

2023 Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly
Report of the Bishop

I begin my report to our synod this year by remembering the ending of my report from the 2022 NWPA Synod Assembly.

A way forward

Have I ever told you ‘no’? One of my other brigade commanders phrased it differently, “How do we get to ‘yes’?” Given the limits and the constraints that we have to live within, those things that will not change now or in the near future, how do we get to ‘yes’? ...

The way forward will mean pastors and deacons will need to focus on care, leadership and support as defined by their ordination vows and letters of call. It will mean congregations and congregational leaders will need to focus on the mission and ministry of the community of believers in their particular setting. The way forward will require individuals to allow themselves to be freed by the gospel, so they can find their individual and community’s way to ‘yes’. ...

Congregations within our synod are working together to develop plans for shared pastoral ministry. These plans recognize the limited number of pastors we as a whole church have to draw upon as well as the related costs. Sharing cost among two or more congregations frees money normally directed to the pastor to the ‘yes’ of other mission and ministry opportunities within the community. ...

Synod Statistics

I reported the following to our Synod Council at the May 2023 meeting:

There are 72 congregations in NWPA synod within 13+ counties.

The 72 congregations are configured into 5 conferences. The conferences boundaries are county lines.

1. The Clarion Venango Warren Conference has 18 congregations with 6 having no pastoral coverage.
2. The Cameron Elks Forest McKean Potter Conference has 13 congregations with 5 having no pastoral coverage.
3. The Crawford Mercer Conference has 7 congregations.
4. The Erie Conference has 18 congregations with 4 having no pastoral coverage.
5. The Indiana Jefferson Conference has 16 congregations with 9 having no pastoral coverage.

Of the 72 congregations 24 do not have pastoral coverage.

There are 56 ELCA rostered leaders on three rosters within NWPA

- One is a deacon
- 20 are actively serving congregations within our synod, in addition to serving full time:
 1. One serves as the Lutheran Campus Ministry pastor at IUP
 2. One serves as a Navy Reserve Chaplain
 3. One serves less than full time on Synod Staff
- One serves full time on our synod staff and as an Army Reserve Chaplain

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- Three serve as full time chaplains within our synod (Bethesda, St. Paul's, Thiel)
- One serves at United Lutheran Seminary
- One is On Leave From Call
- There are 29 retired ELCA pastors rostered in our synod
 1. 4 are serving as interim pastors
- We have five ecumenical partner rostered leaders serving in our synod
 1. 2 Episcopal Church USA
 2. 1 Presbyterian Church USA
 3. 2 United Methodist Church

There are 30 pastors and deacon, ELCA and ecumenical partners, serving within 48 of our 72 congregations.

There are 2 full time seminarians, one resident and one distance learning.
There are 4 TEEM (Theological Education for Emerging Ministry) candidates
There is 1 ecumenical partner transferring rostered status

Since our last gathering as an Assembly our synod has faced the sudden death of one of our pastors, Rev. Benjamin Austin. Pastor Austin's first call was to Grace, Brookville and Trinity, Reynoldsville. His second call was to St. Paul Lutheran, Drake's Mill where he entered into the Church Triumphant. We also gathered to remember and commend to God's care and keeping Rev. David Mumford who served our synod for many years.

We have also recognized the retirement of Rev. Kimberly Hirsch and will recognize the retirements of Rev. Sandra Jones and Rev. Mark Fischer.

We have had several pastors move within our synod as they accepted new calls. Rev. Jeff Piccirilli to Faith, Venus and Holy Trinity, Shippenville and Rev. Erik Young to St. Paul, Erie. And we have welcomed into our synod the Rev. Jay Mitchell who was called to Luther Memorial, Erie.

Our Authorize Lay Worship Leader (ALWL) program continues to add new lay leaders to support our congregations. This year Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod began to work cooperatively with Alleghany and Upper Susquehanna Synods to develop and training new ALWLs.

The need for pastoral care, leadership and support is not limited to the ELCA. I have begun a series of conversations with our ecumenical partners to discuss ways we can support each other in the geography that make up our overlapping denominational boundaries. This may mean our rostered leaders and congregations entering into a period of discernment and discovery of the creative ways of being the body of Christ in our world today.

I continue as time allows to supply and visit within our congregations. I look forward to being among the people of God on Sundays but also visiting with congregation councils, call committees and other gatherings of our synod.

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Moving Forward

I believe we continue to work towards, “How do we get to ‘yes.’”

Rev. Jake Jacobson and Rev. Doug Dyson continue to work on a number of projects and programs which will strengthen our faith life and leadership skills within our synod.

Over the next year we will be engaging in a program called Mission Insight, a data aggregator program, which will help our synod and congregations see their local communities and in particular where the opportunities are for mission and ministry.

We have come through a time, an unexpected time, of change and opportunity to be renewed in mission. Our synod may not be the largest geographically or numerically within the ELCA but we have much to offer and much to receive from the communities within which we walk together.

Thank you dear people of God for all you have done and all you will do in Christ’s name.

Called to Serve,

Bp. Lozano