

MONTANA SYNOD REPORT: CAPE ORANGE DIOCESE, SOUTH AFRICA COMPANION SYNOD RELATIONSHIP

Bishop Crist received an invitation in early 2015 to visit our Companion Synod, the Cape Orange Diocese in South Africa as they celebrated the 40th Anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa. She designated a small group to accompany her on the visit. From late October – mid-November, 2015, Bishop Crist, Colter McCarty, (the Synod’s “Tech Guy”) Pastor Will Sappington and I spent time with our sisters and brothers in the Cape Orange Diocese.

Colter shares a reflection on the trip: “One of the first things that I noticed when we got to Kimberley and started meeting with members of the Cape Orange Diocese was how connected everyone was. Cellphone usage in South Africa rates amongst one of the highest in the world, far ahead of the US. This ability to connect is strongly displayed within the congregations through various Leagues, leaders of the laity. Witnessing these tools of communication being used by Bishops, pastors, and congregants alike gives me great hope for our present and future congregations. We may worry about connection to the church amongst young people but the solution is right in our hands, this is an example exemplified by our companion Synod.

I think that the largest takeaway I have from this trip to South Africa is how much we truly have to learn from our companions, and them from us. We live in a world of two way, international communication, and ideas are not limited by borders or culture. This is what stood out to me, our similarities. Our faith, our church, and our world are shared; using this knowledge as a starting point enables us to learn, teach, and grow together in Christ.”

Pastor Sappington shares this: “As a first time guest in the Cape Orange Diocese I was struck by the enormity of the geographical area being served and the abundance of gifting in the people and leadership. There are many similarities to the way we do ministry in Montana. Challenges we face with distance and availability of pastors to serve small towns are issues they are wrestling with as well. We also have much to learn from our sisters and brothers in the Cape Orange Diocese. I witnessed a tenacity for ministry that I found convicting and inspiring. Congregations I’ve served have cited lack of resources as a reason not to go forward with ministry opportunities. What I observed in South Africa was the acknowledgement that resources may be lacking, but this was not a valid reason to not move forward.

I was also humbled by the servant heart of many leaders. I was invited to preach on All Saints Sunday and upon arriving at the church the pastor of St. Sylvester’s asked if I would baptize two children during the service as well. I’ve never asked a visiting pastor to perform a baptism because my possessive nature never allowed that thought to occur to me. What an example of servant leadership and what a gift. There are a great many experiences from the trip that have profoundly affected me and this is one that is reshaping my ministry.

I was blessed again to be able to travel to see our companions in the Cape Orange Diocese. As we met with sisters and brothers there, we came up with what we hope are some concrete plans for deepening our relationship. We are working on the details for a Pastor from the Cape Orange Diocese who will be able to be in our Synod for several weeks in the fall. Be watching for news about that. Plans are also being made for a small group of “young adults” to travel to Montana to be here with us in 2017. These will be opportunities for more of us to share in the life giving relationships with our sisters and brothers in South Africa. Please keep Bishop Bill Bowles and the people of the Cape Orange Diocese in prayer!

Cape Orange Diocese Companion Synod Coordinator,
Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger