**Montana Synod Council Meeting (DRAFT)**

**September 15-16, 2023**

**Synod House Great Falls, Montana**

**Friday, September 15**

*Opening devotions and prayer by LPA Dave Scholten.*

Present: Kim Bloch, Megan Hoewicsh, Peter Erickson, Allen Hansen, Allen Tooley, Mark Suta, Bishop Laurie Jungling, Bonnie Novak, Celeste Pogachar, David Scholten, John Sheppard, Doris Tollefson, Lorrie Vennes, Gretchen Wagner, DEM Peggy Paugh Leuzinger, Natasha Morton, A2B Brenda Frelsi, Colter McCarty, Charlie Parker (on Saturday)

Absent:

Guests: Gloria Lannen

Vice President Kim Bloch called the meeting to order.

**Plenary I**

**Approve the Synod Council Agenda**

Motion

Second: Approve the Synod Council agenda with the privilege of the chair to revise.

**VOTE: SC.23.09.01 APPROVE THE SYNOD COUNCIL AGENDA WITH THE PRIVILEGE OF THE CHAIR TO REVISE.**

**Approve the appointment of Mark Suta and Allen Tooley to the Synod Council.**

Motion

Second: Approve the appointment of Mark Suta and Allen Tooley to the Synod Council.

**VOTE: SC.23.09.02 APPROVE THE APPOINTMENT OF MARK SUTA AND ALLEN TOOLEY TO THE SYNOD COUNCIL.**

Bishop Laurie Jungling installed Mark Suta and Allen Tooley as members of the Synod Council.

**Approval of minutes of the June 2023 meeting as presented.**

Motion

Second: Approve the minutes of the June 2023 meeting as presented.

**VOTE: SC.23.09.03 APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JUNE 2023 MEETING AS PRESENTED.**

Treasurer’s Report

Financial Condition. The giving is down but also our expenditure has also been down. Our revenue goes down but also expenditures are down, not counting the fixed expenses such as salaries and utilities. Some of the changes made last year are minimizing the impact of the shortfall, which is still within the $50,000 cash surplus designated for this year.

Designated Accounts. The treasurer cleaned up some of the designated accounts which are in the budget for specific purposes. However, some of these accounts have not been active for a long time. Dave will make suggested changes to the cleanup and present it to the council for vote.

Responding to Questions. Dave is willing to share with congregations and individuals the process of the budget and answer questions such as where the money comes from, where the money goes, compensation guidelines, acceptable level of cash. He is willing to do this with in-person presentations, by video, by zoom, by articles in the newsletter.

2024 Compensation Guidelines and Continuing Education. These were discussed thoroughly, and suggestions were made. Action will be taken in the meeting.

**Approve MJ’s and Candie’s remaining continuing education funds to be placed in Colter McCarty’s continuing education account and ask Jason Asselstine if he would or would not like to receive his remaining continuing education funds.**

Motion

Second: Approve MJ’s and Candie’s remaining continuing education funds to be placed in Colter McCarty’s continuing education account and ask Jason Asselstine if he would or would not like to receive his remaining continuing education funds.

**VOTE: SC.23.09.04 APPROVE MJ’S AND CANDIE’S REMAINING CONTINUING EDUCATION FUNDS TO BE PLACED IN COLTER MCCARTY’S CONTINUING EDUCATION ACCOUNT AND ASK JASON ASSELSTINE IF HE WOULD OR WOULD NOT LIKE TO RECEIVE HIS REMAINING CONTINUING EDUCATION FUNDS.**

Approve the inflation adjustment for the Synod’s compensation guideline to be 6.25%.

Motion

Second: Approve the inflation adjustment for the Synod’s compensation guideline to be 6.25%.

**VOTE: SC.23.09.05 APPROVE THE INFLATION ADJUSTMENT FOR THE SYNOD’S COMPENSATION GUIDELINE BE TO 6.25%.**

Update the compensation guidelines for 2024 that the recommended rate for pulpit supply be $175 plus $75 for each additional service, to be reviewed annually.

Motion

Second: Update the compensation guidelines for 2024 that the recommended rate for pulpit supply be $175 plus $75 for each additional service, to be reviewed annually.

**VOTE: SC.23.09.06 UPDATE THE COMPENSATION GUIDELINES FOR 2024 THAT THE RECOMMENDED RATE FOR PULPIT SUPPLY BE $175 AND $75 FOR EACH ADDITIONAL SERVICE, TO BE REVIEWED ANNUALLY.**

**Plenary II**

Bishop’s Report. See attachments. Bishop Laurie is asking for the council’s approval for a fund-raising campaign this fall to benefit Rocky Boys. She is also requesting a two-month sabbatical beginning after the 2024 Synod Assembly from June 20, 2024, through August 19, 2024.

A2B Report. See attachments.

DEM Report. See attachments. DEM would like to recommend that the Synod establish a Synod Hunger grant fund and that we in the Synod recommend and encourage congregations and individuals to support this local fund in order that we together as the Synod equip local congregations to respond to the needs of the hungry in local communities. The DEM would like to see the Synod continue its support of the Confluence Collective.

VP Report. See attachments.

Freedom in Christ. Allen Hansen is the newly elected chair of the Freedom in Christ board. Inmates who actively participate in a religious program while incarcerated have a lower recidivism rate than those who don’t. Freedom in Christ is exploring a Cell Block to Community program to aid inmates in their transition into the community after their release. Since Allen is the chair of the Freedom in Christ board and is also the Synod Council representative to this board, he is asking that another member of the council assume the role of the representative from the council. Bishop Laurie asked that Freedom in Christ submit reports to the Council.

**Plenary III**

New Business

Retired Pastors Review. It is the responsibility of the council to review the list of retired pastors. Over the past two years, the council has reviewed a third of the list, and after this review, the list will be entirely reviewed. Bishop Laurie recommended this list.

**Reviewed and accepted the list of retired pastors.**

Motion

Second: Reviewed and accepted the list of retired pastors.

**VOTE: SC.23.09.07 REVIEWED AND ACCEPTED THE LIST OF RETIRED PASTORS.**

**Accept the consent agenda as presented.**

Motion

Second: Accept the consent agenda as presented.

**VOTE: SC.23.09.08 ACCEPT THE CONSENT AGENDA AS PRESENTED.**

The dates for the 2025 Synod Assembly in Billings have disrupted the usual assembly dates for the first weekend in June. As of now the dates for the assembly are May 30, 31, and June 1.

Synod Council meeting dates are February 16-17, 2024, by Zoom, and the September 2024 synod council dates are September 12, 13, and 14, 2024 in-person in Great Falls.

**Move Jason Asselstine’s remaining continuing education and whatever is remaining in Peggy Paugh Leutzinger’s continuing education to Colter McCarty’s continuing education**.

Motion

Second: Move Jason Asselstine’s remaining continuing education and whatever is remaining in Peggy Paugh Leutzinger’s continuing education to Colter McCarty’s continuing education.

**VOTE: SC.23.09.09 MOVE JASON ASSELSTINE’S REMAINING CONTINUING EDUCATION AND WHATEVER IS REMAINING IN PEGGY PAUGH LEUTZINGER’S CONTINUING EDUCATION TO COLTER MCCARTY’S CONTINUING EDUCATION.**

**Plenary IV**

SALM/LPA compensation guidelines. A2B Brenda and Bishop Laurie will put together a guideline for LPA’s to use regarding compensation. It is suggested that additional pastoral ministry should be compensated.

*LPA Dave Scholten led us in closing evening prayer.*

**Saturday, September 16**

*LPA Dave Scholten led us in opening prayer.*

**Plenary IV Continued**

New Business Continued

Review of gift policy. This policy will be reviewed at the Executive Committee meeting in September 2025.

Discuss and Construct Sabbatical Policy. There is a sabbatical guideline for congregations on the Synod website—compensation guidelines has a link. Guidelines are for congregations while for Synod staff requires a change in Synod policy. Peter Erickson, Kim Bloch, and Laurie Jungling were appointed to develop a sabbatical policy and bring it back to the February meeting.

Compensation Policy. The compensation guidelines for 2024 were reviewed.

**Accept the compensation guideline for 2024 as presented.**

Motion

Second: Accept the compensation guideline for 2024 as presented.

**VOTE: SC.23.09.10 ACCEPT THE COMPENSATION GUIDELINE FOR 2024 AS PRESENTED.**

Accept the changes to the restricted accounts as presented.

Motion

Second: Accept the changes to the restricted accounts as presented.

**VOTE: SC.23.09.11 ACCEPT THE CHANGES TO THE RESTRICTED ACCOUNTS AS PRESENTED.**

Update Sexual Misconduct Policy. This policy was last updated in 2018. Kim Bloch, Bishop Laurie Jungling, Allen Tooley, and Celeste Pogachar were appointed to revise the sexual misconduct policy.

Sexual Misconduct Response Team. Bishop Laurie explained that the Sexual Misconduct Team is the initial contact in response to sexual misconduct when someone feels uncomfortable coming to the bishop with a complaint. Bonnie Novak, John Shepard, and Allen Hansen were appointed to the Sexual Misconduct Team.

Create a Montana/Northern Wyoming Synod Hunger Fund seeded with $2500 and $7500 from Montana Disaster Relief Fund for a total of $10,000.

Motion

Second: Create a Montana/Northern Wyoming Synod Hunger Fund seeded with $2500 and $7500 from Montana Disaster Relief Fund for a total of $10,000.

**VOTE: SC.23.09.12 CREATE A MONTANA/NOTHERN WYOMING SYNOD HUNGER FUND SEEDED WITH $2500 AND $7500 FROM MONTANA DISASTER RELIEF FUND FOR A TOTAL OF $10,000.**

Create a M/N WSHF to develop criteria for disbursement and to promote congregations to contribute to this fund.

Motion

Second: Create a M/N WSHF to develop criteria for disbursement and to promote congregations to contribute to this fund.

**VOTE: SC.23.09.13 CREATE A M/N WSHF TEAM TO DEVELOP CRITERIA FOR DISBURSEMENT AND TO PROMOTE CONGREGATIONS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THIS FUND.**

Peggy Paugh Leuzinger and Gretchen Wagner were appointed to the Hunger Team.

These are the talking points that came from the September Synod Council meeting describing what was accomplished at the meeting. Share these points with your clusters and councils.

* The Hunger Fund was created to assist hunger programs in the Montana/Northern Wyoming Synod. Seed money of $10,000 has been established to get the fund off the ground.
* The Sexual Misconduct Response Team was established. Bonnie Novak, John Shepard, and Allen Hansen were appointed to the Sexual Misconduct Response Team, and Bishop Laurie Jungling will also serve on this team.
* A team was established to create a sabbatical policy for the Montana Synod. Peter Erickson, Kim Bloch, and Bishop Laurie Jungling will work on this team.
* Compensation guidelines for 2024 have been updated and will be on the website soon. The bishop plans to make a video highlighting the important parts of the compensation guidelines. This video will be available soon on the website. Treasurer Dave Schloten is willing to visit congregations through zoom or personally to take people through the budget process.
* Treasurer Dave Schloten cleaned up some restricted funds in the budget and moved those funds into other accounts. These are funds for which money has been designated but have not been used for a long time.
* The rate for pulpit supply was increased to $175 per service with $75 for each additional service.
* A fundraising campaign will begin this fall for a new parsonage at Our Saviour’s Lutheran at Rocky Boys. The current parsonage is uninhabitable.
* Office hours at the Synod House are 9-5 on Monday through Thursday. Even though the office is closed on Friday, the staff is still working and will be available via email or cell phone.

Call for New Business

Lana Buerkle was appointed as the Synod Councils representative to the Freedom in Christ board.

*LPA Dave Scholten sent us with closing devotions.*

Meeting adjourned at 11:45.

Respectively submitted,

Pr. Doris Tollefson,

Secretary

Attachments

Synod Council

September 14-16, 2023

Bishop’s Report – Rev. Laurie Jungling

Dear Fellow Council Members

“The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,” (Eph 4:11-12)

Recently, I read a blog from one of our seminary professors, Rev. Cody Sanders, that struck home for me. https://baptistnews.com/article/i-left-the-pastorate-while-still-loving-it/ He was offering an alternative perspective to a recent clergy quit-lit post entitled “Departure: Why I Left the Church” by former pastor Alexander Lang. Lang’s post has been making its way around Facebook among clergy in mainline churches these past two weeks. <https://www.restorativefaith.org/post/departure-why-i-left-thechurch>.

Professor Sanders’ blog resonated with me not only as a pastor but also as a bishop serving a synod. “Being a pastor (and bishop) is hard,” he writes. “Congregations (and other pastoral leaders) need to know that. And it’s only getting harder.”

As I think about my last several months as bishop, I concur that being a bishop is hard. And to explain one reason why it’s hard I will paraphrase another statement from Professor Sanders’ article: “Most people don’t know how to be a bishop. (I didn’t before I was elected.) They know what they like in a bishop, but that doesn’t mean those qualities are what it takes to be a good bishop for the whole synod and the wider church in a particular time and place.”

This statement is also true for pastors. But for this report, I want to claim it for myself, my colleague bishops, and for the staff who serve this synod as well. Too many folks in congregations, including pastors, don’t understand what the bishop and the synod staff actually do and why we do it, and we’re in a time where a few feel the need to complain loudly about how we are not meeting their expectations.

It’s so easy for me, and a lot of us I think, to fall into people-pleasing mode, trying to meet everyone’s diverse desires and fix every problem as quickly as possible. We do this to try ease our own anxiety as much as others’ anxiety. But eventually the pressure of not pleasing everybody builds to a blow-up of emotional reactiveness and defensiveness when faced with criticism given in an unloving way. I confess that I have had one or two of these minor eruptions in the last year and have not always lived out the healthy responses I ask of myself as bishop (and in other roles). For that I am sorry and am I continue to work on patient listening, time for prayer, and doing honest and humble self-reflection. At the same time, though, I will not allow myself, the staff, or others (particularly our congregations, LPAs or rostered leaders in need) to be disrespected or to become a passive rug to be stepped all over by someone else’s emotional reactivity and cynicism in order to demand their own way.

Over the past several months, particularly since the Synod Assembly, I have been spending some time doing self-reflection as I continue to grow in emotional intelligence, continue to learn what it takes to be a good bishop for this time and place, and continue to take care of myself. For I have learned that when my introvert gas tank is low and I’m emotionally exhausted, that is when I lead from my worst self rather than my best.

Thankfully, my summer has been a rejuvenating one and I look forward to a busy fall as the synod bishop serving both on behalf of the synod and the wider church. (Note: Something many don’t know about the bishop’s role is that we are bishop of the synod AND of the Church.)

Prof. Sanders writes, “We must teach the congregation (and synod) what being the pastor (or bishop) of this particular church looks like today, and then do it again next year, and again the year after that.” Therefore, this report is much longer than normal as I share the tip of the iceberg of what I and the synod staff actually do so that you as the council are aware of where our time, work and energy goes. I am also attaching a document that comes from our recently updated Synod Constitution that describes the role of the bishop as well as the synod staff who are called to help her fulfill this role. I ask you to read all of this material as we prepare for this meeting. (Attachment A)

For finally I think that the primary role of the bishop, the synod staff and the synod council is equipping the synod for ministry of the gospel. And we need to do better at telling the story of this calling and how, through our roles, we are actually equipping the congregations, ministries and people of the Montana Synod to proclaim the gospel and live Christ’s love into the world. We also need to explore how we can do better at the practical equipping we’re already doing AND perhaps change our means of equipping to meet the needs of the church (though not always its desires) that are emerging through the power of the Holy Spirit. And since we’re not really sure what those needs are, we must discern what makes sense for the now and even as we prepare for an uncertain future.

So what are some of the tasks of equipping the synod that the staff and I are most regularly engaged in at this time?

Transitions

The primary task we are focusing our time, energy and attention on involve the transitions affecting our synod and wider church. First, we are responding to the leadership transitions affecting our congregations and ministries, in other words the congregations seeking pastors. Please see the attached document (Attachment B) laying out in detail the status of our congregations regarding pastoral leadership. Pastor Brenda (and to some extent I) spend much of our time working with congregations who want a pastor, can afford one in some form or another, and are waiting for a pastor. Some of these folks, while still looking, have moved away from the anxiety of such uncertainty and are being creative with how they do ministry. (Cut Bank, Chinook, Baker/Ekalaka/Plevna). For some, however, this is the first time in years when they’ve been without a pastor or an interim for any period of time so they are quite anxious about how to move forward when the wait time averages over 1 year and we have very few interims. These congregations require extra handholding in easing their anxiety and helping them engaging in conversations about other possibilities.

Second, we have a few congregations in the process of closing, considering Holy Closure or changing their form of ministry. For example, First English in Great Falls is closing and from that is emerging the Helping Hands ministry that will retain its connection to the ELCA/MT Synod but will no longer function as a congregation. Also, First English in Billings is entering into a partnership with Luther’s Lodge to provide housing for people receiving long-term medical care. There are also a few congregations that haven’t been functioning as a worshipping community for several years but haven’t done anything official about closing. These congregations are needing pastoral support and guidance and the occasional nudge from synod staff – me, Peggy and Brenda – to move forward in their discernment in healthy ways that allows them to close (if that’s what they choose) in a positive way that can leave a legacy. I expect we, including the new DEM, will be spending more time on these processes than what has been done in the past.

Third, several ministries in the synod have gone through some leadership transitions and have needed guidance from the synod staff, primarily me. This spring I worked with both FLBC and Emmaus Campus Ministry as they called new staff and assisted them in the process which looks quite different 3 than a standard congregation call.

Fourth, transitions in staffing and the resulting changes in office hours are an ongoing reality. We have found a temporary solution in Oliver Main who is serving part-time as office manager even as he is finishing his last year of college. After he graduates, he hopes to move on to seek his Master’s degree. But for now, he knows the role and is doing a good job for us so we’re going to keep him on.

I have asked Betty Brumwell (LPA) to come in one day a week to fill in a few gaps and take a load off of me and Jenny by processing the finances each week and helping me with roster management. Those two tasks had been handled completely by Candi (and Susan before her); but since their departure and through our many office manager transitions, Jenny has been generous with her time and experience to help with the financials and I have taken on much of the roster management (making sure the pastors who come, leave, retire, go on leave, etc. are properly rostered with the ELCA). That needs to change.

Brenda is leaning into her role as A2B more deeply each day and I feel confident in letting her do her job without much guidance. But she’s been in this role less than a year so we still meet regularly to address questions and issues we’re facing together. As I said, this is a hard job and it’s not the same job as it was even 2 years ago when Jason was filling it.

Colter is returning to distance learning this fall to complete the final year of his MA program at Luther and move through candidacy to become a deacon in the ELCA. While he is still able to fulfill his role as Director of Communications and Technology, he must manage his time differently than usual office hours. Fortunately, Oliver is able to take on some of those day-to-day responsibilities.

Finally, as you no doubt saw in the Synod newsletter, Pastor Peggy is retiring in December so I’ll need to begin working on hiring/calling another DEM. Because this position is actually a churchwide job, the process of hiring this person looks different than the call of an A2B or other staff. That process will begin in October and go through several months of interviewing before the person can hopefully begin in mid-to-late January.

With all these staffing transitions plus some changes in synod council officers plus the uncertainty evident in the ELCA as a whole with the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, I personally have felt the ground beneath my feet wobbling over the past year as I hire, train, and manage the staff according to the synod’s needs, their own needs and the skills and talents they bring while still fulfilling the role of the bishop. I am so thankful for the several years I had to learn this role while having Peggy, Jason, Colter and Candi fulfilling their roles in such excellent ways; it isn’t until you lose someone at a position that you realize just how much they do (as congregations losing their pastors or office secretaries are also learning). Those years have allowed me to become much more confident and skilled in my role so that I can do it more efficiently and help with training new staff.

Visioning and Leading

One of the primary roles of the bishop is leading the synod toward the church God is calling us to be. Remember that being the synod means “walking on the way together.” As bishop and one of the primary leaders of the synod, that means equipping and encouraging as many of the parts of the synod to walk on the same way – Jesus’ Way? – together. Over the past years, even in the midst of Covid, I have been working with the staff, the council and the synod to discern what Jesus’ way for the Montana/N.Wyoming Synod is for the future. We have found that in the vision and practice of equipping the saints for ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have developed a “Vision, Calling and Values statement” together as a council which was also presented to the Synod Assembly in 2023. As part of disseminating that statement to the synod, Colter and I have created a video Bible study on Ephesians 4:11-12 that will be released right after this synod council meeting. Soon thereafter another study will be released on the “Vision, Calling and Values statement” to help congregations, ministries and people 4 engage it from their contexts.

Part of that work will involve us – the bishop, the staff and the synod council – telling the story of how we are equipping and exploring how we can find new (or old) ways to equip the ministry of the gospel in our area. Hopefully, our retreat this week and the work the staff has already done will help us tell this story and empower the synod to do this work together.

Communications plays a large role in the synod staff’s equipping work for congregations, ministries and people. We are sending out two primary communication emails each week:1) the Monday Announcements that contains information about events, programs, ministries, and other items from the synod, the ELCA and other partners; and 2) the Wednesday News of the Week that contains more storytelling and information about some synod offerings. There are also regular updates on Facebook. We continue to wrestle with using more platforms without doing too much. Colter is helping us think about the best effective ways to use technology for communication and other aspects of our role that don’t chase us down rabbit holes of the annoying problems that come with the technology.

Over the past four years, I have the been the primary newsletter article provider through written and video means with Jenny providing some occasional Spotlight on the Synod articles. This fall that is going to change. I will still do some videos and written pieces and Jenny will still be writing some Spotlight articles but more and more, I/we will be inviting synod council members, staff, and leaders (rostered and lay) from around the synod to share their stories of ministry equipping in their contexts. (Note for example this week’s article from our own Pr. Doris Tollefson on frontier ministry.)

One way we need to improve on our communications, particularly from the synod staff and council, is providing clarity on a variety of topics such as Synod Guidelines, congregation constitution review, Congregation Reports, Budget and Financial issues, and others. Such clarity requires us first to be clear with ourselves about such things. We’ll be engaging in some of that clarifying regarding the budget and guidelines at this meeting led by our Treasurer, Dave Scholten.

Pastoral Care and Support for the Whole Synod

While I can’t go into great detail in this area because many of these conversations and situations are confidential, Brenda, Peggy and I are regularly having conversations with rostered clergy, deacons, LPAs and congregation leaders as they seek guidance, support, and help in discerning the direction of their ministries and deal with the issues, including conflicts, facing them. Phone calls and zooms with leaders are a regular part of our week (though they do not appear on the public calendar) and through coaching, spiritual discernment and direction, and practical advise regarding everything from the constitution to inheriting a piece of property to conflict with another congregation’s pastor, we do the best we can to walk with, equip and empower these folks without giving in to the expectation that we do this work for them. Also Colter offer his own version of support through individual and group coaching for congregations and leaders trying to wrestle with how to best engage technology. And Jenny working with Peggy and Marilyn Hall are working hard to build up our coach roster and leader’s access to coaches. One thing I hope we can increase is access also to spiritual direction for leaders in the synod.

Ministries Support and Equipping

As the synod staff, we equip and support many ministries that serve in various aspects of the synod. Peggy has no doubt shared information about Freedom in Christ and Confluence as well as the Congregation Vitality work she spearheads. Also, every year I facilitate and equip a Thriving Leadership Formation Cohort, a small group spiritual growth ministry for rostered leaders sponsored by a grant through PLTS/CLU. This is a by-invitation-only gathering of different leaders facilitated by a trained leader and former participant of the program. We’re on our fourth year and may actually offer two this 5 year. Brenda is working to organize youth ministry leaders and congregation for the ELCA Youth Gathering. The Racial Justice Task Force is undergoing some revisioning and reorganizing, hopefully with the help of the new DEM next January. And the Creation Care task force slowed things down this summer due to transition in some of the participants’ lives – congratulations to Pr. Eric Huseth in his new call at Emmaus Campus Ministry and congratulations to Pr. Megan Hoewisch on the birth of her baby girl this summer.

I had the opportunity to go up to Christikon for the first time since becoming bishop and participate in their continuing ed time. I also will be up at FLBC for their annual meeting to install their two new assistant directors, Prs. Grant and Amanda Appelhans in October. What gifts to the synod these two very different camps are!

I am working with PLU and Concordia to help them connect with folks to serve on their boards and with PLTS/CLU as we begin conversations across regions 1 and 2 regarding a more normalized Lay Education system across the western US.

I have also been in conversation with Pr. Tom Schlotterback at St. John’s United regarding how we can enter into a deeper partnership that is not financial into the future. One way the synod can support/equip SJU is by helping to tell the story of the ministry of God’s work being done at SJU and also we can use synod communications to in their fund-raising appeals. We also plan to help all of the ministries tell their story as ministries of God’s work in the world -- the Bible Camps, the Campus Ministries, the Elder Care homes, Freedom in Christ, Confluence and Rocky Boy.

An update on Rocky Boy: I was able to go up in July to lead worship and meet with their new council. We visited about next steps for them. We are still searching for a pastor but because the parsonage is condemnable, we really need to help them remove it and put in a new one, probably a modular home, before a pastor can come. I hope, with the council’s approval, we can do a Fund-raising campaign this fall. Our Saviour’s received a Holy Closure gift from Emmanuel Lutheran in Cheney WA for $34,000 that I’m hoping to use as a kick-off for this fund-raising campaign. I continue to search for a pastor for them but have been thwarted on the few opportunities I’ve had to pursue someone. Fortunately, one of their members, who has been leading worship on Sundays is starting the LPA program this fall. There are 1 or 2 pastor prospects I have in mind but they won’t be available for many months yet. Finally, I have applied for a grant through Interfaith Power & Light (thanks Caleb) to help Our Saviour’s do some energy efficiency upgrades on their Mission House and Round Church. I’ll learn if we get it in October or November.

Regarding Candidacy: Pr. Julie Long has taken on the role of Candidacy Coordinator for the Synod while Pr. Steve Loy is the committee chair. Our numbers for candidacy are at an all-time low but Julie is doing some strong work in beating the bushes to find candidates for Word and Sacrament or Word and Service Ministry. This shortage of candidates for Word and Sacrament is not just in MT; it’s across the ELCA as the following chart shows: 2019—358; 2020—314; 2021—205; 2022—183; 2023—183 (est.) Candidates with Approved Entrance 358 314 205 183 183 (est.) I call on the council and all of the synod to share in seeking out pastoral leaders for our synod (pastors, deacons, and LPAs) for I truly believe that in this reality, we are going to have to grow our own.

Bishop of the Church

Being a bishop of the Church involves multiple responsibilities that I had no idea I was signing 6 onto when I left my name in the hat. Some are responsibilities that I enjoy and are extremely important to the future of how God is calling us to be Church together, not just in our siloed congregations or synod but across the ELCA, the global Lutheran communion and with our ecumenical partners.

It was only last September that I attended the Lutheran World Federation leaders conference in Geneva and Wittenburg which allowed me to hear across the boundaries we in the USA create about being church together. That global work has continued as I engage our Lutheran Companion Synods: the Bolivian Lutheran Church and the South Africa Lutheran Church – Cape Orange Diocese. I have had the opportunity to visit with the new Pastor Presidente of the IELB and to engage with other synods concerning Southern Africa Lutheran church which is in the midst of some transitions. My hope is to visit both of these companion synods before my time as bishop ends. At the same time, I want to “spread the wealth” of these encounters by asking some folks across the synod to participate in some relationship building teams with our Companions.

The ecumenical and interfaith work I am doing with our partners, the Roman Catholics and the Jewish community continues but in new and various forms. Now that MAC has folded, my primary work with ecumenical partners concerns sharing congregation leaders and joint ministry opportunities. I was able to have lunch with the RC bishop of the Helena Diocese last spring as we discussed the future of the RC church. And as I am able, I am in conversation with Rebecca Stanfel with MJP; I would like to engage this relationship between the ELCA Lutherans and the Jewish community in Montana much more intentionally but find myself lacking the time.

However, the primary way I serve as Bishop of the Church is through the Conference of Bishops, the Region 1 bishop consults and meetings, and working with certain projects and people at the churchwide office. I serve as the chair of the Theological and Ethical Concerns Committee and through that am involved with 1) the Quality of Call for Women project to improve ministry conditions for women in ministry; 2) updating boundaries training for the ELCA; 3) exploring virtual worship ideas, particularly around Holy Communion; 4) ordination and rostering issues; and many other issues the changing church is facing. I also serve on the “Church, State and Civic Engagement Social Statement Task Force;” we are entering the statement writing phase but we have a long two years to go before 2025 when it’s brought before the CW Assembly. I also have been nominated and will probably be elected in 2 weeks to serve as Region 1’s bishop liaison to the Churchwide Council which involve 2 more meetings in Chicago each year. I have promised myself that I will NOT serve as the chair of the COB or on it’s exec council. Enough is enough!

Other

Prince of Peace – we’re still in a holding pattern although some recognizance has been done. As far as I can tell the congregation is still worshipping 1 or 2 times a month and renting out the building to another congregation. I don’t know attendance numbers for the Lutheran congregation that’s left. I will be visiting with Eric Nord, Synod Attorney, about the letter that needs to be sent to them to begin the process of closure. This is something that needs to be done but at the same time will suck a lot of my time and energy from other aspects of the role once it’s started so I’ve been slow to start it. And this is something that only I and the synod council can do.

Boy Scouts Lawsuit – Four years ago a former member of a boy scout troop at Faith Lutheran, GF (which has since left the ELCA and the remnant became New Hope) sued New Hope, the Montana synod, Faith Lutheran and the BSA due to sexual abuse by a scout master in the late 1970’s. The lawsuit against the synod has been on hold as the suit against the BSA has made its way through the courts. That seems to have reached a conclusion and the Scouting Settlement Trust, which is the fund established to compensate survivors of sexual abuse while in the Boy Scouts of America ("BSA"), is starting to 7 process claim of the estimated 82,000 individuals who filed claims in the BSA bankruptcy cases. When the plan was approved, the Trust's compensation fund was valued at approximately $2.5 billion. We are waiting on whether the individual victim will be satisfied with what he receives from the large lawsuit and choose to withdraw his suit against us. The claims process is going to take a long time. But if he goes forward with the lawsuit, the plan is to make a motion to dismiss. That may be a few years from now.

Personal

Complaints and how to respond. Listen and encourage them to contact me…

As I stated at the beginning of this report, I have done a lot of personal reflection and work over the summer to become a better and less reactive leader (especially with regard to a few individuals). Through that reflection I’ve realized that I need at least three things as I move forward into the next two years: 1) a spiritual director; 2) a Mutual Ministry committee; 3) a sabbatical next summer (2024) to help me discern whether I will stand for election as bishop in 2025. I am already working on the first two needs, the second of which I will visit with the Executive committee about.

The third needs the council’s permission and planning. I have never had a true sabbatical (parttime work and losing my teaching job does not count) and I need one to get away from this sometimes fulfilling, sometimes exhausting role as synod bishop in order to get a sense of this call and whether or not I and God think I am the right person to lead the synod during the next 6 years. So I hereby request a 2-month sabbatical beginning after the 2024 Synod Assembly from June 20, 2024 through August 19, 2024.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Laurie Jungling, Bishop

Montana Synod Council A2B Report

Sept. 14-16, 2023

1. Looking back

* Synod Assembly – I made it without any major slip-ups! The process for the Nomination Committee will certainly be easier next year now that I have gone through that once. However, it will never really be easy.
* LPA Gathering – We met immediately after Synod Assembly for fellowship, worship, and a few words of wisdom from Bishop Laurie. It was like attending a family reunion – the energy was very positive.
* LPA 2.0 was a huge success due to the warmth and wisdom of Dr. Melinda Quivik, our guest speaker. 19 LPA’s attended. I will be looking for ideas for future LPA 2.0 retreats.
* Synod travel – As more and more congregations become open, I am traveling to meet with them and help them understand the process of the time of transition between pastors. This part of my call means that I get to address the anxiety created by a new vacancy, and I’m finding that I can encourage the congregational leaders to remember that they also have gifts for ministry and have what it needs to continue in the absence of a pastor, at least for a while.
* Installation of Pr. Barb Haugarud in Sidney Aug. 27.

1. Looking forward

* LPA Retreat on Worship and Spirituality/Prayer is Oct. 13-15. Pr. Julie Long is our speaker. We will meet at the Synod House and at New Hope Lutheran.
* We are doing some adjusting for our LPA training. We have combined retreats 3 and 4 into 1 longer retreat. The 4th retreat will focus on ELCA polity, healthy leadership and conflict management. This is needed because more and more of our LPAs are in congregations without pastors and are in positions of leadership that they haven’t been trained for.
* Installation of Pr. Ryan Chaddick at Atonement, Billings on Sept. 24.
* Installation of Pr. Eric Huseth at Emmaus, Missoula on Oct. 22.
* The fall is filled with preaching around the synod – I may have gotten carried away with my planning.
* Youth Summit – I am going to go to Chicago Nov. 2-5 with 2 youth for a youth summit. This is for 2 youth and 1 adult from each synod and is for the purpose of strengthening the leadership skills of our youth who are already in leadership in their youth groups or congregations.
* Registration begins on Sept. 15 for the National Youth Gathering. I have been and will continue to be in contact with the adult leaders from congregations planning to attend the gathering.

1. Transitions Update

* Unfortunately, if I were to list all our congregations without pastors, this list would be long. Listed are the ones that are fairly close or that have something to report.
* Circle and Richey – open for over 3 years – Their SAM moved to MN, so we are looking for other options for these faithful people.
* SOTV Townsend and New Life Helena may have a possibility in their near future.
* Glendive interviewed, but that pastor decided not to continue in the call process with them.
* Broadus is currently trying to work with the UCC congregation there to find a pastor to share. We thought we had a possibility, but that person decided not to interview.
* Our Redeemer in Helena is in the interview process for an Associate Pastor.
* Eidsvold/Somers and Bethlehem/Kalispell are going to work together to call a pastor to share.
* Gloria Dei and Gold Hill in Butte are in the process if figuring out how it would work for them to share pastoral staff.
* Several congregations are in the process of working on their paperwork.
* More than 50% of our congregations do not have pastors, which is discouraging. Congregations are learning to be creative, and LPAs are really being generous in their preaching and worship leadership. I would love to tell pastors to quit retiring, but that would not go over well!

1. Conclusion: I love what I do! I am challenged, surprised, fulfilled, encouraged, and filled with joy over and over again. I do look forward to the day when I am not surprised by so many things so that I have better answers, but that will come. When the unrealistic is asked for, I am increasing my skills at holding firm to proper boundaries. When pastors, call committee chairs, LPAs and others need encouragement, my coaching skills have been useful, and I am good at being a source of energy and hope. There will always be people who expect what I can’t give. I will work well with those who understand what my calling entails, and I am learning to cling to the successes instead of fretting over the perceived failures when someone asks the impossible of me. I will continue to give 100% effort to be the A2B that is needed for the Montana Synod. I wish for more people to be pastors that want to come to Montana, and I give thanks for everyone who is a part of the powerful and spirit-filled ministry of the Montana Synod ELCA.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pastor Brenda Frelsi

Associate to the Bishop

Montana Synod ELCA**Report to the Synod Council**

**Sept. 15-16, 2023**

**Director for Evangelical Mission in the Montana Synod**

Please note the separate letter to Bishop Jungling (and you on the Synod Council) announcing my retirement on Dec. 15, 2023. In the News of the Week on Sept. 6th, Bishop Jungling and I announced my pending retirement. I began to serve as the DEM on Sept. 5, 2017. Prior to that, I had been serving as the Secretary of the Synod since 2006 when I was elected. I had been on the Synod Council in the early 2000s as I served the Baker, Plevna and Ekalaka Parish in the Southeast Cluster. In total, I have attended about 56 Synod Council meetings over the last 17 years. This will be my last Synod Council meeting. As I stated in the letter to the whole Synod, I want to also extend to you, members of the Synod Council my thanks for your faithfulness and witness to the Gospel and for the work that you have done and that others have done before you to lead and guide the Montana and northern Wyoming Synod through times of challenges and changes.

Bishop Jungling and I have had conversations about ways that I want to continue to support some of the work that I have done over the last years as the new DEM takes over.

**AREAS WHERE I AM WILLING TO CONTINUE TO SERVE THE SYNOD AT THE BISHOP’S DISCRETION:**

Faithful Innovation: I have a new cohort of congregations who are expecting to begin a new training for Faithful Innovations beginning in November. I have committed to continue to work with that group and a new DEM at least through their 2nd training and if asked, to be involved in their 3rd training. The leadership team is solid and will be able to continue in my absence with some guidance from a new DEM. I believe that the Faithful Innovation Process is an important way for congregations in the Synod to shift how they function to be more able to adapt to changes in the world rather than remaining closed and rigid.

Domestic Hunger Grant Process: I have been working since 2022 with the ELCA World Hunger Appeal Domestic Grants process. I have communicated to Bishop Jungling that I am willing to continue with this process through fall of 2024 to go through another grant process year. Carrie Parker, Exec. Director of Helping Hands in Great Falls, and Pastor Melissa Johanson, from American Lutheran in Livingston have joined with me as the Synod’s Hunger team. There is an ELCA World Hunger Gathering in Feb. and both Carrie and Melissa are interested in attending.

Excellence in Leadership: I am also committed to continue to work with Excellence in Leadership through the Rocky Mountain Synod (and our Synod’s partnership with them). The leaders of EIL in the RMS applied for a Lily Grant during the summer and are waiting to hear if they receive it. I have been serving as a trainer and small group leader and am happy to continue working in that capacity. I think that the learning is very helpful for leaders in the Synod. I would recommend that Synod Council members consider participating in the program. A new cohort will begin in January, meeting twice a month for a year. It will be intense, but I think will also be a way to keep working on the learning of the theories and incorporating them into one’s life and work. Check out the Rocky Mountain Synod website for more information. I have also agreed to be a part of the Call Committee with EIL as they seek to hire a new Executive Director. I do not anticipate that this will be a long or time-consuming process to pull me away from my work here in the Synod this fall.

I have also communicated to Bishop Jungling that I am willing to be involved in whatever way is helpful to encourage the Synod’s relationship with our Companion Synod of the Cape Orange Diocese in South Africa. I took my first trip to South Africa in 2007 and (somehow…) became the Companion Synod Coordinator with South Africa for the next 12 years. I gave up the position in 2019 and passed it on to A2B Jason Asselstine. Due to Covid and his leaving, the relationship has been mostly stagnant for the last four years. I am concerned that leaders in the Synod not let the relationship die and am willing to do what I can to help to enliven the relationship again and to pass the leadership on to others.

I will also be available to assist a new DEM to get up to speed to take over this position and will be available to consult and offer advice and guidance as requested.

**CURRENT MINISTRY**

In these last months since we met at the Synod Assembly, I have continued to work with the Faithful Innovation leadership team and have engaged in several conversations with pastors and lay leaders to share about the process and to encourage their participation. This cohort of congregations will join in the first training on Nov. 11th. I will be traveling later this month to Libby to work with Christ Lutheran as they go through the 3rd and final training. Colter will also be going with me to record some of their process and story. The congregation has been enlivened as they have begun to engage the homeless in their county and have seen themselves grow spiritually. Their story is one that will be helpful for others in the Synod to see.

I have also scheduled two zoom conversations with Rev. Tim Brown, the speaker at the 2023 Synod Assembly to discuss generosity. Leaders in congregations are invited to attend on Oct. 2 and on Dec. 4th. Our plan is to provide a space for conversations and encouragement for congregations to encourage generosity among their members. (See the info in the News of the Week for the Oct. event. People need to register to gain access to the Zoom link.

I have been and will continue to consult, teach and preach in congregations. Some of the conversations have been around Faithful Innovation and the process, but I have also been and will be in a few congregations to offer presence from the Synod and to address Stewardship and generosity. I also am scheduled to attend a Kogudus Retreat in early Nov. at the Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge. I will attend the First Call Theological Conference in mid-Nov. I will also work with colleagues at churchwide to discern funding levels for the ministries in the Synod which receive churchwide funding and will prepare the paperwork so that the new DEM does not have to work on that at the beginning of their service. (It’s a pain and complicated!)

I will be attending my last DEM gathering and last Mission Developer Training in Chicago from Oct. 9 – 14. Both Pastors Rebekah Cochrane from Confluence and Marlow Carrels from Freedom in Christ will be attending the Mission Developers training with me.

**UPDATES ABOUT MINISTRIES WHICH RECEIVE CHURCHWIDE FUNDING:**

**Confluence Collective:** At the end of August, DEM in the NW WA Synod, Dianne Johnson, Pastor Paul Anderson of Faith Lutheran in Hamilton, and I led a Ministry Review with the three leaders of Confluence. We met on Mon. Aug. 28 in the afternoon and evening and in the morning on the 29th. We engaged in conversation to evaluate and reflect on the ministry of Confluence over the last several years. This ministry (now referred to as version 3) is a Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community (SAWC) of the Montana Synod. This is an official category of new ministries in the ELCA and is the only SAWC in the Synod at this time. Pastor Rebekah Cochrane as well as Pastor Karen Craven (Presbyterian) and Youth Ministry Colter Murphy (at St. Paul’s in Missoula) make up the leadership team. I invited Deacon Dianne Johnson to come to join in the evaluation because she has had responsibility for several SAWCs in the NW WA Synod and brought experience and insight that I do not have. In the evening, five participants of the ministry also joined in some conversation about what their perceptions and desires were for the continuation of Confluence. We as the Ministry Review Team were very pleased with the progress and intentional effort put into Confluence by the leaders and are very encouraged by the attendance and level of commitment and participation. Those who attended on Monday evening also spoke of a desire for another gathering in addition to their twice a month Sunday evening times. There was also conversation that Faith Lutheran in Hamilton might have members and leaders who would be helpful for some of the financial structure for Confluence.

I do want to request that the Synod fund Confluence even at a small level from the budget in 2023 if possible and certainly in 2024, as a sign of support and commitment to this interesting and creative ministry. Dianne’s statement that was affirming was “that she would go to the mat to urge support for this ministry.” I had a hunch that Confluence was important and valuable to the Synod and to the participants, but the ministry review confirmed my hunch.

**Freedom in Christ Prison Ministry:** Pastor Marlow Carrels began as the second pastor of Freedom in Christ in Feb. He was called (by the Synod) to a half time call, but in June, the Freedom in Christ board recommended that his call be expanded to full-time. At a retreat in June after Synod Assembly, the Board enthusiastically recommended that Marlow and Bea (the Exec. Director of FIC) go ahead to pursue an expansion of the ministry to include returning of inmates into communities around the state. The reality is that recidivism is significantly reduced when people are supported and cared for as they leave prison and are welcomed in congregations. But the Board and staff have also realized that there are many issues and ways in which congregations are not prepared to welcome back returning citizens. The hope and dream of Pastor Marlow and the Board is to establish “Cellblock to Community” as a program offered to congregations in the Synod to help prepare them to welcome returning citizens.

Because Freedom in Christ is a ministry of the Montana Synod, I would like to recommend that a motion come from the Synod Council to encourage that this new ministry area be pursued as a sign of support for this new direction. Pastor Marlow is somewhat limited as to hours he is able to be inside Montana State Prison, and this is an area that the Board is excited about pursuing in the coming years.

**Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church on the Rocky Boys Reservation:** Bishop Laurie and I have been in conversation with Vance Blackfox, the ELCA Indigenous ministry leader over the past several months seeking to address the issues of not having a called pastor there and addressing the need for a new parsonage. Bishop Jungling has been taking the lead in the relationship with the leaders of Rocky Boy. The ministry has been (and I assume will continue) to receive grant funding from the ELCA as a strategic ministry (a ministry that will never become self-supporting). This is an important ministry here in the Synod and I will continue to do what I can to lift up and support the ministry.

**Task Forces:** When I began as the DEM in 2017, I established two task forces – the Stewardship Task Force and the Congregational Vitality Task Force. Over the years, the Congregational Vitality Task Force was a part of the movement toward Faithful Innovation (a process that came out of research from Luther Seminary leaders. The Synod received a grant for Vitality from churchwide of $20,000 to cover the cost of purchasing the rights to the material from Luther and to help offset costs for trainings for congregations and coaching.) As I approach my retirement, the task force has not met formally. I will be gathering the Task Force for one last meeting soon to thank them for their efforts.

The Stewardship Task Force has also not met for a few months. I have thanked the group for their input and commitment – this task force met faithfully for about five years and was important as we as a Synod have grown in understanding of faithful and generous giving and support for the wide variety of ministries around the Synod and the whole church. Bishop Laurie has suggested that a new group be established by a new DEM.

**OTHER MINISTRY AREAS:**

**Stewardship/Generosity/Mission Support:** In the fall, there has been an expectation that the DEM send out new “Statements of Intent” and encouragement for congregations to seriously consider their giving to support the work of the Synod and the wider church. I will be preparing material for this mailing by the end of Sept. so that the mailing can be sent out by early Oct. I would like to encourage Synod Council members to encourage faithful and generous giving to the Montana Synod in your own congregations and in whatever ways that you are able to share information in your own cluster or area. The work that the Synod staff is doing to “equip” for the work of ministry is related to the generosity and faithful giving by congregations around the Synod. What the Synod is able to do together is so much more than what any one congregation can do. Thank you Synod Council members for the faithful giving from your congregation to help support the work that we share together!

**A Congregational Vitality Survey** is available, and I can help congregations take the survey and then assist in analysis of the results with conversation and reflection. If you would like to reflect on how your congregation is doing, to engage in a free survey to gather and analyze data and perceptions, please reach out to me. This is a resource offered from the churchwide organization and can be a tool for a congregation to gather data on perceptions in a congregation.

**Coaching –** If you are an LPA, Rostered Leader, Council member or officer in a congregation, consider engaging a coach to accompany you as you make decisions, seek clarification or address an issue in your life or the life of your congregation. Here in the Montana Synod, we are working to get coaches trained and offer coaching for life’s challenges. Thanks to Marilyn Hall, LPA in Missoula who has been serving as the Coaching Coordinator in the Synod. I am also pleased to announce that Jenny Kunka (NRIT director) has completed requirements to receive her PCC coaching credentials with the International Coaching Federation. She and several others in the Synod have been working to increase their skills as coaches. If you or someone you know might be interested in being trained to be a coach, please reach out to me, Marilyn or Jenny for more information. The ELCAcoaching.org website has information about coaching as a model for expanding skills and resiliency for many of life’s challenges. Information about being trained as a coach are on the website, too.

**ELCA World Hunger – Domestic Hunger Grants Fund of the Montana Synod:** As I mentioned above, Carrie Parker and Pastor Melissa Johansen and I read seven “Letters of Intent” from ministries in the Montana Synod who were requesting funds from the ELCA Domestic Hunger Grant process. Of the seven letters, we recommended that the feeding ministries in local Montana and N. Wyoming congregations be considered for grant monies. We received word the Common Good, Missoula was the only organization in the Synod which was asked to submit a grant (with a fairly strong assurance that they would receive $30,000 over a three year period.)

I am disappointed that the ELCA Hunger staff ignored our recommendations. I do believe that Common Good Missoula is doing great work (and addressing root causes of hunger), but I also believe that they have much capacity to raise money in the state and their community that other ministries in the Synod based in congregations do not have.

In conversation with Bishop Jungling, I would like to recommend that the Synod establish a Synod Hunger grant fund and that we in the Synod recommend and encourage congregations and individuals to support this local fund in order that we together as the Synod equip local congregations to respond to the needs of the hungry in local communities. Melissa, Carrie and I are also planning to host a zoom gathering/conversation with those involved in hunger/feeding ministries in the Synod to learn from one another and to consider how to encourage making the ask for funds to meet the needs of people in communities. It seems that several of these ministries have been functioning in fairly limited ways in their communities, even as the needs of those who are hungry has been increasing. We believe that there are people in the Synod who have experience and knowledge to share to encourage the congregationally based ministries to think in broader terms and to make an even greater impact in their local communities. I would like to also suggest to congregations to designate a percentage of the money raised for the ELCA World Hunger Appeal to be redirected to the Synod’s Hunger Fund, in order that by the end of 2023, some funds might be directed to these local ministries in the Synod to meet the needs of people who are struggling and who are hungry.

Thank you for the honor to serve in the Montana Synod as the DEM. I am grateful to Bishop Jungling, the Synod Council and the entire Montana Synod for the blessing and opportunity to serve in a variety of ways through my career and especially in these last years as the DEM.

Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger Director for Evangelical Mission, Montana Synod Vice President Report

Montana Synod Council

September 15, 2023

Matthew 18: 20 “For where two or three have gathered in My name, I am there in their midst.” While I was reading the Gospel for Sunday, September 10th, it dawned on me that, “Yes, this is what we are doing here this weekend, and praise God that He is in our midst, leading us and guiding us!” As we gather as a council, we are here to support the Synod, the ELCA, and our congregations, and each other with the help and guidance of God. I truly believe the church is the body and we are the hands and feet of Jesus here on earth. We will struggle and we will make mistakes as we are human, but as we work together, we can and will do so with love and kindness as Jesus commands us to do. Love thy neighbor as yourself. I am honored to have been elected as the Vice President of this Synod. As I have been putting together the agendas this past week with the help of Bishop Laurie, Dick, and Pastor Doris I realized how exciting this is and also how much there is to learn. I look forward to working with all of you and utilizing your gifts and talents as we move forward conducting the business of the synod. We have some tough conversations and topics to tackle this weekend, but with the Holy Spirit working through us we can do so with support and love from God above and each other.

I am looking forward to getting to know each of you a little better as we share fellowship, work, and hopefully a little humor this weekend. We will work together to prepare to equip the synod for the future and discover new ways to tell the synod’s story.

Peace to you,

Respectively Submitted,

Kim Bloch

Synod Vice President