

STRATEGIC PLANNING SUMMARY

report from Gronlund Sayther Brunkow

June 2016

INTRODUCTION

The following is a brief summary of the report given to the RMS strategic planning team from the online survey of professional leaders and lay leaders across the synod and the 10 Leadership Listening Groups conducted by Evan Moilan of Gronlund Sayther Brunkow. Both were conducted in the spring of 2016.

The survey received responses from 849 participants with the following breakdown:

- Pastors 181
- Rostered Lay Ministers 20
- Synodically Authorized Lay Ministers 3
- Non-Rostered Church Staff 62
- Congregational Council Members 396
- Other Congregational Lay Leaders 176
- Synod Council Members 16
- Office of the Bishop Staff 3
- Other Leaders in the Synod 30

The listening sessions included a total of 119 leaders.

- 19 were lay professionals
- 100 were pastors
- 4 were members of the planning team.

Overall in comparison with similar efforts from other middle judicatories the participation in these two efforts was extremely strong.



Rocky Mountain Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

CELEBRATION

- There is a clear belief that the Lutheran Church has a unique and meaningful perspective to offer the world today.
- It was clear that there is a deep appreciation of the work and approach of the current Office of the Bishop.
 - Specifically, the effort to be present and improve accessibility.
 - There is a general sense among rostered leaders, especially those in places far from the Office of the Bishop that things are better today than there were a few years ago.
 - There was also clear recognition of the difficulty and enormity of the role of Bishop and Office of the Bishop's staff.
- The language, "We are Church, Better Together" is taking root, and is beginning to be owned by leadership across the synod.
- There was clear celebration of the powerful ministry that is taking place all across the synod in its various contexts, even in a time when resources seem to be decreasing.
- While there was some fatigue around continual planning, there was also a degree of celebration that the Office of the Bishop is taking this listening seriously and is planning for a way forward.

- The vast geography and unique western mentality of the wider community is both a challenge and a celebration of the synod.
 - While there is some distrust of “the church” (organized church in general) in the wider communities of the front range, “church still has influence” in Utah.
 - These differences do not allow a one size fits all approach to ministry across the synod and can at times create a delta in the agreement of expectations of the role of the Office of the Bishop between communities.

CHALLENGE

While there were several operational challenges (included below), there was clearly one over-arching challenge.

- **Uncertainty**
 - There is a high degree of anxiety about what the future holds for the church and the viability of professional church vocations among church leaders.
 - It will not be enough to simply to continue to lift the issues, as issue fatigue is overwhelming. This is also not a call for a programmatic fix. There is however, a clear desire for a vision of the way forward to be cast.
 - One of the roots of this anxiety is the perception of reduced resources.

FUTURE DIRECTION

Looking to the future there were three main themes among the hopes lifted, and one main directive.

- **Vision**
 - There was a clear desire for the Bishop to be an honest vision caster. While there is fatigue around the lifting of

trends and studies, there is a true openness and desire for a pointing forward vision of what it means to be church today. There is clarity that a rearranging of business as usual will not be an effective outcome. This is a time for a true and deep look into how the church will structure and function in the future. A recognition that some of the needed vision is beyond the scope of the judicatory was also present.

- **Focus**
 - There was a clear directive to find crystal clarity on the functions and responsibilities of the Office of the Bishop. It was recognized that there is an unwritten expectation that “the synod” is everything to everyone, and that this hampers its effectiveness. Permission is there to reduce function for the sake of impact and to decentralize function of impactful things that may not need to come from the Office of the Bishop.
 - Within this permission of clarity and permission for reduced function was also a permission and even a desire to increase relationship and understanding of local context by considering the decentralization of the Office of the Bishop, staff, and functions.
- **Creativity**
 - The future will require bold and open thinking. It will be a new day for creative collaboration and partnership. This may require a reduction in permission granting and a new look at accountabilities and measurements, some of which may be out of the control of the Synod Council or the Office of the Bishop.
 - How this extends beyond rostered leaders is also critical to consider. It was clear that leaders in the synod

appreciate the opportunity to have true community with one another and a desire, or hope, for increased collaboration, and a system that will encourage collaboration.

- While the need for increased collaboration spanned the entirety of the synod, within the more rural areas there was a clear expansion of this need to also consider how we work with ecumenical partners.
- There was a recognition of the great deal of wasted resources in the duplication of each denomination trying to maintain their capital structures. But perhaps more immediately pressing was the issue of supply pastors. Many of the rural areas are dealing with a crisis around available supply. This conversation extended into lay licensure and the requirements of the distribution of the sacrament.
- This need for inventive creativity also lifted the need to look at Sunday morning worship.

SYNOD PROGRAMMATIC FUNCTION

In consideration of current programmatic functions of the Office of the Bishop through interviews and survey, supporting World and Domestic Hunger Issues, Communications for facilitating connection, and Engaging in ELCA Global Mission were seen as highly impactful, encouraging the broader work of church together.

The work of equipping congregations and leaders to be more successful in outreach to their community and reaching new communities stood out as areas that are critical and require additional attention.

Throughout the process several specific programmatic functions generated concerns and need for improvement.

- **Pastoral Transition Process**
 - While there was recognition that the process has improved in recent years, there was confusion around, “bridge pastors” and how decisions are made about, availability, and placement of interim pastors, as well as a perceived discrepancy in the differences in process between congregations within the synod. Finally, there was a recognition that this is one of the times when the opportunity for meaningful change exists, and where an accountability for honesty with the congregation on their viability is required.
- **Communication**
 - The work of communication was lifted as a celebration of the work that has been done, and as an area that deserves continued focus, as it is critical to the sense of connectedness discussed above.
- **Ministry Reviews**
 - The ministry review process was appreciated. However, there was a general feeling that there is an uneven nature to the process dependent on the review team and a desire to see the follow up after review more closely defined. It was suggested that perhaps the team include a peer that has similar context experience and is chosen in conversation with the ministry being reviewed.
- **The Missional Gathering, Synod Youth Gathering, and the recent change of congregational mission support from 50% to 46% all garnered discussion with highly mixed feelings, too divided for a clear trend.**