



Upstate New York Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

A REPORT FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

Conference Assembly - Fall 2021

Bishop's Report

Bishop Lee M. Miller II

"Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4)

I can't even read those words without singing them in my mind as they begin their own refrain, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! And again, I say Rejoice!"

Paul writes these words to the church in Philippi who is struggling in the face of opposition and suffering. Paul himself was imprisoned and awaiting trial as he wrote this letter encouraging believers to have the "same mind" (1:5), the same love, that was in Christ. Paul wanted the church to know that in spite of the tension and struggle, because of the power of transformational love, we might still rejoice.

I know you're tired, Church. It's been a long 18...19...20...months...years...in the pandemic. I know pastors are tired of pivoting on a dime and adapting, again and again. I know congregations want to gather, sing, commune, shake-hands, hug, eat together! I know we long to be close again. Some want things to "go back to the way they were." Others know, things aren't going back. And the way things were, weren't good for everyone. I know you're tired.

I pray this fall begins a season of healing and wholeness. I pray that with the gifts of scientists and medical professionals we will find the tools to drive away the pandemic of Covid-19. I also believe that God has called us to be the Church, the Body of Christ, in this place we call the Upstate New York Synod, for just such a time as this. God has given us what we need for what we are called to be.

As people of God, saved by Grace, I dream a church where Love activates us in the world do justice and share the joy which we have inherited.

This fall I will spend as much time as I am able listening to rostered leaders across our synod and lay leaders gathered in conference assemblies. I join the whole synod in giving God thanks for YOU! Without you, there is no church-together! Thank you for the gifts you share. Thank you, for the very many ways God works in you for the sake of justice and joy.

I look forward to listen and learning from you, and serving with one another as church together.

"Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice!"

Report from Operations, Administration, and Finance

As we enter this new Fall season, the Upstate New York Synod is mimicking that change in the synod office with gratitude for what has been and an excitement and rekindling of energy for what is to be. We send our prayers forward with Bishop John and Lin Macholz as they enter a new season of their own in retirement. Blessings and God-speed. We are very pleased to welcome and assist Bishop Lee M. Miller II as he steps into his new call as Bishop of this great synod.

The Synod office has fully embodied the phrase, “change is the only constant”. We are now a much smaller staff, operating primarily out of our home offices, while putting in place new systems and functionality that will serve our synod well in the years to come. We have remained open as we navigate this new way forward so as not to let a deaf ear fall on the voices that make up this synod. Honestly, we have faced challenges. However, they have given us the opportunity to identify priority needs and start to put plans in place and even into action around many of them.

We are in the process of outsourcing both the payroll (Asure Software) and accounting (Insero & Co, CPAs, LLC) functions of the synod office. We are working with our representatives at Dermody, Burke, and Brown to streamline our systems and functions to make them as efficient and effective as possible during this transfer of responsibility. Both functions remain

under synod management and guidance. We are also working through our remaining physical office space: what stays, what needs to be archived, what needs to possibly return? Finally, in the 2022 budget, you have approved the allocation of staffing dollars for a part-time administrator and communication specialist. During this pandemic, we have learned that communication and streamlined systems are key to fully supporting the needs of the synod and we are onboard with this necessary change.

Pastor Lori Kochanski, in addition to Faith Formation, leading a weekly 9@9 and fully facilitating our Faithful Learning and Teaching Together (F.L.A.T.T.) platform has also taken on the regular Upstate Update communications, Midweek Musing facilitation, Synodically Authorized Minister (SAM) program, Welcome Event coordination and multiple functions within the synod that require her special and newly developing skill set.

Julie Grindle remains fully immersed in the large scope of work involved in the synod’s Candidacy & Mobility functions. In the process of streamlining, she has assimilated all administrative functions related to these two areas and our communication with the ELCA. Julie has also stepped in to provide support in the Syracuse office on a regular basis providing banking, mailing and file coordination.

We are grateful to our interim DEMs, first Rev. Dr. Becca Ehrlich and now Branden Dupree for carrying us forward in care of our new starts and mission developers

until a permanent Director of Evangelical Mission is called by Bishop Miller.

As Assistant to the Bishop for Operations, my roles have expanded two-fold since this position oversees the functions of finance, investment, and administration, all of which were greatly affected by the staff reduction over the last two years. After being part of the team that put together this year's first-ever online Synod Assembly and Bishop Election (successfully!), the majority of my time has been spent moving through our financial processes, necessities, systems and the work needed to transition to organizations that will provide consistent, long-term, dynamic support for our synod in the years to come. This took time. In the wake of my diverted attention, other functions have been at a standstill to allow full focus.

Although we have increased hours for staff as we are able, each of these positions remains part-time (Lori Kochanski at 20 hours; Julie Grindle at 30 hours; Michelle Josephson (me) at 30 hours and our Interim DEM at 5 hours per week each).

Your synod staff is small, but mighty and working to serve the Lord in every aspect of our work for the synod. As he steps into his new call, we are creating space for Bishop Miller to listen, understand and gauge where we are as a synod, where we need to go and how best to get there. His staff is here to share our experience and knowledge and offer full support as he steps into this new space.

What an exciting time we are in! As a church, we stand as pioneers: of this new

time, on a new frontier, stepping into this new way of being. Lest we forget, we are reminded through scripture that we are fully supported and strengthened by the love and strength of our Lord, Jesus Christ, just as we have always been. Thanks be to God.

In faith, service and gratitude,
Michelle Josephson
Assistant to the Bishop for Operations

Faithful Learning and Teaching Together (FLATT): *A collective of learning opportunities to grow in faithful witness and service*

We continue to offer courses for learning through this online platform. I am thankful for the way this has been a space for sharing of ideas and continued learning with others who we may not ever get to meet in person.

The range of courses continues to grow. If you have an idea for a course or topic for conversation please reach out and let me know. I am always looking for leaders who are willing to share their passion with others. I am also looking for ways to promote ongoing congregational studies and discussions. If your congregation is offering an online Bible Study or workshop and would like to open it beyond your congregation please consider adding it to our list of offerings.

I look forward to the ways this platform will be a space for intentional leadership development and discernment for members of congregations.

The Rev. Lori Kochanski, Assistant to the Bishop

Synodically Authorized Ministry (SAM) and Growing in Lay Leadership Learning Opportunities, Equipping Leaders to Lead

Early in the 2021 a new set of policies regarding Synodically Authorized Ministry was developed through conversation and with the guide of ELCA policies regarding this kind of ministry. It was then affirmed by Synod Council.

There is also a growing need to provide more opportunities for all congregational leaders, not just those who identify as a Synodically Authorized Minister, to have opportunities for development and learning.

In order to build on the practice of offering a variety of opportunities for general learning, and for the authorization of Synodically Authorized Ministers, we have been meeting in 4 different working groups to determine best practices as we move forward in this ministry. The working groups are: Procedures, Online Learning, Core Curriculum and Education, Lay Leadership Training and Identification. These working groups will continue to meet and plan ways to provide strength and support to our efforts in the area of equipping lay leaders for service to God and others.

The folks on these working groups have been doing very good work on the individual tasks. Eventually the work of all four groups will come together to form a united vision around how we equip leaders to be prepared to keep sharing the Good News of God in all places.

The Rev. Lori Kochanski

First Call Rostered Leaders Partnering with Metro New York Synod

Rostered leaders in their first three years of ordained ministry are required to meet and learn together. This year we began a program where UNYS leaders meet with colleagues who are in their first call in Metro-New York Synod (MNYS). We met for an online retreat to begin this work together. In addition, Pastor Kochanski and Pastor Becca Seely (of the MNYS) collaborate to gather the group together for large group sessions. Leaders are also expected to meet in colleague groups in between the large group sessions.

Zoom technology has made this kind of collaboration easier. The whole process speaks to the way we can practice good stewardship while deepening relationships and sharing support.

We hope to continue to build on this collaboration as we move into the future.

The Rev. Lori Kochanski

Human Based Thinking as a Way Forward Congregational Planning: *Leading with Intention*

I have met with congregations to use a human based thinking model as the foundation for strategic work that needs to be done in congregations. Through a series of meetings, congregational leaders discern their own particular needs and research plans for answering those needs. The plans are often measurable and actionable steps toward achieving goals and growing in faithful witness to God.

If you are interested in learning about how the synod staff may be able to support this kind of opportunity for thinking and planning for your congregation please let us know.

The Rev. Lori Kochanski



9@9: Building Relationship in Uncertain Times

What joy the staff has found in connecting with folks through 9@9. The daily 9AM Facebook meetings have lifted spirits while providing sacred space for meeting together in prayer, praise and practice.

Throughout the Spring and into summer we slowly altered the schedule 9@9. Staff took a break in August but is now back online each Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday at 9AM. We hope to see you there!

<https://www.facebook.com/ups-tatenysynod>

Fall Assembly Report on Mobility and Transitions

Greetings, siblings in Christ of the Upstate NY Synod!

The past 18 months of the pandemic have caused a sea change in the Transitions and Mobility processes in our Synod.

One of our pastors presciently asked me in April 2020, "Will we see lots of retirements and other rostered ministers leaving churches because of this pandemic?" At the time, I wondered the same thing, and for the first few months, it didn't matter to our Synod

personally, as our churches were not heavily in transition.

But then the retirements in our Synod began in earnest, many of which had already been planned prior to the pandemic. Rostered ministers all over the ELCA found that they didn't see eye to eye with their leadership about Covid practices, whether it be masking or social distancing, Zoom or in person worship. And many pastors simply felt the tug of the Spirit to move elsewhere.

You might expect the by-product of this to be a glut of pastors for our churches that are open; but the opposite is true. While there are quite a few pastors looking for call, the number of open churches across the ELCA is large. I have referred to it, crudely, as a buyer's market for rostered ministers. Add to that the (relatively) new pull to live near family that the pandemic has created (or exacerbated), and these pastors are extremely choosy about where they want to move geographically as well.

We have adapted our strategies to continue to find the right pastors for our congregations. We have acknowledged the realities and are working hard to help our transitioning congregations understand how long they may need to wait. And we are encouraging these congregations to work on vision and mission during this time, so that when they are ready for that pastor, the work can begin.

God is working in these times, making all things new. Our response will be one of faithfulness, courage and joy, even in the midst of anxiety and the frustration of not knowing what the future holds. Please continue to pray for those discerning calls, our churches in transition, and that the Holy Spirit will move in every call process to work for good in Christ's church. Thanks be to God!

Julie Grindle

Assistant for Candidacy and Mobility