**ELCA Region 9 Manager for Candidacy and Leadership**

**Report to 2019 Synod Assemblies**

Almost certainly you have heard about the importance of developing vital congregations in the ELCA. Vital congregations, thought, need creative, Spirit-filled, collaborative, and faithful Lutheran leaders, both lay people and clergy. I have the honor of being part of the process that develops leaders to serve as Word and Service as well as Word and Sacrament ministers for this church. Congregations, bishops and synod staffs, professors and staff at seminaries, other churchwide organization folk, and I partner to identify, welcome, nurture, and form leaders to serve the ELCA today and into God’s future. We serve together so that the ELCA can continue to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world.

I travel throughout the Southeastern section of the ELCA, working with colleagues and candidates in the Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Southeastern, Florida-Bahamas, and Caribbean Synods. I attend synods’ Candidacy Committee meetings three times per year, where I offer best practices for candidacy interviews and committee work in addition to bringing updates about the state of candidacy in the ELCA. I also participate in the panels that mark the Entrance, Endorsement, and Approval stages of the Candidacy process, and I meet with students and teach candidacy workshops at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. Other areas in which I work include the Joint Ministries of Region 9 Council, the Region 9 Archives board, First Call Theological Education, Synod Assemblies, and discernment of vocation workshops.

Two highlights of each year are the Spring and Fall Assignment times, where candidates from throughout the ELCA are assigned first to Regions and then to Synods, where they will receive their First Calls. The February 2019 Assignment included 14 candidates from Region 9. Ten of those were assigned to Region 9 synods. Two candidates from other regions also were assigned to Region 9. In the September 2018 Assignment, 18 candidates from Region 9 participated. Of them, 14 were assigned to Region 9; we also received one candidate from another region. This is all positive news.

Some other good news is that synods are seeing more inquirers considering candidacy in the ELCA. Seminaries are reporting an uptick in the number of new students. Just the same, we continue to need good, gifted leaders in this church. There are always more vacancies in congregations than there are people to fill them.

How can you help?

* Identify leaders and potential leaders in your congregation. Say to people: “You really have a heart for service. Have you ever considered being a deacon?” Or, “You seem to love Bible stories. I think you’d make a great pastor.” Offer to mentor them, or steer them in the direction of someone who can.
* Raise money to sponsor an intern. Congregations are great classrooms for candidates, helping form them into thoughtful, compassionate, articulate leaders.
* Get involved in the candidacy process. Synods always need good people to serve on Candidacy Committees.
* Support your synod and ELCA seminaries so that they can continue their work of forming leaders.

Thanks be to God for leaders, for those who work with candidates, and for all who support God’s work.

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