

Bishop Suzanne Darcy Dillahunt
Report to the Assembly 2019

**Stronger and Better Together...Joining Jesus in the Restoration of the World:
ON THE WAY!**

Are you ready to have your hearts burn with the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Southern Ohio? I want us all to say to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:13-35)

Assembly 2019 is almost here and exciting things are happening in the Southern Ohio mission territory. When we gather together at Wittenberg University June 7-8 we meet in an upgraded facility on campus. SOS youth are meeting along side of us at Wittenberg this year and you'll see them pop in from time to time to see what we are up to.

This year, we gather together in worship and Bible study. We gather to do synod business: elect synod leadership, approve a mission and ministry plan for 2020-21; and hear how we are sharing the burn of the Gospel in congregations and ministry sites. We Clarify who and whose we are in the waters of baptism and what it means to be Lutheran today. We Cultivate relationships with each other for the sake of sharing the love of God in Jesus. We Collaborate together to build up the Body of Christ, the Church, in this Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We welcome Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton as the ELCA representative. And we are on the way to launching a Southern Ohio Synod-wide Campaign that will make us Stronger and Better Together...Joining Jesus in the Restoration of the World. I look forward to seeing you at the Assembly!

ON THE WAY...A Glimpse...

In the Emmaus reading from Luke, the two disciples were caught up in the grief of losing their friend, teacher and leader. They were focused on what was and not what would be. They needed hope. Jesus comes along and lets them tell their story and then Jesus tells THE story. We know what happens next...they invite him to stay, he breaks the bread and they recognize him as he vanishes from their sight. They run back to tell others; we have seen the Lord! Their hearts burned as Jesus opened the scriptures to them...telling the story.

Since our last Assembly, over 800 youth and young adults perspired together in Houston, TX at the ELCA Youth Gathering. Mission trips were taken by some of our congregations and Bishop Youth Ambassadors (YAP) shared their faith and shared who we are as a synod. God's Work our Hands Sundays helped neighbors throughout Southern Ohio Synod as we worked together to be Christ's hands and feet. Thanks to all of you who had anything to do with these ministries. It's how we are church together.

In our congregations, not only were children baptized, so were adults! People came to know the Good News of God's love in their lives as they were strengthened in their faith through service, worship, Bible study, and fellowship in the life of churches in this synod. Think about how the Good News of Jesus is alive in your life. No, really. Stop right now and think about it. Hold on to that thought as you continue to read.

Thank you to all the faithful leaders in this church, rostered and lay, who share gifts and resources to keep this flame burning. This year we launched "**The Collaborative**" under the

direction of Pastor Katie Kerrigan, SOS Director for Evangelical Mission, and the Synod's Congregational Vitality Team. By bringing congregations together in small groups, The Collaborative builds on gifts and strengths already present in our congregations, and multiplies them in a collaborative effort of sharing and learning so that each congregation may better understand God's call to share the story in their own community, and strengthen them with deeper faith and stronger relationships so that they can respond to that call more effectively. We are already seeing renewed hope and great excitement in those congregations who have joined the Collaborative. I invite you to consult with Pastor Kerrigan if your congregation would like to participate.

Thank you to congregations who gave Mission Support to assist ministries in this synod and the ELCA and beyond. If you are curious about your congregation's giving beyond the local church, check out the financials section of the pre-assembly materials or the Assembly website. We are ON THE WAY... together in mission support... giving offerings to the congregation and the congregation giving support to the synod and the synod giving 40% of unrestricted income to the ELCA, shows how we are interdependent and rely on each other to share what God has given to us...which is everything.

Our SOS Stewardship Team continues its work to strengthen congregations, providing resources and encouragement. Thank you all for the commitment to share! Keep it up and increase it!

If you have had a Constitution reviewed or have had governance questions, you may have noticed a change. Thanks to Pastor Craig Richter and the SOS Governance Team we are able to offer guidance to congregations and leaders on these matters. Our synod is blessed with gifted leaders! If you need assistance please just ask.

As part of the Synod Vision to be stronger and better together, we have established the Congregational Resource Team. The Team consists of 5 rostered ministers and 6 lay people who regularly undergo specialized training in Bowen Family Systems Theory. When a rostered minister or a congregation feel they are stuck in the same old patterns, are having a difficult time thinking creatively, or are experiencing conflict, team members are sent to help the rostered minister think faithfully through these issues. Maybe there's something in the congregation's history that just keeps rearing its head; maybe it's difficult for congregation members to listen to one another; or maybe just an outside ear would be of help in talking through important issues facing the church. Whatever the reason, the team members use the skills they have acquired through their training, plus their God-given gifts, to assist the congregation and its leaders in identifying what they need to do as a family unit to remove barriers and establish healthy patterns of thinking and behaving that set up the congregation for long-term growth and vitality.

The SOS Resource Team, which was installed last year at assembly, is busy at work this year. Thanks to the leadership of Pastor Bob Abrams this team is available for consultation with congregations and leaders. Don't hesitate to reach out to Pr. Abrams to be connected with these gifted leaders.

Thank you Synod Council and Executive Committee for your work this past year. Under the leadership of Vice President, Marjorie Ellis, the Council continues to visit with congregations as ambassadors connecting the council with congregations so that we are walking along side each other in ministry and mission. "The Synod" is ALL of US...TOGETHER.

Staying connected to each other is part of who we are in SOS. This year we introduced a Rostered Ministers e-bulletin, which contains information specific for Deacons and Pastors. A general e-Bulletin goes out weekly and if you are interested in receiving this, please contact Ms. Susan Barton-Nonno in the office. Find us on Instagram and Facebook too.

ON THE WAY... Continuing

Transitions are part of life in the church. We are thankful for the service to this synod of Ms. Gabrielle Hudecek, who has accepted a position at Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University. This past year we said farewell to Pastor Jeff Wick, Assistant to the Bishop, who worked with Candidacy, First Call and Mobility. We thank God for his gifts, which he shared with this synod over these many years and wish him well in the next chapter of his life and ministry. In January, we welcomed, Interim Director for Candidacy, Rev. Dr. C. Lynn Nakamura. Have you thought about or do you know someone who may have the gifts for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament or the Ministry of Word and Service? If so, contact us!

Since the last Assembly, we welcomed Pastors Christie Beckman, Neil Cadle, David Eidson, Martin Gehring, Daniel Hille, Blair Miller, Robyn Provis, Steve Rice, Alexandra Rode (from UMC) and Michael Wiechers, as well as Deacon Blair Smith, to our synod. We are grateful for their ministry in our synod. If you haven't met them yet, please welcome them at your next conference or cluster gathering.

Lancaster Lutherans Together is a new collaborative ministry in SOS. Five Lancaster congregations over the past two years have been doing ministry and worship together for the sake of the Gospel. Earlier this year they made a formal commitment to each other to continue this mission so that others may experience and know Jesus' love through them. This is the second ministry of this nature in the territory. The first is Lutheran Saints in Ministry in the Fairborn-Donnelsville-West Milton area. We pray for these ministries and look forward to what lies ahead as more congregations collaborate and cultivate together.

I thank God for our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Episcopal, United Methodist, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ and Moravian Church as we discover the gifts we share in a common faith and witness. I am happy to announce that we have, for the first time a Federated Congregation in Washington Court House...a joint Lutheran/Episcopal congregation was formed this spring...All Saints is sharing the Good News together! Let's continue to pray for this new and emerging congregation.

Our work with the Archdiocese of Cincinnati of the Roman Catholic Church did not end with the Common Prayer Service in 2017. In February, the Archdiocese, SOS rostered ministers and lay leaders, gathered for an education event around the opioid crisis, which affects all of our congregations, neighborhoods and families. Thank you to the joint task force for making this a reality. My prayer and hope is that we can continue our ministry together finding common ground for the good of the world.

ON THE WAY...Look to the Future

So how are we as the SOS moving into a future and a church that is different? How do we share the love of Jesus, our faith and opportunities that are before us? How are we to be Stronger and Better Together...Joining Jesus in the Restoration of the World, making hearts burn with the Gospel? Last assembly, if you were with us, we introduced Pastor Mike Ward and members of the Pastors Advisory Cabinet where we heard about a feasibility study done in

the synod about the future direction of synod ministries. Remember? If not it's ok. Since assembly the Pastors Advisory Cabinet (PAC) has expanded and worked on a plan. I am extremely happy to announce that the SOS will undertake a campaign for the first time in its history. Drum roll please...



is born and is a direct outcome of the synod mission and vision and fits into who SOS has become and where SOS is going...ON THE WAY! At assembly, you will learn more about Thrive! and how you will be a part of this ministry, because it is going to provide assistance to all of our congregations.

The purpose of Thrive! is for congregations to be stronger and more vibrant in living and proclaiming the Gospel in your communities and to become a vibrant presence of Jesus to our neighbors. No matter how small or large the congregation, Thrive! will model for every congregation how to conduct a special gift appeal, how to stimulate and ask for planned gifts through planned estate gifts and provide direct support to stewardship and resource development in every congregation.

I don't know who came up with it first, ELCA or SOS, but Future Directions 2025 of the ELCA and Thrive! both focus on leadership development and thriving and vibrant congregations.

The 5 Goals of Thrive! are:

1. Equipping lay leaders
2. Raising up leaders for smaller congregations
3. Strengthening rostered ministers
4. Launching new congregations and reaching new people
5. Enhancing worship practice

During assembly, you will hear more about Thrive! So come and be a part of this exciting opportunity, because I want all our ministries to thrive, finding the niche where God's calling you to be...ON THE WAY!

Now, stop and remember your answer to the question a few pages ago. How is this Good News of Jesus alive in your life? All of the things you just read about are happening BECAUSE of and to PERPETUATE the Good News of Jesus! All of this is part of your life, because YOU are part of the SOS...We are Church Together!

Finally, come to assembly! We are going to have a lot of FUN. Being together as Church in SOS is exciting and challenging as we share the Good News of Jesus Christ. We are on the way...

Yours in Christ,

The Rev. Suzanne Darcy Dillahunt
Bishop