

## **Bishop's Associate Annual Report:**

As the Bishop's Associate, I have responsibility for Mobility (congregations in rostered leader transitions), Candidacy (seminarians and all those training for rostered leader positions), First Call Theological Education, and Leadership Development.

### **Mobility**

When a pastor leaves a congregation, either because of retirement or resignation, it can be a stressful and anxious time for the faith community. It is also a time, as is noted in our *Call Process Handbook*, for the congregation to “take a breath, reflect on the past, celebrate the present, and imagine a new future engaged in God’s work.” During this interim time, the congregation is challenged to:

- take an intentional look at the past and how God has guided the mission of the community;
- create and allow space for celebration of the present as members examine the gifts of the community;
- utilize intentional conversation and prayer to imagine a new future of mission and ministry;
- work directly with the call process to identify gifts needed in the next pastor so the congregation can be faithful and strong.

Currently, the Central States Synod has 24 congregations that are in the process of discerning their future plans. These congregations are being served by various types of leadership, depending on the needs and capacity of each congregation. The types of leadership available to congregations are:

- Rostered leaders who are full-time interim ministers that serve under Call from the Synod Council;
- Synod Authorized Ministers (S.A.M.s), leaders that serve under the authorization of the Bishop. They can be PMAs, leaders from other faith traditions, or TEEM candidates who are serving a congregation as part of their seminary education.

In addition to the 24 congregations in the discernment process, we have 11 congregations who have completed the work of reflecting and planning and have completed their Ministry Site Profile, which means that they are active in the process of interviewing and seeking to call a pastor.

The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed this process down, but it has not stopped congregations from finding unique and creative ways to interview candidates and share information about their congregation with the candidates.

### **Candidacy**

Candidacy is the process by which the ELCA prepares those who are called to be rostered leaders in the church. The Candidacy process is meant to be a time that allows candidates to best discern how they are being called to serve through the church, Word and Sacrament Ministry or Word and Service ministry. While in Candidacy, there are three main approval times. The first

step is Entrance, the second step is Endorsement; and the final step is Approval. Currently, we have 13 candidates at various stages of the Candidacy process, and we have three candidates that are preparing to seek Entrance later this year.

This past year, the CSS Candidacy Team met August 15-16, 2019, December 13-14, 2019, and April 17-18, 2020 (this meeting was held via Zoom). During these meetings, four candidates were Approved to seek assignment and ordination in the ELCA. Of these four candidates, three have been assigned to the Central States Synod, and two of the three have received a call and have been ordained and installed at their respective congregations, and the third candidate is now seeking a call. The fourth candidate will seek open assignment later this year.

In addition, two candidates who previously had been ordained in a faith tradition other than the ELCA competed their required ELCA seminary studies and contextual education and have been Approved for Admission to the Roster of the ELCA. Both candidates are now seeking to be assigned to the Central States.

### **First Call Theological Education (FCTE)**

Continued education is essential for the growth and development of all pastors, and to assist new pastors in the process of continued education after finishing seminary and being ordained, FCTE is required for the first three years of ministry. During this three-year timeframe, the synod offers various learning opportunities for new pastors.

Currently, we have 15 pastors that are in their first call and are partaking in FCTE. In October 2019, they attended a two-day class entitled “Leadership Starts with You” where they focused on the principles of effective leadership and dealing with technical and adaptive challenges within a congregation. The Spring 2020 FCTE retreat was canceled due to the restrictions of COVID-19; however, we did offer a half-day Zoom Class with a presentation by Jennifer Prinz of Portico entitled “A Call to Live Well.”

### **Leadership Development:**

In the broader area of offering support and development opportunities for all of our leaders, rostered and lay leadership, we are in the process of developing a “culture of coaching” within the synod. “Coaching is a relationship that supports leaders in developing God-given potential in order to grow individually, while making valuable contributions to the Kingdom of God. This relationship is focused on connecting through powerful questioning that will lead the client to identify, articulate, and act on goals in life and ministry.”

Within the Central States Synod, we currently have 12 individuals who are trained to be coaches, and we are in the process of finalizing a formal process for our ordained leadership to partake in having their own coach. We have received an ELCA grant to help us fund the launching of this program and to fund a stipend for a Coaching Coordinator. The new Coaching Coordinator will be Jane Brda. More details about this support ministry will be forthcoming.

In addition, we are developing ongoing professional development opportunities that will be offered on a regular basis. The goal of this offering will be to offer education and development opportunities to all of our leaders. Many of these opportunities will be classes/conferences that are being offered by entities such as our seminaries, the Kansas Leadership Center, Lutheran School of Theology St. Louis, and/or some of our own leadership. The most recent example of this was professional development days that were offered on May 11 and May 18 entitled "Talking About Race." These 90-minute sessions were led by Dr. Terrance Freeman and Rev. Aimee Appell.

Respectfully Submitted by Rev. Dave Whetter, Bishop's Associate