

The Synod Council of the Northeastern Minnesota Synod has been talking about communication at our last two council meetings – specifically, how the synod works and who we are is communicated to others. Council members were tasked with doing some informal surveys with folks in the pews to ask about their perceptions of what the synod is and does. I was a little bit surprised how many folks answered “Don't know.” Don't worry – no one failed the survey or will be kicked out of the synod! What the answers do tell me, though, is that we have a lot of room for growth and education. Maybe you want to think about including this column in your church newsletter or as an email to your members because, after all, WE – all of our congregations together – are the synod!

If you are reading this, you are most probably part of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). The ELCA (sometimes called “churchwide”) is a national organization of Lutheran churches, born out of a merger over 27 years ago of three other Lutheran church bodies. The ELCA headquarters are located in Chicago.

The ELCA is divided into 65 geographical areas called “synods” that span the United States, the Bahamas, and part of the Caribbean. Our synod is called the Northeastern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA and the synod office is located in Duluth. Our synod has 137 congregations in the northeastern part of Minnesota stretching all the way down to Milaca and Princeton, over to Brainerd and Cass Lake, up to International Falls and all throughout the Arrowhead. Each synod has a bishop and a synod council, much like a congregation has a pastor and a church council.

The synod exists to help strengthen and facilitate relationships between and for congregations and pastors and the wider ministries we do in our area and in the world. Much of what the synod staff (the bishop, an assistant to the bishop, a director of evangelical mission, a coordinator of youth ministry, two synod support staff, and a synod cat – we are the only synod with a cat) does is not always immediately visible, but supports pastors and congregations in numerous ways. You've had some of them in your congregation, most probably to preach or teach.

The synod staff oversees the candidacy (people studying to be rostered leaders like Pastors, Associates in Ministry, Diaconal Ministers and Deaconesses) processes. They assist and mediate in congregations that are in conflict or having difficulties. The synod hosts a wide variety of events including leadership and discipleship learning events (including the “Don't Say No Until You Know” leadership events March 14 at Mora or March 15 at Virginia), synod assemblies, continuing education opportunities for pastors, and youth events (the recent Middle School Youth Gathering had 800 kids and adult leaders participate, including the bishop). Various synod committees, with support from the synod staff, network throughout our area, called to many different areas of ministry, including teams for Hunger, Creation Care, Honduras, Russia, Immigration, and Youth Leaders. We, through our synod, also support local ministries like Lutheran Campus Ministry at UMD, Seafarers Ministry, advocacy, new and renewing congregations, and Luther Seminary.

The Northeastern Minnesota Synod is supported by Mission Support sent in by our congregations. Mission Support is the portion of your congregation's regular offerings that you send to sustain our other two expressions of “church” – the synod and the churchwide office. For example, Bethel-Trinity Lutheran in Bovey sends about 8% of their offerings to the synod office for Mission Support. About 92% stays in their congregations for their individual mission and ministry. Like many other congregations, they also occasionally take special offerings for various ministries like the Food Shelf, Honduras Companion Synod, ELCA World Hunger, the ELCA Malaria Campaign, or Lutheran Disaster Response.

Together, the 137 ELCA congregations of Northeastern Minnesota ARE the synod. We are ably led by Bishop Tom Aitken, Assistant to the Bishop Rev. Vicki Taylor, Director for Evangelical

Mission/Assistant to the Bishop Rev. John Dietz, Coordinator of Youth Ministry Catherine Anderson, Administrator Marilyn Hull, and Receptionist/Financial Administrator Kathy Wimer. Our synod council members are Vice-President Brenda Wagner; Secretary Rev. Rollie Bockbrader, Treasurer John Olsen, Susan Anderson, Barb Murray, Cheryl Lindberg, Rev. Phil Berge, Rev. Stephen Olson, Rev. Dwight Rudquist, Ted Pfohl, Rev. Tim Bauer, David Mettler, Rev. Reggie Denton, Rebecca May, Immanueli Magomolla, Rev. Dennis Paulson, Rachel Berry and Sam Teff. We have a number of folks who would be happy to come to your congregation to talk more about who we are as a synod, how a synod functions, and how Mission Support works to strengthen all of our relationships.

Feel free to share this column in your congregation's newsletter. In my next column, I'm going to expound a little bit on the role and responsibilities of our "churchwide" part of the ELCA. If you have any questions, I'd be more than happy to answer as much as I can! I think we are privileged to be part of a strong, healthy group of folks working together in many different ways to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Together we can accomplish far more than we can separately. That's what it means to be the body of Christ!

Peace in Christ,

Brenda Wagner, Vice-President  
Northeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA