

To the people of the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod,

Grace and peace to you in the name of God and our Lord Jesus Christ!

We come to another synod assembly, which gives me the opportunity to reflect on the year that has passed since the last time we were gathered together in assembly. Much work has been done, and I will lay out the high points for you in this report.

Goal 1: Increased Staffing Levels

Since the last Assembly I have made significant staffing changes at the synodical level, some as cost-saving measures and others as ways to increase support to the congregations and people of our synod.

We eliminated the position of Communications Director, and shifted instead to a staff position that is shared with the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane. Melody Green has been with us since May of 2018, and has brought wonderful skills to her work in the office. She helps coordinate, design, and distribute synod communications, she has been of great help in wrapping up the Synod Mission Campaign, and she brings a good perspective to the work we do as a synod. She is shared 50/50 with the Diocese, and is willing to help out however she can.

After two slates of candidates, we called Ms. Mary Morrow to serve as the Director of Evangelical Mission (DEM) for our Synod. Mary is officially employed by our Churchwide partner, but works closely with the synod to oversee evangelism and mission in the synod. She has been doing the work since mid-summer, and has brought good energy and a level-headed perspective to the work. She has been a very visible presence in the synod, making congregational visits, helping to establish our Synod Vitality Coalition, offering trainings, planning, strategizing, and working with synodically authorized worshipping communities on their path to chartering.

In August of 2018 we welcomed Pastor Phil Misner to the call of Assistant to the Bishop. Phil has taken on much of the work of the call process happening in the synod, as well as partnering with me in working with congregations in conflict or transitions. He is a road warrior, spending time behind the wheel to connect congregations with each other and the synod in good ways. We also eliminated the Synod Assembly Manager position, and folded that responsibility into the work of the Assistant to the Bishop—so Phil works to coordinate Assemblies, has been key in making progress on our Regional Gathering pilot project, and helps me pull together Bishop's Convocation in the fall. He is also responsible for catching random things that come his way when I am out of the synod.

We have also shifted HOW the synod staff works together. We are much less "silo'd" as a staff, working collaboratively to make sure that the work gets done quickly and well. This causes the synod office to be fertile ground for ideas and change as we work together to take care of the synod, which is a gift for us and for the synod.

Goal 2: Increased Connections Within the Synod

This need has been expressed consistently since I was called to serve as Bishop. In September of 2017 Synod Council decided to begin this work by utilizing the structure we already have in place—primarily: Clusters. We have asked Clusters to meet at least twice a year, and synod staff places a high priority on

getting to at least one Cluster meeting at each cluster per year. What we have seen are clusters gathering together for social events, working together within a geographic area to provide critical mass for events, and beginning the work of crafting relationships with folks who are members of other congregations in their area. Congregations are stronger when they work together, and fragile when they work alone—so we give thanks for those congregations and clusters who have cannonballed into this work with a joy and vitality that is a delight to witness. The Palouse Cluster has been particularly skilled at this—if you would like to know how to get your Cluster up and active, find someone from a Palouse Cluster congregation and pick their brain.

An additional aid to connection is having a synod office that is able to be more responsive to needs within the synod. When congregations feel that the synod cares, they feel connected to something larger than themselves. We're still not where we want to be with responsiveness, but we have made incredible progress in that, and look forward to making more. Increased staff also means that we have the ability to interact with congregations and clusters in times that are something other than times of fear, tension, or conflict. We are able to be present in times of celebration, joy, and fun—which continues to enrich relationships and makes the work done in times of distress more effective because we are building on a pre-existing relationship.

Goal 3: Improved Communications within the Synod

In 2018 we launched a brand-new website! While we are always taking feedback on content, we are able to easily make sure information is timely, current, and reflects the life that is happening within EWAID. We also began sending out bi-monthly "E-blasts" that provide important information in a more timely manner. If you would like to receive electronic communication from the synod, please go to www.ewaidsynod.org and click "subscribe" (at the bottom of the page). Because we recognize that some of our folks are not computer-savvy, we will continue to do a more infrequent paper newsletter, but it will no longer be a monthly publication in favor of faster communication.

We will also be utilizing social media as a team. At this assembly we will vote on a new synod name. Once that change is ratified at the Churchwide Assembly in August, we will establish a new synodical Facebook page, as well as a Twitter page. Social media will allow frequent information and contacts between all of us.

Finally, I want to take a moment and recognize the fact that mission support from congregations to the synod were the highest they have been in 10 years. THANK YOU. As voting members, I ask you to take my gratitude back to your congregation—get up and make an announcement that Bishop Kristen is grateful for that support. I am often asked, "Does the synod have money for...?" and the reality is that the Synod has no revenue stream outside of congregational mission support—so if congregations don't send it, we don't have it. This year the congregations of EWAID have been so faithful in that support that Synod Council was able to not only increase our synodical mission support to our Churchwide partner by 2%, but we were also able to establish a fund that we can utilize for synod vitality! For the first time in a long time, the answer to the question, "Does the synod have money for...?" can be "Let's talk!" We use your mission support to provide support to our Churchwide partner, local ministry partners (i.e. Lutheran Community Services; Lutherhaven Ministries; Luther Heights; our Campus Ministries; etc.) and

now your mission support also helps support one another as we engage in the work of vitality. We give everything we receive away, helping to support and encourage ministry across a number of different environments. Thanks to our congregations, we were able to do that on a level we haven't seen in a decade. I am deeply thankful.

We all know that times are challenging for the Church right now. But I have every confidence that we will be able to move forward into the future God has planned for us as long as we move forward together. That's why so many of our resources as a synod have been spent in increasing connections, developing relationships, and reminding each other that we can help one another out. That we are not alone. That we are church together, for the sake of the world.

So glad to be doing this imaginative, creative, faithful work with you!



Bishop Kristen Kuempel