

Stronger and Better Together...Joining Jesus in the Restoration of the World
Report of the Southern Ohio Synod Bishop
The Rev. Suzanne Darcy Dillahunt

On the Way: Be Light!
Matthew 5:15-16

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine...Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. I learned this song when I was 2 years old at Zion Lutheran Church in North Canton, Ohio. We are Jesus' love, grace and mercy. It has been a busy year and I want to share some of the ministry throughout the mission territory.

But first I must state the obvious: We are not together for assembly this year because of COVID-19. I am sad about not seeing you. Our plans changed and we needed to be nimble and flexible. THANK YOU to Epiphany Lutheran, Centerville for their willingness to try something new and different by hosting us. We will try that again in the future.

Life changed for all of us at the beginning of March. COVID-19 changed us emotionally, mentally and spiritually. This pandemic bumped us out of normal and made a new reality for all of us. Pastors, Deacons and congregations were thrown into online worship through live stream, Facebook Live, YouTube, Zoom, Skype, email and snail mail worship. And as we slowly come back to in person worship, life in church buildings will be different as well. However, one thing is for sure, even in the midst of this health crisis, the Church is the Church, we care for our neighbor and show God's love in Jesus. Church is not a building, but the people of God. We are Stronger and Better Together...Joining Jesus in the Restoration of the World.

So, let's go...

On the Way...Thrive! Equipping Vibrant Churches Together

What a great year since we last met. Thank you again for your support and prayers for ministry we share with you together in the bishop's office. Voting Members last year actually had fun at assembly and I hope we can continue to be church now with excitement even in this time of COVID-19, knowing we are in this together so that Jesus Christ is made known in what we proclaim and do. We are indeed Stronger and Better Together Joining Jesus in the Restoration of the World.

In Southern Ohio, the mission is to proclaim, share and invite others into the Good News of God's Love and Grace in Jesus. It is the basis of our Lutheran/Christian faith.

Stronger and Better Together...Joining Jesus in the Restoration of the World is the vision in SOS. We continue to Cultivate, Collaborate and Clarify and we do this in congregations no matter how large or small, in campus ministries, in institutions like Wittenberg, Capital and Trinity Seminary at Capital University, in outreach ministries to the homeless and hungry throughout the territory and through Mission Support to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We are the living and breathing Church. It's US together and were (and are) stronger together before COVID-19 made it a theme.

Thrive! Equipping Vibrant Churches Together is the Ministry Campaign that launched at last year's assembly. Signed Thrive! Tee Shirt auction aside, we started strong with Thrive. We trained councils on governance changes; trained congregations to carry out a Thrive campaign and their own ministry campaigns. We will continue our journey into Thrive this fall when we can assess where we have been and where we are going; and reviewing the funding of the 5 goals for this ministry to see how they will meet the needs of this synod beyond COVID-19.

1. Enhanced Worship

2. Coaching for Rostered Ministers and supporting seminary debt
3. Launching New Congregations
4. Equipping Lay Leaders
5. Lay Ministers Training

Take a look below for an update from Pastor Larry Donner, Thrive Campaign Manager, for all that has happened since the Tee Shirts! Thank You to all of you who have given to the mission campaign and the congregations for their generosity so far.

On the Way...Thrive!

“Stronger and Better Together: Joining Jesus in the Restoration of the World” is the compelling vision that has been guiding the work of the synod and its staff since being adopted at the 2016 Synod Assembly. Fulfilling the vision, however, has been hampered by decreases in Regular Mission Support that occurred for various reasons over the past two or more decades.

“Thrive! Equipping a Vibrant Church Together” is the 3-year mission campaign created in consultation with GSB Fundraising, and officially launched on January 1, 2020, to fund the synod vision in a sustainable manner. During the fall of 2019, over 120 representatives from fifty-five churches were trained to lead *Thrive!* campaigns in their congregations. Numerous congregations planned to hold campaigns in the winter or spring, and additional training was planned for churches still waiting to come on board. Excitement over the campaign grew quickly, spurred by news from the seven congregations that held amazingly successful campaigns in 2019 or early 2020. It is worthy to note that each of the seven congregations not only exceeded its non-binding goal – by as much as three times in one case – but also reported experiencing a great sense of fulfillment, joy and hope. Commitments received or made to the campaign from all sources, plus projections from non-binding goals set by congregations awaiting to hold their campaigns, totaled over \$650,000 as of February 1st.

As we are now too painfully aware, our personal, congregational and national plans were put on hold or significantly altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fittingly, plans for *Thrive!* were put on hold because the focus of the synod and its staff needed to be on caring for congregations, rostered ministers, and communities whose lives have been upended, if not devastated, by the pandemic. Providentially, two congregations had volunteered to serve as “early adopter” test sites in 2019, five congregations were able to hold campaigns early in 2020 before the pandemic required in-person worship services to be suspended, and numerous other gifts to the campaign were received from individuals, organizations and congregations. Income received from those sources allowed the synod to move forward on several goals of the *Thrive!* campaign, providing training and support for congregations and their leaders before the pandemic, and now *Thrive!* is helping us navigate through it. Here are some examples:

- A virtual hub was created at the synod office allowing staff to lead and/or more easily take part in providing online meeting and training experiences, thereby increasing efficiency and reducing travel expenses
- *Effective Congregation Council Training* led by Pastor Mike Ward of GSB Fundraising was provided to over 125 church leaders across the synod
- A 2nd Coaching Cohort was funded allowing Pastor Mike Weaver to mentor ten additional pastors in how to lead more effectively
- Funding was provided for three pastors to be trained to become mentors for the Coaching Cohort program
- Matching funds were provided to 14 congregations taking part in the 2-year Stewardship for All Seasons training program
- Sixty-eight congregations took part in “*Keeping Stewardship Strong During Uncertain Times*” online workshops, led by Pastor Ward, to help them navigate through the uncharted waters of the pandemic

- Online worship and educational resources produced by churches and individuals of our synod are being provided on the synod website as a way to collaborate with and mentor one another in ways to care for our congregations during the pandemic
- A *Thrive! Worship Team*, under the leadership of Josh Brodbeck, has been called together to develop training and resources that will enhance the vitality of congregational online and in-person worship throughout the synod

Clearly, *Thrive!* is already having a positive impact on life in our synod and is arguably even more important now in light of the pandemic. We anticipate relaunching the campaign when it is again safe and appropriate to do so. When that may be unclear and, depending on what happens with COVID-19, *Thrive!* may look differently than originally conceived. Yet, in whatever form it may take, we trust God to guide us, and pray *Thrive!* will continue to bless the congregations and people of the Southern Ohio Synod as we join Jesus in the restoration of the world. Indeed, we are *Stronger and Better Together*.

On the Way...Mission Support

THANK YOU for the Mission Support to the SOS and ELCA. In case you didn't know, the way this works is you give an offering to the congregation, the congregation shares an amount, usually a percentage to the synod and the synod sends 40% of what we receive in unrestricted funds from you to the ELCA. Remember our fiscal year runs February 1-January 31. For the first time in several years Mission Support from congregations in SOS increased in 2019!! Whoo-hoo! Thank you! Please keep it up, just as you have done these past weeks when we have not had in person worship. We are grateful for your continued giving.

Please check out your congregation's giving record later in the materials.

On the Way...Congregational Ministries

The Congregational Vitality and Stewardship Teams are overseen by Pastor Katie Kerrigan, Director of Evangelical Mission. She has several teams that help make congregational connections throughout the Mission Territory.

We are now completing our second year of The Collaborative, through which we accompany congregations through a two-year program of revitalization under the leadership of our Congregational Vitality Team. Our first cohort will have completed the program by the end of this year, and, while vital congregations never stop trying new things, this first cohort has acquired some new tools and strategies to equip them for their next chapter in ministry. The team will be accepting new applications for the next cohort soon.

The Stewardship Team has submitted its own report, but I want to convey my own thanks to this Team for their hard work over this last year. They have been experimenting with new ways to tell the story of how we in the Southern Ohio Synod are Stronger and Better Together, and to share that story more widely. They have reminded us that "the Synod" is more than the Synod staff—it is all of us together, supporting one another so we can do our best ministry in our communities. They continue to offer us new resources in stewardship education for both leaders and lay folks. This year's workshops on budgeting ("Plan the Budget, Plan the Future" by Pastor Pete Rudowski) and the new intergenerational stewardship program, The Generosity Project, were both well received.

For congregations looking for individualized support in revitalizing their stewardship appeals, we recommend Stewardship For All Seasons, made available to us through the Thrive! Campaign, which subsidizes program costs to make these expert consultation services affordable. We are currently enrolling our third cohort in this two-year program, and participating congregations have been very pleased with the results.

The Race Relations Task Force kicked off a new initiative this year—a workshop entitled “Seeing Race Through Faith.” This workshop has been presented in nearly every conference, and has been very enthusiastically received. They will continue to make it available in the future upon request, even as they continue to look for new ways to help us fulfill our calling to advocate for justice and equity for all God’s people in our communities.

Mission Interpreters continue their work in congregations. What is a Mission Interpreter? Mission Interpreters, led by Mrs. Joslyn Bennet, is an ELCA ministry connecting congregations and synods and the ELCA who share stories of faith. Do you have a Mission Interpreter? If not contact Joslyn because she is always looking for people who are excited by mission and who love to share.

Thank you to these important ministry teams which help us clarify and collaborate in mission.

This is a PLEA...Please, please send in your annual **Congregational Report to the ELCA**. It is important. The deadline is fast approaching. These are used to determine how many Voting Members SOS will take to the 2022 Churchwide Assembly. Last year we were in the 75% range, which is an improvement, but not where I want us to be. There are 2 synods that have achieved 100% participation. Wouldn't it be great if we were among this group?!

The **SOS Finance Team** meets monthly and monitors the synod’s finances, mission support and the Mission and Ministry Plan. As you know we changed financial institutions to First Commonwealth and established a new lockbox (where mission support checks are sent). The transition has gone fairly smoothly. Thanks for making the transition to the new lockbox go so smoothly.

The Team also worked on a Synod Gift Policy. It is on the website. [Check it out!](#) And please read the team’s full report in this bulletin of reports.

Pastor Bob Abrams is the Assistant to the Bishop for Mobility, Call Process, Congregation and Rostered Minister Care and Health and Governance and works with Congregational Ministries and anything else assigned by the bishop. As the only Assistant to the Bishop, he wears a lot of hats.

During the past year, we have continued to identify ways in which the call process in this Mission Territory can be nimbler and more responsive in an environment where there are fewer ordained pastors available, and where filling part-time calls has become difficult. Focusing on a close working relationship between call committees and the bishop’s office, the use of electronic media to meet and evaluate candidates, and responsiveness to the available, qualified candidates by our call committees and Pr. Abrams, we have been able to maintain a low rate of congregational vacancies in full-time calls relative to other synods in our region.

The Congregational Resource Team (CRT) has become an important part of how we are Stronger and Better Together. These twelve pastors and layperson trained continually in Family/Natural Systems Theory, meet monthly to think about how congregations respond to challenge, and how the group can come alongside them during these times. Team members have met this year with pastors individually to help them think through issues and through difficult times. Change and adaptation are never easy, but the CRT commits to be present and available for the longer term. The Team may be reached through contacting Pr. Abrams.

On the Way...Youth and Family Ministry

Mr. Gary Pecuch, Director for Youth and Family Coaching, is one of only a few full-time synod staff people who work with leaders in the Church.

One of our definitions of ministry in children's ministry is "children doing ministry" and a definition of youth ministry is "youth doing ministry." Let's hear from Gary...

Hi I'm Gary. My role is to help congregations to clarify their vision as they develop the ministry outcomes they wish to build into their young people. Ephesians 4:12 tells us our charge is "to equip the saints for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ".

Here in the Southern Ohio Synod we place an emphasis on immersing our children and youth in the life and mission of the church through active participation. Through intergenerational networking and coaching our young people take on church responsibilities that build and equip them as leaders for both the church of today and for the future.

Events like Something More, the Bishop's Youth Ambassador Program, Synod Day, the Middle School MiX, the Youth Summit, the Connect Retreat, the Renew Retreat, the Campus Ministers Retreat and our affiliations with Wittenberg, Capital, Trinity Seminary and LOMO are examples of how we network together to empower young people for ministry. I also visit congregations to specifically encourage and/or train our church members in developing Faith Assets and Ministry Skills. All of these efforts work towards the achievement of the goals of our Thrive Campaign.

On the Way...Anniversaries

Leading is part of the calling of Rostered Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Word and Service, to assist others to shine their lights. We celebrate with the following Pastors and Deacons on significant anniversaries. Remember that we use dates of anniversaries according to the ELCA...we don't make them up!

Ministers of Word and Sacrament

- 25 Rev. Martha Fisher
Rev. Mary Laymon
Rev. Jeff Wise

- 30 Rev. Ralph Wolfe
Rev. Charlie Woodward

- 40 Rev. David Buchenroth
Rev. Fred Cook
Rev. Ken Hacker
Bishop Emeritus Callon Holloway, Jr.
Rev. Ron Murdock
Rev. Bill Rush III

- 50 Rev. Wayne Hoedt
Rev. J. Weston Jones, Jr.
Rev. William Rauch

60 Rev. Dr. Rudolph Featherstone
Rev. Dwight Hedrick
Rev. Ron Redder
Rev. John Ware

65 Rev. Earl M. Fritz
Rev. Harold Hasenauer
Rev. David Risch
Bishop Emeritus Kenneth Sauer

70 Rev. Paul Klopfer

Ministers of Word and Service

30 Deacon Heidi Stover

Thank you! For sharing your gifts, your light, with this church. Thank you for teaching, preaching, leading and sharing the faith.

Be Light! Congregations have been doing just that for many, many years! This year we celebrate years sharing the Gospel and thriving in their callings. Again, these are dates of anniversaries from the ELCA records, so if you have a different date it's probably because of incorporation dates vs. when the congregation was established.

25 Faith Lutheran, Baltimore

75 Redeemer Lutheran, Dayton

150 Philadelphia Lutheran, Bellefontaine

175 Harmony Lutheran, Buffalo
St. John Lutheran, Logan

200 St. Paul Lutheran, Lancaster
Zion Lutheran, Dayton

Thank You for shining the Light of Christ in your neighborhoods. Congratulations!

On the Way...Synod Council

Thank you to the Synod Council for its faithful work during this past year and especially these last 2 months with extra meetings and phone calls. Under the leadership of Mrs. Marjorie Ellis, the council made decisions and carried out its responsibilities. You can read the Vice President's report in this bulletin of reports. At the April council meeting the Council passed a Mission and Ministry Plan for 2021-2022; extended the terms of those council members, whose term ended, for an additional year, and granted the request of Trinity Lutheran Church, Lancaster, OH onto the roster of the Southern Ohio Synod. We will officially welcome Trinity at next year's assembly. For now, we are happy to say Welcome Trinity!

On the Way...Literally

After 20 years, we are relocating the Synod Office. The building in downtown Columbus was sold. Synod Council, Finance Team and Executive Committee have been great partners as we made this decision. Here are some of the challenges we faced with the 300 S. Second Street building.

- two major floods in two years which resulted in damage to the building and records
- the high cost of maintenance due to the age of the building
- the inability to lease the second floor due to the lack of accessibility for people with mobility challenges
- loss of building availability due to street closures for summer festivals
- limited parking for synod meetings

Our new home is located at 9200 Worthington Road, Westerville, Ohio 43082. We'll let you know soon when you can start sending us mail there! This office space allows more flexibility for synod office business, including,

- easy access from all parts of the synod
- sufficient parking
- accessibly for persons with mobility challenges (first floor office)
- size of space to meet the needs of the Synod with flexibility to accommodate changes in needs in the future.

We looked at options throughout the territory and Synod Council and I decided this was the best option for the bishop's office staff and synod as a whole for emerging ministries.

An Open House and Blessing of the space will be held later this year, when it is safe to do so. Plan on coming and visiting with us.

On the Way...Lay Education

Thanks to Thrive! gifts we are able to begin new Lay Education Programs for Lay Worship Leaders and Synod Authorized Ministers.

Lay School of Theology has been part of this synod's ministry for a while. It is open to anyone who wishes to expand their knowledge theologically and biblically. It is not going away but it has given us the opportunity to expand ministry.

New and exciting things are happening with Southern Ohio lay ministry! Rev. Dr. Lynn Nakamura and Deacon Dr. Cory Driver have revamped the process by which people are trained and formed to be lay worship leaders (LWL) and Synod Authorized Ministers (SAM). The LWL program will be a one-year course of formation for people who are feeling called and have gifts to serve as pulpit supply in

congregations around the Southern Ohio Synod Mission Territory. Synod Authorized Ministers will undertake a two-(ish) year formation in order to serve one congregation or parish on an ongoing basis, including sacramental leadership. At the end of the first year of SAM training, the candidate will be authorized by the Bishop to serve as a lay worship leader to gain experience and familiarity with the synod by leading services at various congregations. The SAM program, especially, is thoroughly modular, and is designed to work for people with a variety of educational backgrounds, time commitments, and financial resources. Both processes are in the final stages of editing, and we are hoping to have cohorts begin in Fall 2020. We are excited to help our lay leaders serve congregations to make us stronger and better together.

On the Way...Looking Ahead

If you have not heard or seen this equation CWA+SOS=2022--the 2022 Churchwide Assembly is in Columbus! This is quite an honor and a lot of work. In the next months a synod planning team will begin its work with the ELCA planning team. We are going to need all kinds of volunteers. Exactly what roles need to be filled will be determined by the ELCA, but I know when the call goes out "We need help", SOS will be there. What FUN!

Thank you, SOS, for this past year as we have made changes and grown stronger in ministry together. I/We in the Bishop's Office pray for you, your mission in sharing Jesus's love and ministry among friends and strangers. It is not always easy and we know that, but we also know you do it with care, love, grace and dignity. As you show mercy, kindness, grace and peace to the neighbor know that we are with you. And we look forward to us living out being stronger and better together, joining Jesus in the restoration of the world for the sake of the Gospel. It continues to be an honor and blessing to serve as your Bishop. I look forward to seeing you soon in person with facial coverings and social distancing. Please take care of yourselves and stay well!

In Christ,

Bishop Suzanne Darcy Dillahunt