

2018 Synod Office Report to Congregational AGM's



The 2018 Synod Convention Theme “Bearing Fruit on the Vine” comes from John 15: 4. We are invited to “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me”. We are created and sustained by being in community with one another. For most of us, whether we are congregations, ministries or ministers, we recognize the need for being in community with others, knowing we cannot go it alone. As the church continues to face challenges of diminishing resources and declining memberships, we experience a stronger sense of being connected to one another, a greater need to be in partnership with one another. Otherwise we become invisible to ourselves and to others.

Congregations have begun to create opportunities for partnerships through a variety of ways this year and have invited synod office staff to be part of those ongoing conversations and decisions around the partnerships. Four years ago we had a tri-parish and a multi-parish model for youth ministry. This year we have tri-parish and a multi-parish model for a confirmation program. Two years ago we had a single regional parish; now we are looking at a second grouping of congregations to develop as a region parish. In all of these situations it took people with vision, determination and a sense of community to bring about the partnership. We have amazing resiliency in our synod when faced with these kinds of challenges.

This past year we also partnered with 88 agencies, institutions and ministries to sign off on the Winnipeg Indigenous Accord. Together we hold each other accountable for the 94 calls to action as found in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We gather twice annually to acknowledge new participants and be better educated about our relationship with Indigenous people in our area of the world. We learn of initiatives that create healthier communities in terms of health, education, economic development, technology, etc. To hear of excellence where partnerships are making a difference in our relationship.

The 2017 Reformation 500 events strengthened our Lutheran/Roman Catholic relationship and there was much to learn about healing and challenges to our contexts. The year began with a global event in Lund Sweden where the LWF President and the Secretary General shared worship leadership with Pope Francis. It was also a time to invite our ecumenical neighbours into conversation and worship. Mennonites came together with Lutherans, in song, study and worship. Who would have thought such events could happen in our time, when we set aside our differences and focused on what we have in common? We look to many more opportunities to gather as we did in 2017.

A number of communities came together under the umbrella of ALIGN- Anglican and Lutherans in God's Neighbourhood. Through dwelling in scripture and intentional conversations and building of relationships in our neighbourhood we learned that its a challenge to be trusted and engaged in secular society that has little interest in building relationships with the church today. Through perseverance we will continue to seek ways to see God's work in the world so that others will know the loving and grace filled God we know.

There were exceptional challenges to synod office staffing in 2017. While both Bishop Elaine and Debbie Beyer, Financial Administrator were off on medical leave, Pastor Tyler Gingrich and Pastor Larry Ulrich managed to keep connected and work with congregations. We lost two administrative assistants throughout the year and so our usual pattern of work was disrupted while we learned to adapt the work load. We said farewell to Pastor Larry as his term ended and he wanted a change as well. We were extremely mindful of the gift of ministry he gave the

synod and always give thanks to God for his role in building and sustaining good relations across the synod.

We mark a significant leadership change in 2018 as Bishop Elaine leaves office after 12 years of service. The delegates to synod convention will elect a new bishop. We hope and pray that congregations will participate in the discernment process as a group of leaders begin focused surveys and the development a synod missional profile to share with delegates in their Bulletin of Reports. Beginning in January your councils will receive survey's to complete about the work of synod, congregations and ministries from the past, to the present and into the future, so that we can begin to identify leadership needs for the future of MNO Synod. Focused groups will gather to reflect on the synod mission profile and the ongoing ministry of the synod. This will not be about electing someone of the "right age" or popularity, or who you know kinds of leadership. This will be about prayerfully discerning who is needed to lead the synod into the future and what kind of synod we are going to be in the ELCIC. Look for those opportunities to be engaged in this discernment process.

Synod communications also had a change up this year. We are committed to a weekly e-newsletter format that is sent to synod council, congregational officers and leaders of ministries, as well as those interested persons who have subscribed to the e-news. We ask these leaders to forward the e-news or add names of congregational leadership so that many more can receive news from synod, community, ELCIC and global connections. This is our primary way of communicating across the synod.

We continue to support the Canada Lutheran and appointed a new editor in 2017. Joanne Janzen from St. Luke's Zion welcomes your articles to be included in the MNO insert in the magazine. She can be reached at mnoeditor@gmail.com. In every issue you can also see the future themes of the magazine so perhaps it will inspire you to share a story from your congregation or ministry.

The four western synods and Lutheran Theological Seminary partnered to create the LAY ACADEMY, a unique way for lay people to be engaged in theological reflection and learn to do local ministry with the gifts they are given. Please consider supporting this ministry by encouraging your members to be engaged in one of the courses, or provide local funding for people to register for the courses. The cost is minimal, the benefits to the local community great.

Youth ministry continues to be a priority in the synod. Monthly worship services bring together up to 100 youth and their leaders. The synod camp, Luther Village, provides programming for children and youth during the summer as well. It has been a challenge to get peer ministers on our campuses this year. We would encourage you to identify young adult leadership in your congregation to seek out this ministry. Contact Pastor Tyler at tgingrich@elcic.ca

Financial stability is a constant concern in congregations and at the synod level as well. This year we moved from having a staff person regularly attending to administration at least four days a week. We are down to less than three days. So, when you contact the synod office by phone or email, it takes time for us to respond and we ask for your patience as we try to work with the resources we have been given. Thank you for the financial resources you continue to share with the other levels of the church. It makes a difference in service and mission.

We are appreciative of the support you give to ongoing ministries and partnerships with the synod. Thank you for your benevolence and your second mile giving through the Mission as Hope Appeal. All of our ministries are strengthened when we work together. Blessings in your local efforts to fulfill God's mission in the world.

Bishop Elaine