

God's Vitality Among Us:

W e A r e C h u r c h



Synod Assembly 2020

God's Vitality Among Us: We are Church Bishop's Assembly Report

The theme of this year's assembly was meant to remind us that God is at work in and among us, empowering us through the Spirit to be vital communities of faith, to be the church for that is indeed what we are. While the Covid19 pandemic shut down our communities so that we had to postpone our synod assembly which was scheduled to take place June 4-6, 2020 in St. Louis, God's work continues among us and we continue to be the church.

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light so shine before others, so that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16).

At my installation last October, Pastor Linda Anderson-Little, the preacher of the day, called me to be a beatitude bishop and for us to be a beatitude synod – “to be transformed and changed by those whom our Lord calls ‘blessed’ and endows with the kingdom of God.” For as the church we are the salt of the earth and we are the light of the world.

To claim our identity and fulfill our purpose as the church, it is important that we focus on the vitality of our ministries and congregations and that we raise up and support leaders. God's vitality flows among us to connect us to God, to one another, and to the world.

- It begins with God! Getting clarity about our purpose as individual congregations and ministries - to participate in God's mission with the gifts and resources we have been given - is vital for every congregation and ministry of the synod. Working with our Directors for Evangelical Mission and the Congregational Vitality Team, we are helping our congregations do this.
- We are in this together. We cannot afford to operate in silos. While each congregation has a unique ministry there is much we can do when we collaborate together. We continue to develop area ministry strategies and strengthen our ecumenical relationships.
- We do this for the sake of the world. Advocacy stands along side acts of charity and service to bring healing and transformation to the world. While we will have different views on strategies, we are called to this important work of being a voice (a light) for the world to address such issues as racism and care for creation.

This work of clarifying and claiming our purpose as the church needs strong, compassionate leaders both lay and rostered. To raise up, empower, and support leaders we:

- Continue to strengthen and grow our Parish Ministry Associate Program – our lay school program
- Developed a coaching program for our rostered leaders and PMAs serving as pastoral leaders
- Offer continuing education, professional development days to address issues such as racism
- Offer workshops on topics such as outreach, evangelism, stewardship for our lay leaders

At the beginning of the year, a small task force designed a process to help develop a new mission statement for the synod: ***Flowing Water, Living Word: A Baptismal Journey of Discerning God's Mission***. The process included a time of discernment through Lent, conference gatherings to share information about the synod as well as gain insights from participants, and then a recommendation regarding a new mission statement with goals and priorities to be worked on in the coming year. Then Covid19 hit and everything shifted.

During these past few months when most of our church buildings have been closed and in person gathering suspended, we have been forced to try new things, to prioritize our resources and time, and to more intentionally discern how God is continuing to move and act among and through us. It is important that as difficult and challenging as this pandemic has been, we also experience this time as a call to be salt for the earth, a light for the world in this new reality. The coming months will continue to present us with opportunities to be the church in new ways.

As the bishop, I am called to continue to proclaim and teach the gospel in ways that help us see and embrace these new ways of being church, to challenge us to ask the difficult and sometimes uncomfortable questions that reveal our different perspectives (we need to hear those differences knowing that our unity is in Christ) , and to encourage, support, and care for our congregations and leaders to indeed be the church. I am grateful for the support of my staff, the synod council, and so many partners in ministry. May we continue to do such works as the church that the world may indeed see God and give glory to the one who calls us into life.