

Our Synod Neighbour

presented by Laurie Knott, Eastern Synod Vice Chair to the Eastern Synod Assembly 2018

Our theme for this assembly is being neighbour. During this time, we will explore what is happening in our Synod neighbourhood. A little over two years ago, the Synod's strategic planning process began. It started with information gathering---through interviews, surveys and discussions---you may remember participating in table discussions at the Synod assembly gathering two years ago.

In the fall of 2016, the feedback was reviewed and a strategic plan was developed and approved by Synod Council in November of 2016. A copy of the plan is included in your bulletin of reports in section 6- page 28.

The plan aligns around four primary goals. Under each goal in the plan, you will find sub-strategies to address the feedback received around the environment in which we operate---our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

From there, a work plan was developed. It has 100 action items. A little daunting! We realized we needed to focus our attention on the activities that would have the highest impact to ensure we allocated appropriate resources---primarily time---to ensure that we moved these initiatives forward. We identified eleven action items that are tracked and monitored.

The Bishop meets monthly with the Assistants to the Bishop to review the status of each of these priority items. The plan is reviewed at each Synod Council meeting with a separate agenda item to discuss one or two of the priority items in more detail---to get an update, provide feedback and to determine next steps.

It is these key activities that I, along with some colleagues want to review with you today. As we walk through them, you will see that they are very much interconnected with each other---as a good plan of activities should be!

So let's start at the beginning! Our first strategic goal....

1. Provide Vision, Leadership & Support to Synod Community
.....recognizes the relationship that we have as a Synod and congregations and the role that the Synod plays in setting direction and providing support,

From the feedback received, the Synod was recognized for its support of our national church and for helping the Synod community feel connected to the wider church. Congregations expressed appreciation for the support and resources provided by the Synod.

On the other hand....making difficult decisions was identified as an area for improvement for the Synod with feedback suggesting that we need to stop some ministries rather than let them continue to drain resources---both financial and human. We heard that there were

opportunities for the Synod to provide assistance and care for congregations who may not be viable going forward. As we look at concluding some ministries, we also need to be providing direction as to what new forms of ministry should be explored.

Three key activities were identified and let's walk through each of them. The first,

i. Identify New Forms of Ministry

The Bishop and the Mission Committee have been allocated responsibility for this action item. It is both exciting and a little scary! It would be great to come up with a magic formula that could be shared! So, to clarify expectations----there is no one size fits all or in this case--one plan-- fits all.

As a Synod, as you heard in our Treasurer's Report, we allocate over \$300,000 to congregational ministry initiatives. We all need to be asking what is the best way to invest our resources---not just the dollars, but our time and our talents.AND, how do we measure that we are achieving the desired impact.

We have tapped into several sources----first, we reviewed research available from the Anglican Diocese in Toronto as they analyzed initiatives in their diocese to identify best practices and parameters for new ministry, second, we looked at congregations in our own Synod to see what they are doing and third, we explored what other churches are doing.

While the exploration continues, we are learning that it comes down to wise discernment in assessing the needs of the community and, in leveraging the gifts of the leadership. It means asking some different questions and being open to the opportunities created by the Holy Spirit. And, if things don't work as planned, strong safety nets need to be in place. Interestingly, the Anglican diocese research found that projects that started small and grew did better than those that required large upfront investments---and in part, after putting so much money into a project, it made the decision more difficult to end it.

That raises the question of how do we measure the impact of ministry?

In Gil Rendle's book, "Doing the Math of Mission" (an excellent read). Rendle advises not to just focus on the numbers. Rather, we need to measure what we are trying to accomplish. What is the outcome that we are looking for and are we having the desired impact? It's not just about people showing up. I like how Rendle describes the need to measure----he says, measurement is a tool "to hold ourselves accountable to the purpose of God's dreams for us in the world".

we heard some great examples of ministries in the open mic session yesterday..... evidence that.///

Whether we are big or small....or even a medium sized church!.....our purpose is not diminished!

We need to be looking within our own communities.....being a neighbour--- to identify opportunities to make a positive difference, define what we want to accomplish and then, define the activities that will support the goal.

ii. Identify, Encourage & Support Congregations at the Crossroads

As we raise questions around ministry, our second priority item addresses congregations who are perhaps at a more critical decision point. In the feedback we heard that congregations are looking for assistance and support in the decision making process.

In the Kitchener-Waterloo area, congregations have had the opportunity to benefit from the work of Lutheran Homes KW who provided an outside perspective and assistance in gathering market information. Recognizing that there would be a benefit in providing this support to the wider Synod, a new part time position--- Ministry Director, Property Transformation--was created. I'm delighted to introduce to you, (and for many of you he will need no introduction), Reverend Joel Crouse who will talk about his new role.

[Joel Crouse presentation to Synod Assembly 2018](#)

Joel mentioned that we learn by listening and sharing our stories and our third priority relates to this. Effective communication in a social media world in a church with diverse demographics is a challenge.

iii. Communications Strategy

Developing a communications strategy is a work in progress. This past winter, we hired an outside consultant, Tom Nunn of Strategic Communications to review how we currently communicate and make recommendations on how to enhance our communication. While the Synod received positive feedback for its communications, the ongoing challenge is to find ways to engage a wider audience using both traditional means and modern technology with somewhat limited resources. One of the key objectives is to further strengthen relationships with congregations, pastors and other partners to develop more reciprocal communications so that we are sharing our stories and accomplishments with each other on an ongoing basis. So now let's talk about the people who have to lead the way forward. under the 2nd strategic goal....

2. Develop Capable Leaders

This goal speaks to how we identify new leaders and how we support and encourage our current leaders----both rostered and lay. In this category we learned that the Synod could do more to train and educate leaders. Ministry area leadership teams were looking for support as they grow into this new structure and it was identified that we have opportunities to support the effectiveness of ministry areas.

From a call process perspective, the Synod is recognized for its ability to match rostered leaders with the right ministries but identifying candidates for ministry was raised as a weakness.

We are focusing on these four activities:

The first,

i. Develop a Succession Plan

As we look at our rostered leaders, ministry directors and officers, we can anticipate some changes in our leadership over the next 5 – 10 years---maybe sooner. We need to be developing more specific plans to support the transition of our leadership team---in other words-- we have work to do!

ii. Lay Leader Workshops

As we talk about leaders, we acknowledge the increasing role of lay leaders in the life of the church. Legislative requirements are also becoming more onerous. The Synod has lead workshops designed for specific lay leader roles such as church treasurer and admin assistants and continues to lead workshops such as the Apple Tree, Leadership & Healthy Congregations, Generosity Practicum and most recently, a Communications workshop. Identifying and responding to training opportunities is ongoing.

iii. Develop a LT Strategy: Deans & Leadership Teams

For Ministry Area Deans---- 3rd priority under this goal---leadership training is now a significant component of the Deans' and Ministry Directors' fall meeting agenda. The role of Dean has changed significantly over the last four years as we transitioned from eight Conferences to seventeen Ministry Areas. Having smaller areas was designed to support closer proximity for working together (although geography still causes challenges in some ministry areas) and the structure (having less structure) was designed to allow more flexibility within the local community context.

To help us better understand the work of Deans and Ministry Areas, the Dean of the Greater Toronto area, the Rev. Dr. Christian Ceconi will talk about his role as Dean, the work that is happening in his ministry area and some of their plans for moving forward.

[Christian Ceconi presentation to Eastern Synod Assembly 2018](#)

In the Bulletin of reports, if you haven't done so already, please take time to read about what is happening in the ministry areas in our Synod. There is a lot going on!

And now let's look at new leaders.....under the Candidacy priority.

iv. Candidacy & Recruitment Work

The Candidacy committee---as outlined in their report---is responsible for assessing and endorsing individuals in the candidacy process. Recruitment falls under their mandate. While we may not be opening new congregations and in fact, we are reducing the number of

congregations, we still need to prepare and train leaders to carry forward the work of our church.

The challenge for recruitment is that the role is changing and the setting may be very different in the future. The role isn't going to be the same as we know it today. Perhaps that is also exciting for newer leaders? The recruitment task force has tried a more proactive approach to identify candidates and is looking at how they can develop a relationship to support and encourage those who are in the discernment process.

Under their Letter of Call, rostered leaders have primary accountability for identifying and encouraging candidates for ministry. Let's face it---we all own the responsibility to identify and encourage candidates for ministry. Who do you know?

So now let's take a look outside our synod as we look to connect with the wider church through effective partnerships

(3. Connect Synod Community with the Wider Church through effective partnerships)

This goal speaks to our partnership with the ELCIC, Global Mission Companion programs, Canadian Lutheran World Relief and ecumenical and faith based relationships.

i. Review Relationship with Companion Synods

When gathering feedback for our strategic plan, the role of our companion synods was questioned. It is felt that we have a strong relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. You may remember that one of our ELCIC initiatives for the Reformation was to raise funds for scholarships for schools in Jordan and the Holy Lands. Through Bishop Munib Younan, also the President of the Lutheran World Federation, we had an opportunity to get a broad perspective of the global church.

On the other hand, our relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana has had a lower profile. We have had a relationship with the Guyanese church since 1990 yet, over the last few years our work has been somewhat limited.

This year the Lutheran church in Guyana celebrated their 275th anniversary and we had three representatives from our Synod attend their 75th annual convention. Bishop Michael Pryse, Assistant to the Bishop, Rev. Riitta Hepomaki and I attended.

I am extremely grateful to have had this opportunity to experience what it means to be the church in a different context----I found out---we aren't that different! We are all people who want to serve our Lord, want to build relationships and engage with the people in our local communities. While we were there, we were inspired by the stories of ministry that were shared. Pastor Riitta Hepomaki has written a detailed report outlining our time in Guyana which you can find on the Synod website. If you haven't read it yet, I encourage you to do so!

In Guyana--- a country where many are without, I was impressed by the kindness, generosity and resilience of the people I met. Elocia Smith, the Secretary for the church, summed it up well---she said when you run into obstacles, you can fall down and turn into dust or you can choose to pick yourself up, brush off the dust and keep moving forward. Good advice for all of us!

For the church in Guyana, their biggest challenge is training new leaders. They have eight pastors and ten Deacons serving 44 congregations. As we now define next steps, we need to determine how can we be neighbours together---and the roles in our relationship.

We are delighted to welcome Rev. Conrad Plummer, the newly elected President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana to our assembly and look forward to hearing more from him tomorrow afternoon.

Our 4th goal---Live as a Healthy Synod responds to how we conduct ourselves.

4. Be a Healthy Synod

We are a church—we are called to be ministers of the Gospel. We must also be a healthy organization—incorporating effective communications, good governance practices, sound financial stewardship and strong, mutually accountable relationships.

In this area, we have focused on three priorities. The first is to continue the Reconciliation initiative.

i. Continue the Reconciliation initiative

As a church we have worked to deepen our understanding of indigenous rights, to participate in the ongoing work of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation process, and to renew relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in our varied contexts.

Reverend Katherine Altenburg, our Ministry Director, Public Policy & Service will provide an update on the work being done by, and through, the Reconciliation Task Force.

Katherine Altenburg presentation to Eastern Synod Assembly 2018 to be added soon.

Our second priority relates to a broader category....

ii. Growing and Preserving Assets.....

We want to build a strong foundation for the future just as our parents, grandparents and great grandparents have done for us. In the feedback, respondents expressed concern over our future sustainability. Policies related to the disposition of assets, providing resources to assist in congregation decision making and the development of the Ministry Director, Property Transformation role are all examples of actions taken to support this priority. At times the decisions that we are making are painful but as Pastor Joel reminds us--- we need to keep looking ahead and thinking about what is needed to build a sustainable vision of the Lutheran Church.

Assets are more than financial. We are neighbours....we are in relationship together. To support our relationship, in 2013, a Covenant document was developed to outline the roles between the Bishop and Synod Council and Congregations. A copy of this document is in Appendix A of the strategic plan (section 6, page 37) in your Bulletin of Reports. While it was not meant as a legal contract, congregations were invited to sign the document together with the Bishop to acknowledge our roles in sustaining and nurturing our relationship.

There are three key areas of the Synod's Commitment:

First, Communication---keeping each other informed in a timely manner, being upfront about what is happening, listening to each other and being respectful in dialogue.

Second, a commitment to leadership in Mission and Ministry----which includes public leadership, providing leadership, support and direction to congregations, equipping new leaders and providing education and training for rostered and lay leaders.

And thirdly, Ministry Vacancies. The Synod works with congregations to assess their needs, recommend an interim pastor and provide assistance through the call process.

As you can see, the priorities of the strategic plan align closely with these commitments.

For congregations, there are five areas....the first two relate to communication---first, communication with the Synod and second, communicating with congregational members. The accountabilities are the same as the Synod's---open and respectful dialogue.

The third relates to the direction and leadership of the Synod----participating in programs, being collaborative in ministry and listening and responding to Synod recommendations.

The fourth, relates to governance ----specifically what you are doing here!---participating in the life and work of the Synod by being a delegate and taking the decisions made here back to your congregations.

And finally, the fifth relates to financial support. The Synod relies on the benevolence dollars of congregations to do its work. Just as you ask members of your congregation to be generous and provide financial support proportional with their capacity to do so-----so the Synod asks of you and your congregation.

How would you assess our neighbourliness? What connects us and what at times, pulls us apart? I hope you have a burning desire to respond to these questions!

The Strategic plan is designed as a fluid document. With the election of a new synod council, one of the first orders of business will be to update the current strategic plan, set the direction

for the next three years and define our priorities. What is the impact that we want to make? What are the questions we should be asking?

An online survey is available until July 17, 2018 on the Synod's website under the Synod Assembly link. Look for the Performance Assessment button.

The survey is an opportunity to provide feedback---what is going well and what could be improved.....what should the priorities be? What are your thoughts?

We have work to do! It's not easy, it's sometimes scary.... But it is exciting! I hope you feel the same sense of urgency that I do---to move forward together, as neighbours, responding to God's call to do Christ's work in the world.