



## Synod Assembly 2022 Report of the Bishop

In January of 2020 we announced the Spirit's stirring within us to come into alignment in all we do as a synod. We invited all tables and teams to take into consideration our mission statement, priorities, and our themes for the year. They responded with great intention and faithfulness. It was so well received by the teams and our synod that we decided to lean into the invitation to continue with the themes of Sabbath, Cultural Competency, and Transformational Leadership for the rest of our term together. As always, the Spirit was faithful to help us see that these were not just themes we were to engage, but the fruit we hoped to reap as church together.

As such we discovered that from the beginning of our ministry together, we have been co-participating in and witnessing the work of the Spirit to create life abundant rooted in Jesus.

For this reason and for the remainder of our term we will use the image of a living tree to communicate our,

- Identity- (Roots)
  - In **Jesus**- Rooted in Jesus' love and his teachings
  - As **Disciples**- who are truly Followers of Jesus
  - Who bend all their work toward **Justice**.
- We will communicate our Mission, (Trunk)
  - **By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we are called to cultivate a bold and boundless love for Jesus and for all God's beloved creation.**
- We will commit to our Priorities- Branches
  - **Equip** and Develop Healthy Leaders
  - **Empower** and Nurture Vibrant Ministries and
  - **Encourage** and Model Faithful Accompaniment
- And we will bear Fruit as transformational leaders who are culturally competent, and respond to the command to keep sabbath for the sake of our lives and ministries.
  - (Equip) **Transformational Leadership**
  - (Empower) **Cultural Competency**
  - (Encourage) **Sabbath**

Dear Friends, this is our current work and our work ahead. Because we are rooted in Jesus, we remain inspired by the Holy Spirit and fruitful in our discipleship.

We gain the ability to recognize the injustices in our world and the needs of creation around us- human and ecological.

We grow in our desire to confess and repent for the sin we have done and have left undone.

And we grant ourselves and those we're entrusted to serve, the opportunity and possibility of healing and restoration as co-conspirators with the Holy Spirit.

Rooted in Jesus as disciples who bend all our work toward justice, our synod has already engaged in this holy work, even amid some of the hardest years of our lives and ministry. Some of us have lost loved ones, friends, church or family members. Others have lost their employment, homes, and mental and physical health. Not one person - lay or leader- I have encountered in the last year has been exempt from loss, grief, or pain. Some would argue, we have all endured psychological and emotional trauma due to the pandemics that have invaded and threatened our lives: COVID, racism, the climate crisis and social unrest to name a few.

If the grief of the last year were all we'd experience as beloved children of God, we may have missed the grace and gift this year has also brought us. For many, this year has offered more clarity of call than ever before. Some of you listening to these words discovered you had shared all you had to offer to one space and were ready to explore your gifts in another setting. This became true for our beloved Pastor Erin Swenson-Reinhold, our Assistant to the Bishop for Mobility and Candidacy. Pr. Erin has always been clear that she is called to serve and lead a congregation. The question was when. Due to her consistent discernment, she discovered that the time was now. Her ministry with us was a gift from which we gleaned much wisdom, knowledge, and best practices for such hard and holy work. For this, I am deeply grateful and pray she will continue to share the richness of her gifts in her new ministry setting.

This spirit of discernment and clarity made its way through and between our synod and that of The Delaware Maryland Synod. If you have been up to date with our newsletter you know that we now share two wonderful Assistants to the Bishops, Deacon Julie Stecker, Assistant to the Bishop for Youth and Families and as of April 1st, we welcome Pr. David Shank, Assistant to the Bishop for Generosity. Two fine leaders and fellow disciples of Jesus who love all people and bring out the best in the people they encounter. We are blessed to have them with us in ministry.

The spirit of discernment and clarity also accompanied me as it became clear to me that we have all the tools and resources (mostly created by Pr. Erin) to teach a new person how to serve in the role of Assistant to Bishop for Mobility and Candidacy. As such, it was not a matter of seeking someone skilled or proficient in this area, but of seeking someone who is respected, appreciated, and trusted within the church community and who would ultimately work well with the team we've already co-created. I believe I have found that person, in Rev. Sarah Garrett Krey, also coming to us from the Delaware Maryland Synod.

I believe Pr. Sarah will be a wonderful addition to our synod staff, not only because of her undeniable devotion to Jesus and all God's beloved creation, but because I've witnessed her ask the church good and piercing questions and make hard and holy decisions as a response to the demands of the Gospel. Pr. Sarah will be installed at our assembly and begin her ministry with us on July 1st.

As I look back on our initial hopes for our ministry together, I remember praying and pleading to God, "Jesus, grant that we simply begin *shifting* the culture of this synod and *begin* bending *all* our work toward justice so that we might *faithfully* respond to the demands of the gospel." I wasn't seeking change, necessarily. I was simply pleading for a shift and a beginning and that we might be faithful leaders along the way.

Dear Friends, we are two and a half years into our ministry together and the shift in the culture of our synod is evident. That would not be a reality were it not for the faithful ministry of our synod staff. Pr. Erin, your work was and is not in vain. You blessed us with your gifts of discernment, and for that, we are ever grateful. Pr. Lamar, your ability to name a thing what it is and graciously invite whoever will listen to lead by faith and not skill, is humbling and invaluable. Katharyn, I cherish your accompaniment and capacity to know what others need before they need it. May God bless your seminary journey toward the Ministry of Word and Service. The world is blessed to have you. Katie Evans, Assistant to the Assistants to the Bishop, May God bless you, too, on your seminary journey toward the Ministry of Word and Service. Your presence and voice was a gift to our synod and is a true gift to the church and the world. And [Kelly Champagne](#) and Evoke, your patience and eye for detail has made our synod look as wonderful as it truly is. Thank you!

It must be noted that none of our efforts in ministry would have led to a shift in the culture of our synod without you, the synod. You have dared to take risks and have some hard and liberating conversations co-creating Sacred Ground among us. When you were skeptical about our commitment to bend all our work toward justice, you turned judgment into curiosity. You determined you

would be church in uncertain times and through you God has, is, and will continue to do a new thing among us. Thank you and thanks be to God!

May we ever be inspired by the Holy Spirit to be the church the world needs today; the church that is rooted in Jesus, follows his teachings, and bends all their work toward healing, restoration, and justice for all God's beloved creation... with God's help and in Jesus' name. Amen.

En Cristo,

Bishop Leila M. Ortiz