

## REPORT OF THE ACTING VICE PRESIDENT

*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*  
Isaiah 43:19

It has been a little over a year since COVID-19 made its presence known. The church, which is typically known as moving slowly, responded and adapted quickly. We continue to share the gospel in new ways through online worship, bible studies, retreats and more. We also adjusted ways in which we spread the gospel through engaging our communities via food ministries, homeless ministries, social justice ministries and more. Looking back over the past year, God has worked and continues to work in our lives doing new things and showing us new ways to be the church.

Our 2020 Synod Assembly was not held due to the impact of the pandemic. As a result, the Synod Council acted to fill Synod Council vacancies until the next Synod Assembly could be held. The following persons were elected to fill one-year terms until 2021 elections were held: James Druckenbrod, the Rev. Molly Haggerty, the Rev. Brian McClinton, Stacey Schroeder, and Carlotta “Chucki” Strevig. Those seats will be filled by election at our 2021 assembly.

The election for synod vice president scheduled for 2020 also could not be held. Vice President Lucinda Bringman had submitted a letter of resignation effective October 31, 2020, thus creating a vacancy for the office. On November 4, 2020, Bishop Jim Dunlop appointed me to the position of acting synod vice president. Since that time, I have been walking with God on a very steep learning curve. Fortunately, others walk with me and support me as I learn. Thank you to Lucinda Bringman for sharing your knowledge and continued guidance through Zoom meetings, phone calls and email. Thank you to Bishop Jim Dunlop for your patience and support. Thank you to the Rev. Beth Schlegel, synod secretary, for your guidance regarding procedure and policy. Thank you to Joe Stepansky, synod treasurer, for your gift of explaining finances in a way that I can easily understand. Thank you to our dedicated and amazing synod staff for your support. I must especially thank Debbie Clark for sharing her wealth of information with me and being patient as I moved into the role. I am blessed to serve with such an amazing team.

As acting synod vice president, one of my duties is to chair the Synod Council. Our Synod Council members are dedicated and faithful rostered and lay leaders. Our meetings are typically held on four Saturdays and one Thursday evening during the year. In addition, council members serve as committee chairs, committee members and liaisons to committees and conferences. Together, with Christ at our side, our Synod Council works to support the mission of our Lower Susquehanna Synod and participates in visioning where the future may take us. I am truly blessed and thankful to work with the members of council. This year we say thank you to council members who have completed their terms and will not be serving on the Synod Council in 2021-2022: The Rev. Matthew Best, the Rev. Jillian Riddle, Carlotta “Chucki” Strevig and Theodore Wolfe.

### Equipping Leaders

Our synod continues to support both rostered and lay leaders through offering a variety of trainings, retreats, and programs. Many online opportunities are offered in a wide range of topics. Additionally, our camps offered our rostered leaders opportunities for informal time away for rest and refreshment at Camp Nawakwa, Camp Kirchenwald and the Wittel Farm.

Online worship and faith formation gained great importance during this time of pandemic. During our Bishop’s Convocation in October, hybrid church was the topic for training and discussion. Hybrid church continues to develop and grow in exciting new ways.

Our bishop and synod staff are dedicated to caring for our rostered leaders and provide support and guidance to them throughout candidacy and mobility.

Alpha Beta Christos/First Call Theological Training specifically supports our rostered leaders in their first call through fellowship, discussion, and training.

Leadership Training Camp and youth activities continue to foster the gifts of our youth who are interested in leadership roles in the church.

Our synod’s Justice Ministries initiative is moving full steam ahead! Wednesday morning chapel services shared worship focused on various justice issues. The Justice Ministries developed a justice-focused Lenten devotion series and made it available for download. Planning is underway for worship services, including a Juneteenth worship experience.

Synod Council members participated in cultural competency training during our meetings in February and April. This introduced us to thinking in a new way about justice issues and becoming more aware of our communities. Training is available on an ongoing basis through our synod.

**Encouraging Cooperation**

Congregations are working together more – sharing resources, ministries, and events. Our synod can help connect congregations that want to share ministries. Synod staff are available for consultation about sharing church staff, forming partnerships, and looking at creative ways to serve God together.

The bishops and vice presidents from the eight synods in Region 8 meet on a regular basis. Together, we have identified specific areas where we can work together across synods. The first steps in shared ministry involve youth and technology. Planning is still underway regarding youth ministry. The technology team shared information about online Synod Assembly and communication.

Synod vice presidents from across the ELCA meet monthly via Zoom regarding a variety of topics impacting our synods and churchwide organization, the role of vice president, training, new mission, and ideas for further development. The group provides support and insight into issues that impact vice presidents.

**Engaging in New Mission**

The Lower Susquehanna Synod Mission Fund was established to provide initial funding support for the growth of ministries within our synod. The Lower Susquehanna Synod Mission Fund Committee receives and reviews grant proposals approximately three times per year. The application form is found on our synod website.

Early in the days of the pandemic, worship became an online experience and has continued to develop in amazing ways. Many leaders and congregations took their first steps into the world of social media and experienced success. As we move forward, worship continues to be offered online even as some congregations have returned to in-person worship with appropriate COVID-19 precautions in place. We are seeing the growth of hybrid church. The Bishop's Convocation in October 2020 featured Hybrid Church. Resources are available to learn more about hybrid church, including the book, *Becoming a Hybrid Church*, written by Dave Daubert and Richard Jorgensen. More training will be offered in the near future.

The R3 initiative continues and focuses on relationships - relationship with God, relationship with each other, and relationship with our community. This is the second "round" of R3; and due to the pandemic, we have moved online. This has not diminished the enthusiasm of the R3 teams! I served as an R3 coach during the first time the initiative was offered and am serving as a coach for the second round. Our R3 teams are doing great work in their congregations and communities. Congregations in the R3 program make a commitment to work toward renewing their congregations spiritually, connecting with their communities, developing principles on which to base their ministry, and envisioning how they can continue to develop their ministries.

At present, we are experiencing a challenging time for the church. Our rostered leaders and lay leaders are responding to rapid changes. Our congregations are adjusting to the new way of being the church, and at the same time are grieving for what used to be. Our bishop and synod staff are also facing new challenges and running as fast as they can. Please keep all our leaders in your prayers. Encourage our bishop, synod staff, pastors, and deacons to take breaks and rest. Be patient with each other and be kind to one another.

Take another look at Isaiah 43:19. I like the way *The Message* paraphrase says it:

*Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it? There it is! I'm making a road through the desert, rivers in the badlands.*

God promised to provide a road and rivers for us to use on our journey and will accompany us every stop of the way. God's blessings and peace to you.

Jennifer Lau, *acting vice president*