

Report of the Synod Vice President 2021 Northwest Washington Synod Assembly

Grace and peace to you, faithful servants gathered in assembly (via Zoom!) to do the work of the synod. It has been two years since there have been any reports made to this, the synod's highest legislative authority, as we had to cancel last year's assembly due to the COVID-19 pandemic -and what an interesting couple of years it has been! We've all experienced major changes in our world that have affected our understanding of how we are church in and for the NWWA Synod.

As noted above, the Synod Assembly is the highest legislative authority in the synod. The Synod Council is the board of directors, serving as the interim authority between meetings of the Synod Assembly. The job of synod vice president is to chair the Synod Council, making me the chairperson of the board. That is just about all the constitution says about the role of vice president. However, over the last year the synod vice presidents have worked on creating a document that more accurately reflects the part we and our councils play in synod leadership. The pandemic has also impacted the way that our synod council in NWWA functions. We have spent time connecting with congregations in new ways – through Zoom, for example - and collaborating on how to best serve our communities in the middle of a global health crisis.

We have also experienced some changes in our leadership group:

- We elected a new bishop at the 2019 Synod Assembly. Welcome aboard, Bp. Shelley Bryan Wee!
- Treasurer Dale Zehms moved out of the synod and Bart Brosten was appointed to the position – Thank you for your faithful service, Dale, and welcome Bart!
- Secretary Deanna Wildermuth accepted a new call as Executive Director at Interfaith Coalition and resigned her position on the council. Pr. Gail Rautmann was appointed to fill out her term, which ends in 2022. We thank Deanna for her service and welcome Gail!
- Several members of our current council joined us last spring. We normally would have held elections last year to fill several slots on council, but because we had already solicited nominees prior to cancelling the assembly, the sitting council instead reviewed the nominees and appointed individuals from that pool to serve until such time as we could meet in assembly again for a proper election. We have been blessed with their service this past year: Pr. Rebecca Langholz, Dcn. Amy O'Collins, Lauren Ode-Giles, Pr. Herb Shao, Elizabeth Stitt, Dustin Wunderlich, Curt Eidem, and Pr. Ivar Hillesland. They joined returning council members Emily Brebner, James Colver, and Pr. Hector Garfias-Toledo. Many thanks to those council members whose terms ended since the last assembly: David Horton, Pr. Elizabeth Rawlings, Dcn. Jan Cherry, Pr. Joan Beck, and Joanne Hinkle

These changes to the council have made us more diverse in age, gender, ethnicity, and lived experience. This is in line with what we hoped to accomplish when we amended our bylaws regarding council composition at the 2019 Synod Assembly. It has been an honor and pleasure to work with this amazing group of servant leaders – especially as we've navigated all the changes that the pandemic imposed on our lives and ministry.

Even before the pandemic, we had been experimenting with using Zoom to allow fuller participation of council members who reside in the more far-flung areas of the synod. This early practice served us well

as we moved to fully online council and executive committee meetings. Once we can safely meet in person again, we will continue to provide Zoom as an option for participation in synod leadership. That Zoom practice also prepared us to sponsor synod-wide events to help chart the course through the pandemic, which in turn helped us to connect as a synod more deeply than we have in the past. We give thanks for the technology that has allowed us to continue the ministry and mission of the synod, even while remaining physically distanced.

Much of the work of the synod the past two years has been centered around justice and equity. This work is ongoing and is in line with many of the resolutions adopted by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly, such as *Faith, Sexism and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action*, as well as the "Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity in the ELCA." The NWWA Synod has an active Strategic Team for Authentic Diversity that meets regularly and provides resources for individuals and congregations. As a council we have used the Intercultural Development Inventory to assess our intercultural competency and pursue strategies for becoming more culturally accepting and adaptive.

Of course, in the last year our work has been shaped by the response to COVID-19. The council and synod staff have worked to create and administer the COVID-19 relief fund, assist congregations with PPP loans, provide worship resources, and more. Thanks to your generosity we have not only been able to continue existing ministries, but also explore new ways of being God's people here in Northwest Washington. We are truly blessed with an abundance of love, creativity, faithfulness, and generosity.

The council continues to serve as faithful stewards of these gifts and resources. Since the last assembly we have begun to distribute the funds raised through the Because of You campaign, assisting with seminary debt and funding new ministries. Additionally, we have awarded one round of Grace Grants and the second set of grants will be announced at this assembly. Thanks be to God!

None of us could have imagined when we gathered in assembly in 2019 what the next two years had in store, but as we know, "all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28) Thanks to all who have faithfully answered the call to leadership these past two years.

Kay Edgerton, Synod Vice President