
2018 Metro D.C. Synod Assembly

Report of Assistant to the Bishop

The Rev. Leila Ortiz

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I've been in this role for close to two years now. Given my responsibilities I get to walk alongside councils, transition teams, call committees, interims, deacons, pastors, seminarians and people discerning their call to ministry. Basically, I get to walk alongside you, the church. I get to see you and hear you and listen to your hopes, expectations and dreams for new ministry. I witness true love and desire for growth and freedom to worship and live in harmony with one another in this fragile and broken world. I also get to witness much of what is sacred about faith communities in moments of high tension, anxiety, and insecurity. I can give testament to your resilience, passion and holy conviction that the gospel matters in and for this world today.

By God's grace, in these sacred moments of wonder and uncertainty, I get to come into your spaces and remind you that you are not alone. There is group of people on 3rd and E St. aka the Synod Office, that also love and desire growth and freedom to be church, just like you. These people are not strangers to church dynamics; they've served in the parish and have wisdom and experience with Holy Spirit moves that are not always welcome, yet absolutely necessary. They know the complexities, heartaches and joys of ministry and they have some helpful processes that were created for you and not against you. This last part takes some convincing, but once we engage this reminder faithfully, we're able to get to work... together.

This year, our work together has resulted in 12 new pastoral calls to our synod and 20 candidates in the candidacy process. This is reason to celebrate! God has been faithful and so have you as we navigate the decline in seminary enrollment in the past several years and what some are now calling the "grey tsunami" of retirements. By the grace of God, despite this reality, we've pressed on and believe in the move of the Spirit to guide our discernment as we continue to call gifted rostered leaders into our synod.

At the moment, seven of our congregations are served by interims, three of these are in the study process, three are awaiting names, and one is interviewing candidates for call. I ask that you hold all of us involved in this time of preparing, waiting and watching in your prayers. I also ask that you pray for our seminarians. This year, of the 20 candidates in process, we have 4 candidates who entered candidacy, endorsed five, and approved four with the help of a wise and Spirit-led Candidacy Committee and Candidacy Chair.

As we discern with congregations and candidates, we also discern with our colleagues in ministry and respond to the needs of the world to the best of our ability. Last year I shared with you the beginnings of a partnership with the Delaware-Maryland Synod. We aimed to connect, have courageous conversations and provide trainings for immigrants and refugees and for any, and all, leaders and congregations within our synods who have claimed the call to serve and accompany immigrant and refugee communities. We quickly learned that communities of faith in each synod were already working around these important issues in their own and effective ways for their context. We could not find the time to meet and organize as synods together. However, you, the church, were consistently present in support of our sisters and brothers. You went to rallies in protest of injustice, you organized locally and created awareness of unjust laws, trained communities and families seeking belonging, and you advocated and lobbied for your members, friends, and neighbors. Thank you! Even when our plans fail, God's will prevails. Thanks be to God!

Even though our partnership with the Delaware-Maryland Synod did not materialize as we'd hoped, another crisis hit our lands and both synods felt called to respond. In September, 2017 Hurricanes Irma and Maria hit the Caribbean Islands and left already depressed communities, due to the economic crisis, all the more devastated and desperate for relief. Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Gaithersburg, MD already had a strong connection with the most affected congregation of the Caribbean Synod, Iglesia Evangélica Luterana San Pedro in Toa Baja, Puerto Rico. They called their partnership, "Building Puentes". Once these hurricanes hit, I presented a proposal to the Synod Council that offered the possibility of expanding the efforts of "Building Puentes" to the entirety of the Caribbean Synod. In November 2017, the proposal was approved. During the season of Epiphany we made an appeal to you and you responded with offering and pledges that amounted to \$12,836. The Delaware-Maryland Synod also made an appeal and has received a total of \$87,000. The difference in donations is understandable given how you were so generous in giving to Lutheran Disaster Response in the immediate aftermath of the hurricanes and because we have devoted most of our energies to our New Connections Campaign. Your generosity is still

very much welcome and encouraged as we walk alongside Lutheran rostered leaders, siblings and fellow citizens in their struggle to keep sane and the church alive and flourishing.

Pastor Carmelo Santos and I will share more details of our projected efforts and how you can be a part of these in our “Building Puentes” workshop. If you’re interested in participating in work trips, VBS, after school and feeding programs, and advocacy on behalf of our friends and neighbors in the Caribbean, I hope to see you there.

The greatest gift this partnership has offered us is true friendship and trust. Such is the case, that in learning of our plans to accompany our neighbors on the islands, the Delaware-Maryland Synod Council unanimously voted to transfer and entrust the funds from their appeal to us. God is good!

This experience with the Delaware-Maryland, along with the many God moments I’ve witnessed this year, has taught me something about us as the church in time of crisis, frustration, and uncertainty: we are indeed better together, when we make new connections, and when we respond to the Spirit’s invitation to move with Her into new opportunities for ministry. I am sincerely eager to continue on this journey of faith with all of you and in Jesus’ name.