

Evangelical Mission Plan, 2011 Southwestern Texas Synod, ELCA

Brothers and sisters in Christ in the Southwestern Texas Synod,

Grace to you and peace from God – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In 2006 the Southwestern Texas Synod began a study process to help focus its ministry until the year 2012. There was a synodical visioning event held in Seguin, an audit of synodical ministries by churchwide staff, and multiple conversations with synodical lay and rostered leaders. At the 2007 Synod Assembly, I presented the results of all that work together that gave us this Ministry Focus for 2007-2012:

Forming Faithfulness – in Leaders, with Congregations, among Partners!

That focus has served us over these years, but we are at a new place. Where is God leading us today?

While ***Forming Faithfulness*** served us well, now the Holy Spirit is leading us to re-focus the synod's ministry on loving our neighbor and making disciples, developing leaders, and building ministries based on the diverse assets of people. Given congregational changes within the synod and a desire to be renewed in mission, we want to maximize our abundant resources and gifts in our joint ministry.

That means changing some structures as well. For example, we know that today people prefer to work in task-oriented teams rather than in standing committees. This allows people's passion to give energy to whatever project they are leading. We also know that we can't do "everything" anymore, but are called to do certain things that are unique to the synod.

With these things in mind, the Southwestern Texas Synod Council brought a resolution to the 2010 Synod Assembly for the creation of an Evangelical Mission Plan.

WHEREAS, the Southwestern Texas Synod of the ELCA adopted "Forming Faithfulness – in Leaders, with Congregations, and Among Partners!" in 2007 for guiding, developing, and evaluating ministry programs through 2012; and

WHEREAS, the Southwestern Texas Synod of the ELCA and its congregations have been in discussion and conversation about their ministry programs since the 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America took action to change rostered ministry policies; and

WHEREAS, the Synod Council sees a need to continue these conversations but also to refocus the ministry of the Southwestern Texas Synod; and

WHEREAS, we have entered a new decade when many people take a new look into the future, therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the 2010 Southwestern Texas Synod Assembly direct the Synod Council to initiate a process to develop a new evangelical mission plan; and be it further

RESOLVED, that congregations of the Southwestern Texas Synod of the ELCA commit themselves to participate in the process; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod Council bring the new evangelical mission plan to the 2011 Southwestern Texas Synod Assembly for adoption.

This is called an Evangelical Mission Plan. What do we mean by “evangelical mission?” It means that Christ calls us to look outside ourselves, to see the needs of our neighbor, and to fulfill the calling of God to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed. One of our leaders said, “Our mandate does not come from our shareholders, stakeholders, members, customers or clients. The Church is unique because our mandate, our mission, and all that we do and have, comes from God.” And most importantly, evangelical mission is driven by the words of Jesus, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

So, when we undertook this study process on developing a new Evangelical Mission Plan, that included many conversations. The Bishop’s Convocation on September 2, 2010, had our rostered leaders focus on both pastoral passions and synod mission. The synod mission component had them break into small groups around the topics: strengthening our unity, social ministry, spiritual formation, Hispanic outreach, youth/young adult ministry, reaching the unchurched, synod structure reorganization, and teaching/training.

Conversations were also had with participants in First Call Theological Education, the Committee of Deans, the four Commission chairs, and synod staff and the synod’s vice-president.

There were also conversations surrounding changes at the churchwide offices and with other synodical bishops who are addressing similar concerns in their synods. As one of the sixty-five synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, both the work we do in this synod and in relation to the mission we do together as the ELCA, is important in this plan.

One other broad brushstroke is important to the Southwestern Texas Synod and comes into play here. We have a long-standing Vision Statement that reminds us of our Biblical rootedness in Christ and our call by the Holy Spirit:

*United in Christ, Diverse in People, Called by the Spirit
Equipping the People of God to be Instruments of God’s Love*

This statement describes who we are called to be as Christ's Church. It also reminds us that we are ethnically diverse, racially diverse, and truly multicultural. While we have congregations of Swedish and Norwegian heritage, most of our congregations have German backgrounds. However, from the very earliest the calling of Latino people to the work of the Lutheran Church has been an important part of our mission. With the changing demographics within our synod and across the state of Texas, it is even more important, in this entire plan, that ministry with, and inclusion of, our Latino brothers and sisters in Christ – as well as other populations in our neighborhoods not traditionally served by our church - is crucial to our effectiveness in sharing the Gospel and growing the Kingdom of God in this place.

Through the study process, three recurring themes developed:

- 1) The need to train lay and rostered leaders for the unique challenges of sharing the Gospel and growing the faith in today's world. For example, our synod has seen changing demographics in our communities, as percentages of Latino persons increase, but those percentages are not reflected in the membership of our congregations. Generally, our congregations are getting older instead of younger, with fewer members rather than more members. Personal stewardship models which support charitable organizations, including the church, have changed over the years and made ministry more challenging.
- 2) The need to focus on the mission of the Church beyond the congregational and synodical walls, seeking to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ outside ourselves. It has always been easier to focus on the ministry of the congregation, but all you need to do is listen to those who have been involved in mission outside the congregation – mission trips, mission partners, etc. – those congregations have a new energy and passion for ministry.
- 3) The need to find ways to revitalize the ministry of congregations in their local settings, as it is in those settings that ministry and mission are carried out on a daily basis. Sometimes congregations get into ruts, turned-in on themselves, and lack enthusiasm for ministry. The health and vitality of congregations is a blessing for the whole church, so those ministries need to be enhanced for the benefit of all the Church.

Therefore, taking these into consideration, I am proposing that the ministry focus for the Southwestern Texas Synod through 2020 be:

GOD's People -
Growing in faith
Outwardly focused
Doing mission

The Scripture that would guide our mission is 1 Peter 2: 9-10:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of God who called you out of darkness into God’s marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

This text from First Peter reminds us of our being claimed by God, the identity we have as God’s people in Jesus Christ, and our calling to let God’s light shine through us, showing mercy and love to all.

For example, the Church’s identity is reflected in the constitution, Article C4.01: “The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God’s creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world.” As part of that Church, a congregation gathers in worship, proclaims the Word and administers the Sacraments, carries out the Great Commission, cares for the sick and poor and powerless, nurtures its members in faith through education, joins together in prayer, and supports the ministry of the Church as good stewards of time, talent, and treasures. Those are expectations of a congregation, the things that make up a congregation’s identity.

In the same way, there are expectations of the synod’s work, certain things that it is called to do, which have been condensed to seven areas, all starting with the letter “c” to help us remember:

Care of Congregations - Call Process and Conflict Management
Candidacy - Invitation to Service and Process
Coordination of Events - Theological Conference, Assembly, etc.
Communication – VISTA and website
Collegial Relationships – Agencies/Institutions/Organizations (like Cross Trails Camping, Texas Lutheran University, and our seminaries) and Judicatories (relationships with the Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others)
Compliance Issues - Rosters, Reports, Constitutions, etc.
Cash - Budget

These integral ministries of the synod will happen through synod staff and contracted personnel, but they will not do it alone. They will work with volunteers and elected leaders of the synod into being GOD’s people.

One component of this proposal is to make changes in the program structures in the synod. It is proposed to no longer have four Commissions, but three Ministry Areas. We will set aside the Commission for Mission, the Commission for Professional Leadership, the Commission for Communications, and the Commission for Congregational Life. In the proposed structure we will have three ministry teams – the Mission Team, the Leadership Development Team, and the Asset Team.

The Mission Team will focus its work in several areas: Mission Strategy, which will work with synodically authorized worshipping communities, congregations under development, and new mission sites; Mission Support, which will provide training in stewardship, evangelism, and mission partner relationships; Mission Development for New and Transforming Congregations, which will focus on restarts, ministry reviews, cooperatives, missional support planning, and asset-based planning; and Mission in Special Places, outside the congregational setting, like campus ministry, seminary and university professors, global mission connections, camping, prison ministry, and hospital/hospice/military chaplains; Mission with Youth and Family, which will be guided by the synod's Youth and Family Ministry Coordinator, and will concentrate on faith formation, cultivating a life of discipleship, and helping youth discern their vocation.

The Leadership Development Team will coordinate the Parish Ministry Training Program, which trains laity in a three-year program for greater service in their home congregations or as synodically authorized ministers; Rostered Leader Care, which will be an organized cadre of clergy to provide confidential, consistent contact and pastoral care for rostered leaders; active and retired, including widow(er)s; Continuing Education, with an intentional emphasis on synod-wide programming annually around a five-year theme rotation, to work with congregational Mutual Ministry committees in establishing a rostered leader's continuing education covenant, and administering First Call Theological Education.

The Asset Team will be comprised of task forces that will be formed and exist for as long as there is passion and interest in that area. These teams can truly reflect the diversity of people and ministry interests in the synod. Currently, those groups include the Poverty Task Force, Cherish Our Children, Peace Not Walls, Partners in Evangelical Worship (PEW), Hunger Task Force, Disaster Preparedness Task Force, Book of Faith, the School of Mission, Young Adult Resource Persons (YARPs), a Communication Task Force, and others as they are created.

An important component of the synod's ministry, related to its mission and congregational focus, is the proposed creation of the Southwestern Texas Synod Evangelical Mission Endowment Fund. This unique function of the Endowment is to provide financial resources for perpetuity both for new mission development and for ongoing support of ministries that are non-self-sustainable. Action on the Endowment's creation will be taken at the 2011 Synod Assembly. It will be created and managed through the Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest.

As part of the changes, the synod's six conferences will become eight conferences. The following slides show the proposed boundaries and congregations in each conference.

Here's the proposal for eight conferences:

- ☐ **The Alamo Conference**, 21 congregations mostly in central San Antonio: Bethlehem, Quihi; Abiding Presence, SA; Amazing Grace, SA; Atonement, SA;

Gethsemane, SA; Emmanuel, Knippa; Good Shepherd, SA; Grace, SA; Christ, Alamo Heights; Highland Park, SA; Hope, SA; House of Prayer, SA; MacArthur Park, SA; Resurrection, SA; Shepherd King, SA; St. Andrew, SA; St. John, Jourdanton; St. John, SA; Trinity, SA; Our Savior (SAWC), Boerne; Zion, Helotes;

• **The Cibolo Conference**, 20 congregations north and east of San Antonio: St. Mark, Adkins; St. Andrew, Canyon Lake; Christ, Elm Creek; Triumphant, Garden Ridge; Grace, Lockhart; St. John, Marion; Ebenezer, Maxwell; Trinity, Luling; Peace, New Braunfels; Elizabeth Beitel Memorial, SA; Good News, SA; Lord of Life, SA; New Beginnings, SA; Peace, SA; Prince of Peace, SA; Christ Chapel, TSU, San Marcos; First, San Marcos; Emanuel's, Seguin; Lutheran Mission of Seguin (SAWC); Christ the King, Universal City.

• **The Capital North Conference**, 19 congregations north and east of Austin: Lord of Life, Austin; Peace, Austin; Hope, Buckholts; Abiding Savior, Cameron; Bethlehem, Elgin; St. Peter, Elgin; Christ, Georgetown; St. Peter, Walburg; Grace, Giddings (SAWC); Hutto, Hutto; Living Water, Leander; New Sweden, Manor; Faith, McDade; St. John, Paige; Immanuel, Pflugerville; Grace, Round Rock; Palm Valley, Round Rock; St. John, Thorndale; Zion, Thrall (Sandoval).

• **The Capital South Conference**, 19 congregations in central Austin: Abiding Love, Austin; Ascension, Austin; Faith, Austin; First English, Austin; Gethsemane, Austin; Holy Cross, Austin; Good Shepherd, Bastrop; Living Word, Buda; Campus Ministry UT, Austin; Messiah, Austin; Prince of Peace, Austin; Salem, Austin; Shepherd of the Hills, Austin; St. John-San Juan, Austin; St. Martin, Austin; Triumphant Love, Austin; New Life, Dripping Springs (Mission); Spirit in the Hills, Spicewood CUD; Resurrection, Wimberley.

• **The Bluebonnet Conference**, 20 congregations in the eastern part of the synod: Salem, Port Lavaca; Christ the Victor, Victoria; First English, Victoria; Martin Luther, Colletoville; Trinity, Victoria; St. John, Westhoff; St. John, Lindenau; St. Mark, Cuero; Zion, Arneckeville; St. Luke, Schroeder; St. Peter, Ander; First, Gonzales; Faith, Weimer; St. Peter, Prairie Valley; Evangelical, Witting; Zion, Moulton; Zion, Sublime; Martin Luther, Shiner; St. John, Denhawken; St. James, Ganado

□ **The Gulf Coast Conference**, 18 congregations in Corpus Christi and north along I-37:

Faith, Beeville; St. John, Bishop; Galilean, Corpus Christi; St. Mark, Corpus Christi; Trinity, Kingsville; Grace, Mathis; St. John, Robstown; Holy Cross, Rockport; Grace, Sinton; Faith, Taft; St. Paul, Tynan; Peace, Woodsboro; St. John, Poth; St. Paul, Nordheim; St. Paul, Karnes City; Elim, Kenedy; Good Shepherd, Kenedy; Safe Harbor (SAWC), Lagarto.

The Hill Country Conference, 14 congregations in the Texas Hill Country: Grace, Bandera; New Hope (SAWC), Blanco; First, Burnet; St. John, Castell; Immanuel, Comfort; St. Peter, Doss; Bethany, Fredericksburg; Christ, Cherry Spring; St. Paul, Cave Creek; Zion, Fredericksburg; St. James, Harper; St. James, Llano; St. Peter, Marble Falls; St. Paul, Mason.

The Rio Grande Conference, 13 congregations in the Rio Grande Valley and along the border: San Lucas, Eagle Pass; Agua Viva, Laredo (Mission); Mision Luterana, Laredo (Mission); First, Edinburg; Good Shepherd, Elsa; Grace, Harlingen; Bethel, Lyford; Our Savior, McAllen; Trinity, Mission; Cristo Rey, Pharr; St. John, San Juan; Love of Christ, Weslaco; San Pablo, Weslaco.

These proposals for conference restructuring have caused the largest amount of anxiety. Over the months there have been congregational changes and conference name changes to this plan. The Synod Council, just yesterday, received a resolution from the Austin Conference asking that its division into two conferences be looked at again. A similar sentiment was shared by some in the Victoria Conference. It is clear that part of the work of the transition team would be to meet face-to-face with those conference leaders to reconsider how these proposals.

Let me be clear, however, that congregations are encouraged to work both within their conference and across conferences for ministry together. Those conference listings are not meant to be boundaries. They are meant to create geographic clusters of congregations that can develop their own unique mission plan for that area and its special settings.

What is our hope as we move forward? In the re-visioning and re-structuring, we anticipate:

- *Slimmer structure
- *Program emphasis on mission and leadership
- *More funding to support those goals
- *More direct accountability
- *Differentiation between “passion” and “must”
- *Staff restructuring to meet synod priorities
- *Use the assets of task force energy
- *Smaller conferences bring better cohesiveness
- *Clearer definition of Conference Deans and conference functions

Therefore, at a Special Assembly held on October 22, 2011, at Texas Lutheran University, there were many bylaw changes approved to put this plan into effect. Currently, the eight new conferences are having organizational meetings and approving their charters. The Bishop is appointing deans for each conference. Nominations are taking place for the elected positions for the 2012 Synod Assembly.

This is an important time of transition. Below is a guideline for the transitions that will happen in the synod. Please keep our work together in your prayers.

Ray Tiemann, Bishop

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

10/22/11 – The Special Assembly approves Bylaws.

11/1/11 – The synod notifies congregations of any proposed amendments to synod constitution for May 2012 assembly (Six months' announcement required according to †S18.13.b).

November 2011 - February 2012 – Each Conference meets to organize, elect Conference officers, and recommend nominees for Synod Council and 2013 Churchwide Assembly elections. The bishop appoints deans to be ratified by Synod Council. Synod Council members help with new conference meetings.

02/24-25/12 – Synod Council meeting (Hill Country Conference – Camp Chrysalis)
Approve Standing Rules for 2012 synod assembly
Ratify Deans' appointments
Other items related to re-organization

April, 2012 – The Bulletin of Reports is mailed to voting members of the 2012 Synod Assembly, which includes the Nominating Committee's report for necessary elections.

April & May, 2012 -- Conference Pre-assembly meetings are held.

05/19-20/12 – The synod assembly elects a bishop, Vice president, Synod Council members, Ministry Team chairs, members of both the Consultation and Discipline Committees, and voting members to 2013 Churchwide Assembly.

General guidelines

Bylaw provisions and constitutional amendments take effect upon approval at the Special Assembly in October, 2011.

One constitutional amendment (S9.03) becomes order of business at May 2012 assembly.

Current Synod Council remains seated until Synod Assembly elections in May 2012; newly elected persons begin immediately.

Current Commissions function until May 2012 assembly; Commissions terminate and Ministry Teams begin immediately after assembly.

Elected officers, Synod Council members, and Team chairs will take office at the close of the Synod Assembly in May 2012. At subsequent elections, the elected persons will take office on September 1 following their election.