

## Bishop's Report to the Spring Assembly



### Installation Thanksgiving

It was a great joy to gather with the whole church at Bethany Baptist Church in Syracuse. The blessings from within the building and through the livestream were present and powerful. Time spent with family and friends who came in and gathered for the first time since the pandemic began was life giving. Your prayers were felt and have continued to sustain me. Special thanks to Tom Madden and

Julie Grindle who coordinated the day's events and worship, gifted musicians Justin and Kristen Pomietlarz, Directors of Music, and soloist, Carolyn Lansom from Holy Trinity, deans and assisting ministers, volunteer coordinators, the hospitality team, artists, and ushers. A very special thanks to our Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton for her presence along with many of the bishops of Region 7, ELCA and Bishop Singh of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester. It was a good day to be #churchtogether.

**The G.R.A.C.E. Mindset** was introduced at Fall Conference Assemblies across the synod highlighting five discipleship practices of: Generous Love, Restorative Justice, Adaptive Leadership, Collaboration, and Experimentation. While we will be encouraging our communities to grow in each of these practices, identifying what practices we do well, and where we can grow, we will also focus on one principal in particular each year. Beginning with 2022 Synod Assembly we will focus on practices of "Generous Love" in response to the love of God we have first received.

### Building Relationships

A priority for my time in the first 6 months has been building relationships with our one hundred and sixty congregations and communities and our rostered leaders. I have intentionally connected with many of our rostered leaders and will continue this visitation until I have met with each active pastor and deacon. I will be scheduling regional events to meet with retired rostered leaders this spring and fall.

My biggest take away from pastoral visitation is how hard everyone is working. Every pastor has learned multiple new skills through the pandemic and has adapted and pivoted countless times. Each one of them is inspiring, and I am grateful to God for their servant leadership.

Likewise, our congregations, camp, campus ministries, synod authorized worship communities have been equally experimental, and persistent in their faithfulness. Thanks be to God for the ways the Spirit has bound us together. Some congregations have grown deeper, getting to know one another in new ways because of the pandemic. Some congregations have reached people they would have never reached before – our found brand new ways of being church, sharing worship, serving in community, advocating for those with whom Jesus walks.

### **Building Staff Capacity**

Building our post-pandemic, deployed-staff has been an adaptive opportunity to build a team which supports our congregations and leaders for 21<sup>st</sup> century ministry.

Pr. Imani Olear joined our staff February 1 as she was called to serve as Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop. In addition to serving as DEM, Pr. Olear will relate to our synod task forces for Racial, Gender, and Climate Justice. She will work with executive staff and the deans provide leadership tools and churchwide resources.

Michelle Josephson, Director of Operations, resigned her position in March after five years in ministry with us. We are grateful for Michelle, her time, and gifts, and bless her in her new opportunity.

Kori Tomelden was hired in March to serve as Communication Specialist. This 15-hour/week position will oversee a new communication strategy utilizing our various digital media platforms including emails, website, and social media, in addition to strategic use of print media.

Interim Specialists for Finance, Transitions, and Administration will be announced soon.

### **Collaboration with Deans**

Our deans are essential, and I give thanks for each one of them. They bring a variety of gifts, and most especially have an awareness of where congregations are and how rostered leaders are doing. Deans are essential communicators with the Office of the Bishop and represent the bishop at a variety of meetings, worship events, and other gatherings. Deans are essential at the time of transitions and are a close, first point of contact between a congregation and the bishop.

### **Supporting Vibrant, Collaborative Congregations and Healthy, Adaptive Leaders**

Working collaboratively, we have already accomplished some great things together. Pr. Kochanski has led the Abide process in several congregations which facilitates strategic thinking and wondering about where a congregation is headed, and where the Spirit may be leading. Pr.



Kochanski also led a creative team who pulled off the first-of-its-kind online “GRACE-a-Thon.” It was a wonderful day of worship, workshops, and opportunities to connect.

Julie Grindle leads the Mobility work and has been diligent in bringing new pastors into our synod in addition to supporting congregations as they prepare their part in the mobility process. Julie works with Pr. John Scarafia and the Candidacy Committee leading explorers and seekers through formation into ordained Rostered Ministry of Word and Service and Word and Sacrament.

Pr. Imani Olear has already begun to connect with our Mission Developers and community explorations, empowering them in their work, connecting them to resources, relationships, and grant opportunities, and accompanying their work as a supportive advocate.

Every team member is active in supporting all our congregations including those transitioning into Legacy status (formerly known as Holy Closure).

We are also supporting rostered leaders through highlighting opportunities for rest and renewal and providing opportunities for skill development, supportive connections, and innovative resources. Workshops offered so far have focused on caring for oneself during the pandemic and caring for communities while we have all been experiencing global trauma.

### **Conference of Bishops**

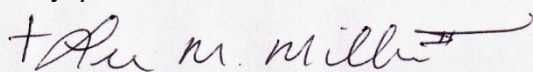
I meet regularly with the Conference of Bishops and Region 7 Bishops through midweek zoom meetings and have recently completed a 10-hour Cultural Competency Training along with the other sixty-four bishops.

The Conference of Bishops Spring Gathering was in-person for the first time in two years in Chicago, and our time was spent in deep conversation, lament, and grief over some of the brokenness in our church today, and an opportunity to consider the integrity and mutual accountability within the conference. I have grown very quickly to appreciate this time together.

### **In Thanksgiving**

This call is a gift and a privilege, and I wake up in humble thanksgiving every day. Thank you for your prayers which sustain me in this call. Thank you for your mission support which does the work of the whole church, in Upstate New York, the ELCA, and far beyond.

Thanks be to God who sustains us with a Word, who pours out grace in water, wine, and bread, who makes all things new. Thanks be to God for Love that activates us to share in God’s justice and joy.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Lee M. Miller II". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Rev. Lee M. Miller II, Bishop