

# Report of the Bishop's Associate for Leadership

Rev. Tracey Breashears Schultz, D.Min.

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As of March, I have served on Synod Staff for three years! It is a privilege to walk with congregations in transition and to accompany candidates and ministers as they discern and answer God's call. Thank you for the trust you've placed in me and for the opportunity to serve God and the church in this meaningful way.

## Call Process

Six calls were extended in our synod since May 2021.

Five were calls to congregational ministry. Listed alphabetically, they are:

- Pastor David Bauser, Senior Pastor; Lord of Life-The Woodlands, TX (Called: Oct 17, 2021; Installation: Nov 14, 2021)
- Clayton Faulkner; New Life-Pearland, TX (Called: May 1, 2022; Ordination and Installation: June 11, 2022)
- Pastor Jay Grave; St John-Bellville (Called: April 10, 2022; Installation: TBD)
- Pastor Cynthia Robles; Greenvine Emmanuel-Burton, TX (Called: Nov 21, 2021; Ordination: Jan 15, 2022; Installation: Jan 23, 2022)
- Pastor Sergio Rodriguez, Pastor of Community Ministries; Christ the King-Houston (Called: Aug 15, 2021; Ordination and Installation: Sept 19, 2021)



*(top left) Pastor Cynthia Robles on her Installation Day; (top right) Pastor Sergio Rodriguez on his Ordination Day; (bottom) Pastor Jay Grave at his new church*

One call for Specialized Ministry was extended by Synod Council:

- Pastor Jay Shailer, by Synod Council (Sept 25, 2021), for Joyful Life-Magnolia, TX (Installation: February 20, 2022)



*Dean Beth Warpmaeker and me with David Bauser at his Installation*

Last year, at the time of this report, there were ten congregations in the call process. This year, that number is seventeen. This increase in transitions is largely a result of retirements and discernment that came about during the pandemic. For more on the state of call processes in our synod, see [this Connections article](#) (January 2022).

Even though the numbers and needs are greater than I've ever seen them, the work of meeting with call committees, recruiting candidates for calls, and searching the database is suffused with the Spirit's presence, and it's where I continue to experience the joy and challenge of this call.

## Candidacy

Those who are preparing for leadership in the ELCA take two parallel paths. One is the academic, seminary journey. The other is Candidacy, for which I'm responsible along with our synod's Candidacy Committee. There are three major milestones along the way: Entrance (the first), Endorsement (usually before internship), and Approval (just before first call). These are check-in points for which there is an

essay due and an interview. Each of our candidates is assigned a relator, a member of the Candidacy Committee with whom to check in and to share concerns and joys. Deacon Beth Hartfiel volunteers as chair of the Candidacy Committee. We meet regularly to go through the needs of our candidates and to talk about how best to support them.

Our committee is made up of dedicated people – both lay and ordained – who walk alongside our students and who make time to read their essays and to reflect thoughtfully with them about what they're learning and what God is doing in their lives.

At present, there are seventeen seminarians in Candidacy in the Gulf Coast Synod. Of these, three are Word and Service (deacon) candidates, and fourteen are Word and Sacrament (pastor) candidates. Four of our candidates will graduate and seek first calls this year. Another eleven are in the inquiry or application stage.

*Gulf Coast Synod candidates, candidacy committee, and staff with Presiding Bishop Eaton at the Candidacy Retreat, Dec 2021.*



The synod's annual Candidacy Retreat was Dec 6-7, 2021 at Holy Name Passionist Retreat Center (Houston). We had a much-anticipated special surprise guest: Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton took the candidates' questions, talked about the state of the church, and posed for numerous selfies. What a gracious leader!

If you think God may be calling you (or someone close to you) to be a pastor or deacon, please [contact me!](#) I welcome the conversation.

## First Call Accompaniment

The synod is committed to accompanying ministers in their first three years of ministry, offering them opportunities for collegiality, the sharing of resources, and continuing education. First Call ministers typically gather twice annually: Summer and September.

Aug 22-24, I met with First Call ministers on retreat at Lutherhill. We had two guest preachers (by video), but besides worship and scheduled meals, the event was not heavily programmed, per their request. I was impressed with the rich level of engagement and deep conversations.

Our September event is in partnership with the other two Texas and Louisiana synods. Sept 27-29, we offered a virtual First Call Event across the three synods. Our hope is to make this an in-person event in 2022.



*With First Call Ministers at Lutherhill, Aug 2021*

In our synod, there are presently seven ministers in their First Call.

## Leadership

In January (Jan 10-12), in Galveston, the Synod Staff hosted a Respite Retreat for rostered ministers and church workers. Programming included worship and text study, but the agenda was largely what leaders wanted to make it. This was well received and came about as a response to the



*(left) Vicar Donna Krueger with SWT Synod Bishop's Associate Lisa Hoelscher on Donna's first day of internship; (right top) Amber Harbolt on campus at Pacific; (right bottom) Kellie Escovy and me at Wartburg, February 2022.*

weariness we were hearing from leaders. Our funding source was a one-time wellness grant from Portico Benefit Services.

At the invitation of the seminary, I traveled to Wartburg (Feb 22-25) to preach in chapel and to speak with students about vocation and call process. I held two forums (one for final-year students and one for students in any year) and then met for one-on-one appointments. Students' questions were thoughtful and wise. I was surprised by and pleased with their participation! (Wartburg is my alma mater.)

On April 12, the Synod Staff hosted Chrism Mass for the first time in two years. This is a worship service during Holy Week in which worshipers have opportunity to renew their ordination and baptismal vows. The bishop blesses oil which is then distributed for use by pastors and deacons in their ministry settings. This year, we included an Affirmation of Ministers of Word and Service, recognizing that many of our deacons were commissioned or consecrated before the creation of the ELCA's deacon roster (2016) and the church's decision to ordain deacons (2019). As a gift from the synod and in celebration of their ministry, each deacon present received a stole. The event included a reception and was the first time for us to host worship at the (new) synod office. What a full and joyous day!



*With Wartburg students after a Candidacy forum, Feb 2022*



*Deacons receiving stoles at Chrism Mass, April 2022.  
Photo cred: Pastor Steve Stutz*

## **Compensation Guidelines**

Since 2011, our synod's Compensation Guidelines have been grounded in the local economy by using teacher salary schedules from local school districts as a baseline for calculating a base salary. We make adjustments for a 12-month work cycle and education requirements (master's). Each year, a Compensation Review Team researches adjustments to teacher salaries and suggests changes to our guidelines based on school district actions. For 2023 Guidelines, we'll consider school district raises and to what extent we will follow their lead. Proposed changes will be presented to the Assembly for a vote.

My thanks to Pastor David Hansen (Spirit of Joy-The Woodlands), Robert Rivera (Synod Council), Pastor Mindy Roll (Zion-Houston), and Karen Hazlaris (Grace-New Orleans) for serving as the Compensation Review Team.