

Report of the Bishop

Oregon Synod Assembly – May 19, 2018



I have a handful of wheat. A hand *full* of wheat, an abundance - too much. Grain cascades down the side of the pile, releasing mini-avalanches of seed that fall to the floor. I regret the waste, and so I try not to move and lose more.

My abundance – or rather the fear of loss – renders me immobile. I could give some grain to you, that would solve my problem. I can also cup my hands together to make more room. That works, but of course now both hands are occupied, and I can't do anything other than care for what I have.

It *is* possible to have “just enough” wheat in my hand. I feel of the weight of it, my hand looks full, but no grain tumbles to the floor. When I have “just enough” though, I must risk what I hold, or it will soon be consumed. It is important to plant a crop for the future. I learn to live with faith, hope and charity. I gladly band with others to work the fields together. At times I will supply their want, or they mine. Having “enough” is God's way, but it is not possible without community.

It is also possible to have too little grain. I look in my hand. The seeds are few and I can easily count them. I see more of my palm than I do the wheat. If I invest my seed in planting I will starve before the harvest. Yet, if I eat the grain there will be nothing for tomorrow. Now I am *dependent*, dependent on you. In isolation my life ends. Only if the bonds of community are rebuilt can I survive.

This parable of wheat and hand is what I have heard from you, congregations of the Oregon Synod, over the past few years. You have shared this story through Vitality Surveys, Visitations and interim processes. Some sense scarcity through membership declines, dwindling budgets and rising costs. At the same time, you report an abundance of gifted members, faith, joy and commitment.

In Regional Gatherings this month we have talked about “right sizing” our ministries. When our buildings and governance structures overshadow our need, we can become immobilized. In such cases the giftedness of leaders and faithful members moves from mission to maintenance. Sixty five percent of Oregon Synod congregations report in one way or another that this describes them. “Right sizing” means change. It may mean allowing some of your grain to fall to floor, so you can free up your hands. Better yet, it may suggest divesting in one form of abundance for the sake of another.

- Bethlehem Lutheran donated their building and property back to the synod to fund other ministries seven years ago. In exchange they became a small, free, empowered community able to do much more than they had before. It was a courageous decision. It was right for them.
- Spirit of Grace ELCA/UMC in Hood River had two church buildings. One was sold and the two, then separate, congregations have become one. Now they have money to fund new ministry. Today Spirit of Grace today is much more than the sum of its former parts.
- Hope Lutheran and All Saints Episcopal in Heppner have both been pastored by Rev. Katy Anderson for 8 years. They are just completing a memorandum of agreement to streamline shared governance and leadership as a single community. Like Spirit of Grace, they are also beginning to look into the wisdom of maintaining two church properties.

- Three other communities in the Blue Mountain Cluster, in addition to “Hopeful Saints” in Heppner are, or have the opportunity to, consider shared ministries with Episcopal partners. Why not have these conversations as a cluster-wide cohort and so, in this way, once again ‘right-size’ the way ministry opportunities are considered and shared? We are better together.

This is the song of “enough.” This is what it looks like to be a church, or a synod, where the plenty of one supplies and need of another. Such partnerships are one way to be truly connected, interdependent, learning one from another in deep and meaningful ways. Will we risk the planting and the harvest? We know too well the dangers of isolation.



Thank you to all who participated in our recent round of Regional Gatherings. Turnout was strong. Energy was high. Faith, hope and love were evident as we talked about such things. We were open to one another, open to new learning and, because of our Congregational Vitality and Visitation work, we know more today about the challenges and opportunities of Christian ministry in Oregon than ever before – **ever!** Addendum ‘A’ of this report contains materials and summaries shared at our Regional Gatherings. It is through this material that I have heard the parable of wheat and hand. We are becoming a synod of “enough” – sharing, risking, working and learning together. There is no other way for the Body to be strong.

Rev. Michael Keys, who has been one of our two half-time Directors of Evangelical Mission (DEM), has accepted a full-time call to Resurrection Lutheran Church in Portland. He begins this call June 1. Mike and our Oregon Synod Mission Table have been the primarily architects of the amazing work that has led to our increased self-awareness around congregational vitality and transformation. Mike has helped many of you with Congregational Vitality Surveys, their interpretation and application. He has negotiated, secured and overseen a significant number of Churchwide grants establishing area ministry strategies, transformational ministry initiatives, new ministries and ministry experiments. My admiration and thanks to Rev. Keys cannot be overstated. Thank you, Mike, for the work you have done on the synod’s behalf, and blessings to you and Resurrection Lutheran in your new venture together.

Some of Rev. Keys’ work has involved new ministries and ministry experiments. The result of this work is hopeful and rewarding. I would highlight the following:

- Rev. Ron Werner serves under a synod call with a project called “Together Lab.” He engages Millennials, and others, in spiritual conversation and community; he has been central to our synod’s work around sanctuary and Youth Cohorts; and in more ways than I can count he helps knit and inform shared work of all kinds.
- Rev. Erika Spaet has a synod call to a joint ELCA/UMC church start in Bend. Like Ron, much of Erika’s focus is with younger people who have been opting out of ‘church.’ Erika’s ministry is the first, from the ground up, joint ELCA/UMC church start in the nation, and it was conceived and is supported by local ELCA and UMC congregations in Bend. Such work cannot be done in isolation.
- Leo Bancroft is our Mission Developer with ‘The Flame,’ an LGBTQIA outreach in the Portland area. Leo is to be ordained as a pastor of the ELCA this summer. He is also known to many of us as a dynamic and sensitive resource person around issues of sexual diversity. The Flame now meets regularly for worship.

- Work in the Cully neighborhood of Portland is supported by Luther Memorial and Salt and Light Lutheran churches, which border the community. Thank you to Juan Carlos La Puente who is central in this imaginative and caring local ministry, as well as Mira Conklin who is a primary – on the ground - partner from the UMC.
- Rachel Kramer and Bonnie Beadles-Bohling are lay leaders in new work. Both are in Candidacy to become Rostered Leaders in the ELCA, and both are on the Synod Council. Katy Rustvold, a leader identified through the Portland Eastside Ministry effort and a member of the ‘right-sized’ Bethlehem Lutheran Church, is engaged in outreach/community organizing work in SE Portland. We have just hired her part time to work through the synod office with DEM grants.

All of these people represent new work and new leadership in the synod. They are the direct result of Rev. Key’s work as an Oregon Synod DEM. Thank you, Mike for your ministry with us!

Rev. Glenn Chase is our other half-time DEM. Glenn holds our multi-cultural ministry portfolio and also works with stewardship opportunities. The past few years we have seen the birth of two, new, Latino ministries in the Oregon Synod. Centro Montesinoes in Woodburn is now in its third year and has just called a new pastor, Rev. Agustín Valadéz Jaime. This ministry is a cooperative venture with the Oregon Diocese of the Episcopal Church. Rev. Chase and Fr. Roberto (Beto) Arciniega of the Oregon Diocese now meet monthly as they work together on our developing Latino Ministry strategy. The following is of note:

- We welcome Rev. Agustín as the new pastor of Centro Montesinoes. This new ministry engages primarily second and third generation Latino immigrants in the Woodburn area.
- Manuel Borbon is the Mission Developer of our Mid-Willamette Valley Latino outreach. This ministry is off to a strong start with the direct support of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Silverton, and both financial support and engagement from other Vineyard Cluster congregations. Manuel organized the first ever, Oregon Synod *Our Lady of Guadalupe* service last December. Manuel is in our TEEM Candidacy program and serves as a member of the Oregon Synod Council.
- Rev. Hildegardo Gonzalez Gomez is an ELCA pastor serving St. Peter and Paul Episcopal Church in Portland half time. We are just starting a new Latino Ministry outreach in east Portland with Hildegardo. This is exciting as well. The future looks hopeful.



Our rapidly expanding Latino Ministry requires focus, partnership and financing. the Synod Council will be looking to formalize our outreach strategy this summer and fall, and congregations which wish to support such work are encouraged to contact Rev. Chase. Thank you, Glenn, for your leadership!

Oregon Synod DEM salaries and associated costs are funded by a grant from Churchwide. Most of the new and renewing ministry efforts that our DEMs oversee are also supported by Churchwide grants, along with matching investments from our own Oregon Synod New Beginnings Fund. A report from each of our DEMs, and a list of ministry grants, is included as Appendix ‘B’ of this report. As bishop of the Oregon Synod I have negotiated with Rev. Stephen Bouman in our Churchwide offices to maintain our full DEM grant through the coming year. Seeing as there is a bishop’s election in 2019, with possible staff changes, I will not be filling Rev Key’s position at this time. Funding will be used for others doing smaller parts of this job for now.

Rev. Susan Kintner, Oregon Synod Assistant to the Bishop, has carried as a primary part of her portfolio pastoral transitions for Oregon Synod congregations. Which is to say, when your pastor retires or takes a new call she works with you to find new pastoral leadership. As Susan and I talk we are aware that much has changed in the past decade. Please see Susan’s full report to you included as [Appendix ‘C’](#). I would highlight the following here:

- The number of congregations in transition is now on the rise. Fully half of our Oregon Synod pastors are 60 years of age and older and we are well into their retirements.
- The number of new pastors coming out of seminaries is down. Many of them also choose more restrictions on how or where they feel called to serve than pastors in the past. In the future we will not have the number of pastors we need for the way we have traditionally done church.
- More congregations are in crisis, transition or disarray than in the past. This further complicates the work of pastoral transition. Synod realities, reported by you and shared in [Appendix ‘A’](#), show that 15% of synod congregations are in “crisis” mode. Perhaps a third of Oregon Synod congregations will be experiencing significant challenges over the next 3-5 years.

My sincere thanks and appreciation to Rev. Kintner for all she does on behalf of the synod. In the year ahead she, I, and other synod leaders will be taking a hard look at our practices around pastoral transitions. She continues to adapt her model for transitions for a new day. It’s the right thing to do.

Jan Wierima, Executive Assistant to the Bishop, has also done amazing work this year. She is working closely with Jamie Armstrong, a consultant who is wholly embracing this work with us, and together they oversee our New Beginnings Grant program. This effort has engaged 11 congregations in collaborative work around local initiatives funded in large part by synod dollars. We have affirmed through this initiative how transformative it is to allow congregations from all around the state to work in cohorts for the sake of learning and mutual encouragement around diverse projects. Jan has written about this program in [Appendix ‘D’](#).

We are thrilled to death to have Sarah Kruger now serving on synod staff as our Coordinator for Communications. We continue to refine her job description and find the best way to use her considerable gifts, even as we are in the midst of a synod treasurer transition and Rev. Keys’ departure.

We have, and will continue, to make use of specialized, part-time employees for various parts of our work. Last year I purposely left the staff position held by Ryan Marquart open due to budget considerations. I am well aware that this decision put increased pressure on staff, most especially Jan Wierima, and Rev. Kintner. They have been faithful and uncomplaining for which I can only say “Thank you!” We have done our best to keep primary work in front of us, working extra hours to keep the boat afloat – and there is still catch up to be done. Your patience is a gift.



Next year at Assembly you will have the opportunity to elect both a bishop and a new Synod Vice President. Rev. Keys and the Oregon Synod Mission Table have brought us to a point of clarity and ministry focus for the months ahead. Rev. Chase has led amazing headway into the opportunities around Latino Ministry. Rev. Kintner is articulating needed changes in what were once ‘routine’ pieces of synod office work - and in the mix we continue

to push, prod, experiment and risk. Like the congregations your synod staff and Council serve – you – we are called to change for the sake of vital, Oregon ministry.

In the year ahead my work, and that of your synod staff, will focus on the following:

1. We have a strong formulation of an effective, vital and expanding Latino Ministry strategy. Rev. Chase and I will be working with the Synod Council to deepen and own this strategy more broadly throughout the synod. We are encouraged by the excitement and commitment already evidenced by Oregon Synod congregations here and will seek to bring more into this work.
2. Some of the various forms of Transformational Ministry our DEMs facilitate have been touched on in this report, but not all. Mission Support throughout the ELCA is a challenge, affecting both synodical and churchwide ministry opportunities. We anticipate support for the kinds of grants we have secured will be declining. The Synod Council, staff and Finance Committee will be taking a close look at long term financial implications going forward.
3. We have two 'Synod Authorized Ministers' (SAMs) serving Grace Lutheran Church in Vale and Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Cave Junction. In addition, we have two new requests for training to equip lay leaders to serve as SAMs for Grace Lutheran in Enterprise and a second leader for Vale – and other interest has been expressed. Our programming is in development and a SAM process will be formalized by this time next year.
4. Synod staff has done the bulk of their work in recent years through individual, congregation by congregation, consultations. This has been effective, and while 65% of synod congregations report struggling to maintain ministry and community life, 20% of our congregations have made the kind of changes they need to feel more vital and sustainable. During the last few years we have also increased the work done through cohorts. Cohorts allow us to share our learning, benefit from the experiences of others and accelerate leadership training. During the coming year we will decrease individual consultation time in favor of further cohort formation and support. This will continue to build capacity for 2019 and beyond.
5. With leadership changes coming in 2019 there are also staff and office considerations to attend to. A new synod Treasurer will invite financial procedures tweaks. Interim Treasurer Bob Cornie has done amazing work in the regard already. Thank you, thank you, thank you, Bob! Staff will ensure that all records and credential changes are up to date. And, we are working with a website consultant towards a new Oregon Synod web presence geared to your needs for collaborative work and information.



The Oregon Synod is now well aligned for next steps. We know who we are. We understand the culture in which we minister. Congregations have the information they need to shape vital ministry for the communities they serve. And, we have learned that we prosper best when we work together. Now we move forward towards a more collaborative and integrated practice of being church together.

With joy and thanksgiving,

Dave Braun-Robe

APPENDIX 'A' – Regional Gathering Reflections



Our Oregon Synod Regional Gatherings were joy, well attended and richly embraced events. Joint choirs, break out interest groups, great food and hospitality, local leadership panels and more were all experienced in their own way location from location. Thank you to host churches, deans, local musicians and cooks and all who made these events possible.

Somewhere between half, to the whole day of these events, was led by synod staff, council members, and members of our Oregon Synod Mission Table. Those who attended one of our six, Oregon Synod Regional Gatherings received feedback relative to their event and a link for follow up materials. We encourage you to look at this site. <http://oregonsynod.org/visitation>.

The following three pages include a summary of congregational data and trends shared by our Mission Table. A fuller presentation is online as an attachment, *Oregon Synod Trends 2018 with Notes.pdf*

Some 400 people participated in these Gatherings. The great majority reported back to us that they appreciated the opportunity to hear and grapple with this data. When asked in evaluation **“What surprised you in the day?”** responses such as *“We have more in common than we thought.”* *“The number of congregations just maintaining.”* or *“Change is a positive thing.”* Were common.

When asked, **“What will you take back to your congregation?”** people said, *“Renewal and excitement.”* *“Everything! We are on the right track.”* and *“We have a lot of work to do.”* And when asked, **“How can we build on the work done today?”** participants responded with such comments as, *“Take more risks.”* *“More lay engagement with pastors.”* *“We need leadership training for laity.”* And *“Try something instead of talking.”*

Each event had its own flavor and learnings. Those gathered in Bend April 7 were deeply engaged in the new work of Erika Spaet who is developing a new ministry in the area. They fully understood that her work was new, needed, and not something they could engage in directly.

Those gathering in Medford April 14 voiced their longing for more collaborate with synod leaders and one another. In Pendleton April 21 we saw the fruits of rich engagement with other denominational partners, and the event in Corvallis April 28 we celebrated Latino ministry efforts. The Corvallis event, and the two events offered in the greater Portland area May 5, were rich in local content, but allowed for less time with synod trends and data. Here evaluations were done individually rather than in small groups and we were able to see how important processing trend data with others really is.

We encourage congregations to try the John 21 Bible Study with their own people. For those who have Word Clouds use some forum time to ask members *“What they notice.”* and *“What they wonder.”* It is the common conversation, deepening relationships, and taking risks of all sorts that are called for today.

Our Mission Table, synod staff and council will continue to work with this information along with you. Let us know what next steps for you might look like. We’ll seek friends for the journey.

Oregon Synod—Assessment and Visitation Process

Trends from Assessment & Visitation Data

April 2018

Assessment Responses

+Congregational Vitality Survey (CVS)	New Fall 2017= 37	2016 or older= 38	Total= 75
+Congregation Life Assessment	29		
+Visitation/Interviews	58 congregations--Estimating 568 interviews		
+Congregations and ministries not participating in this process	25%.		

Consistent strengths identified by congregations from CVS.

- Very positive about their congregation and for the most part lay and clergy leadership
- Worship life is strong in that it is experienced as Nurturing Faith, is Joyful, and full of God's Presence.
- Congregation see themselves as Doing God's Work in congregation and the community.
- Visitors are welcomed and accepted, and to a slightly lesser degree, newcomers are incorporated.
- Strong Sense of Belonging and Commitment to the congregation is felt by almost all respondents.
- Most congregations believe they are vital communities, even though this can be challenged by responses to specific questions and issues.

General Trends for Congregations from Visitation Interviews:

About the Congregation:

- Strong Relationships, we help each other
- Welcoming and Friendly
- Engaged in the community, engage others beyond members, being a good neighbor
- Helping others through community service
- Financial pressures around sustainability
- Pressure caused by national political situation, incivility and hate actions (some congregations)

What God wants for and from the congregation?

- Deepening spiritual life and relationship with God
- Courage to serve others; love and serve
- Relationships with neighbors
- Listen to one another

After these trends, three patterns or groupings arise among congregations (from those participating in the process):

- A. 65% Congregations trying to maintain ministry and community life.
- B. 20% *Congregations ranked themselves highest in Vitality (according to CVS)*
- C. 15% Congregations in crisis ...ongoing or have had to right size their structure/staff

Group A: Congregations trying to maintain ministry and community life

- Being a good neighbor
- Aging Community with few or no young families and children
- Find divisive issues—past and present—hard to discuss; often prefer not talking about them
- Facility challenges with aging buildings; low investment in upkeep
- Primary ministry emphasis is providing or funding community social services; worship and music a distant second
- Focus on homelessness (vs. affordable housing)
- See perseverant and scrappy as identified primary strengths
- Desire to be more accepting; considering RIC
What God wants for and from them?
- Growth in numbers, families, children
- Vitality and longevity

Group B. *Congregations which ranked themselves with highest Vitality scores.*

- *Strong relationships with non-members and community*
- *Wide Political-social spectrum; able to talk about anything; moving beyond “comfort zone” is the new normal*
- *Lack of hatred and hypocrisy, no judgment; RIC process is in the past*
- *Lived out spirituality vs being religious; blurring the line between sacred and secular community*
- *Empowered laity*
- *Focus on affordable housing (vs. just homelessness)*
- *Advocating for justice and peace; working on Immigration and Sanctuary; often environmentally, politically active.*
- *1 to 1s “regularly” often in worship and Listening seasons; community organizing is priority*
- *Time pressure is significant especially with families with children*
- *Multi-generational, often lots of babies and kids*

Group C. Congregation in Crisis

Many of the trends identified with Group 1 also apply here: aging community with few if any children, service/charity ministry as the primary ministry action and desire for growth with no clear idea of how to make that happen.

- Not enough people or resources to take next steps
- Limited or no pastoral leadership for the congregation
- Poor communication especially on divisive issues
- Some congregations—destructive behaviors related to congregation conflicts e.g. secret meetings

Analysis of Trends and Conclusions from the Assessment and Visitation data.

(Sources CVS, CLA, Trend Report and Qualitative and Quantitative data)

1. **Leadership**—clergy and lay—is THE critical component to vitality, positive tone and potential sustainability (or the lack thereof). Leaders that are risk avoidant are often facing some level of resistance and refuse to act upon their future for the sake of “harmony”. This creates the environment where the community is not willing to try new things and is less hopeful about the future. When the congregation has a strong sense of belonging and commitment along with trust in leadership there is capacity to experiment, talk about hard issues and do things differently.

2. **Sustainability Grouping.** Every congregation is full of extraordinary people and gifts. Some demonstrate strengths in many areas, but no place is perfect. Others face critical decisions about their future. The challenge is that by the time most congregations are willing to make the necessary changes they no longer have the capacity—people and financial resources—to implement the needed change.

- **Group #B-(20% highest vitality scores).** These congregations had strong combined scores in vitality and sustainability. They came in every size and configuration. Large congregations with multiple staff, pastoral sized (c. 50-100 members) and places receiving limited pastoral coverage.
- **Group #A (65% focus on maintenance):** Sit right on the lip of “vital and currently viable but not sustainable” and “currently viable but not sustainable or vital”. Leadership is critical at this stage because decisions have to be made that will surface resistance. The Denial-Blaming-Shaming-Bullying cycle is a trap for congregations who think that it will turn around without recognizing it is themselves that must change.
- **Group #C (15% in crisis):** Congregations scoring below 3.8 on the CVS are also the ones who identify themselves as in some kind of crisis. They are at the point where intentional intervention—internal or external--needs to be done in key areas:
 - +*Clear Sense of Mission/Purpose* with a focus on what is God’s Mission,
 - +*Building Healthy Relationship* that can talk about hard issues and challenges,
 - +*Right Sizing the Congregation* to explore appropriate structure, staffing, and facilities within resources available, and determine what kind of action/intervention (internal or external) is required. In Oregon over the next 3-5 years, the synod is likely to see as many as 40 faith communities in Group C.

3. **Strong Healthy Relationships.** Congregations that have been able to make the transition to more vital, sustainable communities, often have developed a culture--within and outside--of ever deepening relationships among participants. When this is present, managing difficult or polarizing conversations becomes much easier and even life giving. This does not mean that there is never conflict; it only means that it will be handled in an open, respectful way. There are several ways this can happen but consistently with successful congregation it starts with listening: Listening to God, Listening to Each Other, and Listening to Neighbors.

4. **Equipped to share faith with others.** Many congregations scored significantly lower when asked two questions: “*Congregation equips member to share their faith*” and “*I feel equipped to share my faith with others.*” When tied to “*Congregation helps people live out their faith,*” this becomes a synod wide priority. The data reveals this can be: (1) lack of understanding about how one shares faith, (2) communication issue from leaders, and/or (3) uncomfortable talking about faith and life. These questions are considered the most important in determining the vitality of a congregation.

5. **Oregon is truly unique.** Looking at the religious affiliation in various communities, we discover that many rural, “conservative” communities throughout the synod have the same or lower percentage of religious affiliation as Portland (the most unchurched metropolitan area in the United States). We have often assumed the opposite. The implications of this reality is that the Oregon Synod faces even harder challenges with growing or maintaining current participation and financial support than much of the country. Declines will be steeper and more dramatic in the next five years with more and more congregations failing to be sustainable except as “house” church with 30 or less participants.

APPENDIX 'B' – Director of Evangelical Mission Reports

ETHNIC MINISTRIES

Heavenly Peace Chinese Lutheran Church

We have had a Chinese Lutheran Outreach for many years here in Oregon. Rev. Joseph Jong, the pastor, leads many programs, to include Worship, Mandarin & Cantonese Classes, Qigong classes and Tai Chi. Heavenly Peace makes its home at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Portland. This outreach ministry is supported by both the Oregon Synod and a grant from the Domestic Missions Unit of the ELCA.

Church of Living Waters

Rev. Matt Littau is the pastor of this church located on the Piute Reservation near Burns, Oregon. The congregation meets weekly for worship and a pot luck lunch following. Many tribe members attend these weekly events. Rev. Littau also meets with many of the residents for counseling. This ministry is sponsored by the Oregon Synod and the Domestic Missions Unit of the ELCA.

Good Spirit

Rev. Chuck Hunt is the leader of this Native American ministry. Located at St. Timothy Lutheran Church in Southeast Portland, the congregation gathers once a month for potluck and worship. Rev. Hunt also has three different study groups that meet at homes around the Portland Metro area. This ministry is supported by the Oregon synod and a grant from the Domestic Missions Unit of the ELCA.

Casa de Zion (House of Zion)

Casa de Zion is in Woodburn, Oregon. This was the first Latino congregation in the Oregon Synod. Under the leadership of Pastor Polo Garcia and his wife, Marta, their ministry has touched many lives. Casa de Zion continues to serve the people of Woodburn.

Centro Montesinos

This mission congregation is a joint *new start* congregation with the Oregon Synod, the ELCA Domestic Mission Unit and the Episcopal Diocese of Western Oregon. This new mission in Woodburn is located at St Mary's Episcopal Church. Worship services are at 6:00 pm, and in Spanish. The congregation has hosted baptisms and Quinceañera's. Montesinos also runs a clothes closet and is well known by Social Workers in the local schools. Montesinos is funded by a grant from the Oregon Synod, the Domestic Missions Unit of the ELCA and the Episcopal Diocese of Western Oregon.

East Portland Latino Exploration

Rev. Hildegardo Gomez, a Lutheran Pastor, is serving St. Peter and Paul's Episcopal church in Portland. Rev. Gomez will also be exploring the possibility of a new Lutheran Latino Congregation in east Portland. This is another joint endeavor with the Oregon Synod and the local Episcopal Diocese.

Mid-Willamette Valley Latino Ministries

After a year of exploration that included one-to-one meetings with pastors and congregational leaders it was decided to develop a Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community, Latino Lutheran Congregation

in the area. Manuel Borbon, a Mission Developer, along with Immanuel Lutheran Church, will soon be hosting a Spanish language worship. This is only the beginning of a new, broader strategy for building a more diverse synod. This work is funded by the Oregon Synod and the Domestic Missions Unit of the ELCA.

Partnerships

Father Roberto Arciniega, Canon for Latino Ministries, and Rev. Glenn Chase, Director of Evangelical Mission for the Oregon Synod, with the encouragement of both bishops, meet monthly to develop a joint Latino strategy for building Christ's Church here in Oregon. Where there once was separation in the work of our churches, now is an understanding of collaboration and relationship that is essential to the work of the Gospel in Oregon.

Glenn Chase
DEM for Ethnic Ministries and Stewardship

OREGON SYNOD MISSION DEVELOPERS

This is what MISSION DEVELOPMENT in Oregon looks like?

- Exploring possible ministry site/community options.
- Experimenting with new ways to think about word and sacrament.
- Bi-vocational approaches for mission developers.
- *Creative leveraging of funding over multiple years to fund new ministries.*
- **Forming cohorts and working through collectives as a means to equip new leaders.**
- Learning how to become "mediating institutions" in our neighborhoods, collaborating with local organizations such as health clinics, neighborhood associations, parent-teacher associations, as well as interfaith religious groups.

Gone are the days of planting "copy-cat" congregations in the suburbs. Gone are the days where the national denomination will pay the costs to get ministries started. Gone are the times where knocking on 100 doors a month can build a faith community.

HERE is what MISSION DEVELOPMENT in Oregon looks like!

Third Space (Synodically Authorized Worship Community) - Located at Trinity Lutheran, Gresham

The core team of Third Space has recently worked on updating their mission statements and name to reflect how the ministry has grown and evolved. The ministry is entering its third year. Rachel Kramer, mission developer, is completing her first year of classes and training for ordination through the TEEM program at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. Third Space is exploring how Word and Sacrament can be viewed from the standpoint of a common table for food, friendship and enrichment.

Cully Outreach (Ministry Under Development) - Sharing space at Luther Memorial, Portland

- **Intercambio!** - A neighborhood-based, English-Spanish language exchange of fun and life-giving experience focused on relationship-building and leadership development.
- **Sanctuary/Accompaniment** – In coordination by the Leaven community, this ministry seeks mutual accompaniment with our undocumented neighbors by going with people to court, joining at school organizing meetings, and taking part in other activities that give opportunity to *walk with*.
- **Housing Organizing with CHAT (Cully Housing Action Team)** – Outreach to bring and maintain affordable housing to the Cully neighborhood. Mira Conklin has taken on the primary role of mission organizer. She is a member of the Leaven/Salt & Light Community.

Together Lab (Ministry Under Development - *Formerly *Millennial Engagement*) - Rev. Ron Werner, Jr. Ministry Developer

Organizing diverse leaders to listen, act, and make meaning alongside God and one another.

In year three, the ministry moves from a season of startup to a season of development as experiments take root and thrive in four key interconnected areas:

- **Youth Together:** Leader-full, neighborhood-based, ecumenical youth collectives have been started in SE Portland, The Gorge, and downtown Portland, with more on the horizon. In a time when many churches struggle with critical mass and sustainable youth ministry, we bring together stakeholders in a geographic area from up to six of our full communion partner denominations to facilitate the startup of this exciting way to accompany youth in our communities.
- **Church Together:** Rooted in relationship and a spacious vision of Christianity these various circles, made up mostly of young adults and families not connected to congregations, gather regularly to spiritually accompany one another on life's pilgrimage through storytelling, ritual, and co-created space.
- **Organizing Together:** Accompanying faith communities through a partnership with the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice (IMIJ). From meeting to mass to mosque, sangha to synagogue to sanctuary, people of faith in Oregon are standing in solidarity with our immigrant kin. In the past year, we've grown from being in relationship with 25 congregations in Portland to 125 around the state (including 25 ELCA congregations and ministries).
- **Lead Together:** With leadership development being a thread throughout our ministry, we've been a part of starting various communities of practice and cohort initiatives with partners. An example of this is *Spiritual & Theological Accompaniment*, a cross-cultural experience developing "strong theological backs as we open our hearts to both the margins of our communities and our own stories." This year there will be sixty participants from Oregon, Mexico, and Peru.

The Flame (Synodically Authorized Worship Community) - Leo Bancroft, Mission Developer

We are The Flame! With this playful name we embrace our LGBTQIA and ally identity, and also evoke images of faith and spiritual renewal.

- an alternative worshipping community, a little start-up church, where we gather, build relationships and community, and share our faith journeys.
- celebrate that all gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations are gifts from God, and that we are beautifully and wonderfully made just as we are.

We are a place where you can bring your whole self, including your doubts and frustrations with God or the church, including your joys and celebrations. Sometimes we gather for church services. Sometimes we do other things to get to know each other better, have fun, and strengthen our bonds of community.

Story Dwelling (Congregation Under Development) – Bend, OR

Beginning in November 2017, the newest mission start is led by Rev Erika Spaet, who has worked to build relationships within the local congregations (ELCA and UMC), as well as with folks not connected to church. Potential leaders are beginning to emerge into a wisdom and discernment team exploring what call God might dream for a new spiritual community here. Folks are longing for **relationships with depth**; for community that will come around them as they **respond to pressures**; and for a community of belonging that is **radically inclusive** and has **intellectual, theological and political integrity**. We are also hearing that this belonging must be tied to fruits of **impact** for the larger Bend community, especially in terms of addressing unaffordable housing, racism and increasing income disparity. Story Dwelling is currently gathering leaders to a Community of Practice to discern core values and practices with hopes of “going public” in the fall.

SE Portland Organizing Project - Organizers Bonnie Beadles Bohling and Katy Rustvold

Using community organizing principles and community “re-rooting” model with churches, SE Portland Organizing Project has worked with SE Portland congregations and community partners to enhance the common good and re-root churches in their neighborhood; worked with pastors of 3 ELCA congregations on multiple cross-congregational discussions to develop and deepen relationships within and between these faith communities; and brought congregation members and neighbors together around key issues in the neighborhood: safe pedestrian access to a local k-8 school, and incorporating a new homeless shelter in the Foster-Powell area.

Mike Keys
DEM for New and Renewing Ministries

Oregon Synod Domestic Grants & Applications 2017/2018

Ministry	ELCA Grant 2017	ELCA Grant 2018	Synod Support 2017	Synod Support 2018	Anticipated Synod Support 2019
Multi-Cultural Ministries					
Living Waters Burns	30,000	30,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Good Spirit PDX	12,000	12,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Mid-Willamette Valley Outreach Salem-Silverton	10,000	20,000	10,000	15,000	20,000
Centro Montesinos Woodburn (Luth/Epis)	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
Heavenly Peace Portland-Beaverton	12,000	12,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Creative Ministries and Outreach					
Together Lab Synodwide	35,000	35,000	33,000	30,000	25,000
Third Space PDX	10,000	15,000	2,000	3,000	3,000
Cully Outreach PDX	25,000	25,000	15,000	15,000	12,000
The Flame (LGBTQ Outreach – PDX)	15,000	15,000	5,000	5,000	10,000
SE Portland Outreach	20,000	18,000	PEM Funds	5,000	5,000
Transformational Leadership Synodwide	25,000	0	35,000	35,000	35,000
Wilderness Way PDX	7,000	14,000	5,000	4,000	3,000
Congregations Under Development					
Story Dwelling Bend	10,417 <small>Prorated 2017</small>	26,000	7,000	17,000	18,000
Grace and Mercy Hermiston	32,000	30,000	10,000	10,000	8,000
Congregational Renewals					
Spirit of Grace Bvtn	0	10,000	0	2,000	Reapply 2019
Bethel Lutheran PDX	15,000	10,000	2,000	2,000	Ends 2018
Total Investments					
Total Grants	\$283,417	297,000	161,000	154,000	151,000

APPENDIX 'C' – Assistant to the Bishop Report

I absolutely love meeting a new congregation and working with them in the transition time between called pastors. It brings me great joy to hear the unique history, traditions, and practices of each congregation. Ten years ago, the majority of pastoral transitions were because a full-time pastor moved to a new call, often with 30 days' notice. That is no longer the case.

We have 18 congregations currently in the call process:

Of those 18 congregations:

- 8 are Full Time including 2 congregations seeking associate pastors (less than half)
- 2 are Lutheran Congregations partnering with Methodists and/or Episcopal congregations
- 5 are Less than Full Time
- 3 congregations can afford only Guest preachers on Sunday
- 6 vacancies are due to pastors RETIRING, 2 with 20-year tenures.

What do these numbers tell us? That the face of transition or interim ministry is changing. When a pastor retires, there is often a 3-month lead time to plan the party and bless the pastor on to the next chapter in their lives. There is a sense of the fullness of time, or a chapter concluding. As soon as the party is cleaned up, congregations want to get to work on the call process.

We find there are important questions that can be asked in the transition time that aren't asked at any other time. This is very valuable. Who are we? What does God want for us and from us? Who is our neighborhood? Is it time to shift programs, expectations, people in leadership?

2 more Full Time pastors will retire in June and September, after serving 10 and 24 years, respectively. The transition time for congregations is often a time to reset ministry by reviewing programs and adapting to changes in their context that occurred during the longer tenures.

We have 8 transition pastors currently serving, and 3 transition pastors currently between calls, in the "gap," between congregations, who will be working soon.

It is a joy to see more congregations beginning to work closely with ecumenical partners such as in La Grande! On Wednesday, May 2nd, St. Peter Episcopal and Zion Lutheran Call Committees met jointly, with the Rev Lee Keifer and me to coordinate the search process. Lee is my Episcopalian colleague in the Eastern Oregon Diocese.

Both congregations voted in April to "enter a search for a full-time priest or pastor to serve the two congregations." This is the first time I have ever met with two call committees who want to partner at this early point in the call process. They were able to vote for this shared model because they have spent time intentionally getting to know one another, and they see mission they can do together that they can't do alone.

Our response has been to congregations wanting to work together has been that we can help you build what will support your mission. This is about much more than survival.

Rev. Susan Kintner
Assistant to the Bishop

APPENDIX 'D' – New Beginnings Local Grants Initiative Report

It all began with congregations having vision and the courage to ask, “What does God want *for* us? What does God want *from* us?” In answering those questions, one congregation with a building that could no longer be maintained gave the building to the Synod to provide renewed focus on mission and ministry. Another congregation opted for Holy Closure, choosing to leave a legacy of ‘new beginnings’ by returning their building to the synod for new mission. Thanks to these resources, along with other support, Synod Council was able to create the New Beginnings Fund. The purpose of this fund is *to facilitate transformation in our ministries in the face of radical change*. The Council listened to members, who represent every cluster in Oregon, as well as voices of diversity. They sought perspectives of youth and young adults. From this listening, criteria were developed for the use of these funds.

The first year of the New Beginnings Local Ministries Grant program had three core purposes:

- 1) Provide small grants to congregations across Oregon whose projects were selected to support local experimental efforts with the stated purpose “to evolve and transform ministry in the local context.”
- 2) Create a learning cohort of the grant sites to leverage the experimentation across the entire group. The collective learning—especially through face-to-face cohort meetings—created a safe container for learning together that benefited the whole group, based on the awareness that each local context matters, as do the unique voices from each project site.
- 3) Build partnership development and intentional capacity-building for change into the experimentation.

Eleven grant sites were funded for experimentation. Some congregations knew exactly what they wanted to try, some needed support in initiating challenging conversations about how to deepen or take a new direction in ministry, and some were already at work in their communities and requested Synod partnership and support for a particular part of their work.

At the end of our first year of grants (Round One), we celebrate together both successes and ‘glorious failures’! Ideas for experimentation have resulted in work that has:

- Been open to changes as the projects were lived out.
- Endeavored to build leadership capacity along the way.
- Focused on ideas, issues and/or challenges that came out of listening to each other and to partners.
- Been supported toward ‘unexpected’ timelines and outcomes.
- Involved collective learning by the cohort members and building new relationships that will endure.

Just a few of the wonderful stories that have come out of Round One:

Centro Montesinos in Woodburn has started St. Mary’s Closet. They requested funds for a washer and dryer. They knew this simple request was the key to larger and more serious work—addressing isolation and fear in their community. What they were able to create was a safe place for members of the

community to be known and cared for so they could fully participate in the life of Centro Montesinos and the larger community. The leadership team for St. Mary's Closet is now looking to develop a partnership with the school next door, and working on ways to connect community members to the services they need in a very challenging time, especially for those newly immigrated to the U.S.

Creator Lutheran in Clackamas is working to empower young adults of color into leadership in the building of a justice-oriented Youth Collective. They offer instruction and practice of their musical gifts, augmented by some further training with ELCA *Glocal Music Educators*. The young leaders have faced tough realities, needing to balance school and work with music instruction and some connection to the faith community. Adult leadership has worked to engage the congregation in the vision of the grant and connect them to the young people. The diverse musicians add Glocal music to Creator's Youth Sundays, as well as lead music for Youth Collective retreats, which are always well-received by both communities. Work is ongoing and will enter into Round Two of grants.

Meanwhile, Central Lutheran in Portland has been envisioning new ways of using and sharing their historic building to expand their understanding of who they are--beyond the Central Lutheran congregation—towards a much larger community they now call "Central Portland." This work has engaged their Building Use Administrator in having one-to-one conversations with building users about how to improve communication and solve technical issues that come up. But it hasn't stopped there. As this work is meant to do, it has expanded to include meaningful new relationships and intentional thinking together. In this instance, it has been about doing a joint community event to raise resources for additional work in the neighborhood. Building users are also now encouraging other groups to be in contact about how they might utilize space in the church building. Central's first step has created a more 'adaptive' culture of investment, not only in their building as a useful space, but in their relationships with one another and the community.

At Zion in La Grande, Pastor Colleen Nelson and her team of lay leaders presented the synod with a request related to their ongoing involvement in a large housing collaborative that is working to address the issue of homelessness in La Grande. This is an excellent example of something churches don't always learn how to do—play a lead role in convening and facilitating community planning and initiatives to solve big problems. New Beginnings grant funds have helped them to convene monthly luncheon meetings, with professional facilitation (that will enhance their own capacity to facilitate), for representatives of 15 organizations committed to working together to find low income housing solutions for Union County. In addition to the 25 representatives at the table for these meetings, they have now extended engagement in the work to 34 other community leaders as well as holding a tenants' dinner to get input from clients about struggles and successes. This La Grande consortium is now applying for a major planning grant of \$100,000 from Oregon foundations and other funders. Sponsoring this kind of project has brought new vitality to the ministry of Zion. Adaptive change in congregations includes being not only the church *in* the neighborhood, but the church *for* the neighborhood. They have a new identity outside of the church and a new enthusiasm inside. And, as Pr. Nelson puts it, "it doesn't hurt that the work has resulted in new members!"

Other New Beginnings grant stories encompass a range of experiments, some that have led to new, different ideas than the original ones. There have been surprises, tough challenges, and learning—all of which are successes because we pursued experiments and allowed ourselves to be changed along the way, always looking at actions, outcomes, learning, and change to hear where the Spirit is calling us--

inside and outside of our church doors. Many thanks go to the participating churches and leaders, as well as to cohort developer, leader, and project mentor, Jayme Armstrong.

The Local Ministry Grant leaders, both lay and clergy, reflected at the last cohort gathering about what had surprised and/or disturbed them as they engaged with their communities on their projects.

Reflections included:

- We are leaning into the unknown.
- We are receiving Sustenance from fellow cohort members.
- There is growing wisdom to see the bigger picture.
- People from outside the church membership are invested.
- The learning AND the freedom to make mistakes.
- We never expected to be doing this work engaging the community – it leads to unexpected and vital places.
- Great ideas can still face resistance.
- Steps forward and backwards.
- The path is emerging.
- The learning is iterative.
- One thing leads to another and leads to another...

As Round One extends into Round Two in 2018

Together, we begin to ‘get more comfortable with the discomfort’ of work that can shift at many turns and that it’s NOT ‘status quo’. The work is not linear or time-bound, rather it is adaptive and seeks to support risk-taking and nimbleness in the challenging and changing environments we inhabit.

Experimentation combined with formation of cohorts of this nature take time to coalesce—participants have endorsed the value with their participation and enthusiasm. This work will dig deeper within the individual sites’ projects supported within the cohort. Indeed, natural partnerships are emerging. Round Two funding will encourage the sites and the cohort to offer support and accountability to this essential adaptive work. Through sharing stories synod-wide, this work benefits the wider community of Oregon Synod congregations.

In the second year of this grants initiative, the synod will live out the commitment to grant recipients that we will stick with them if they desire to deepen or broaden their work using what they have learned in the first year and are committed to continuing in the cohort work together. If there are additional resources available beyond this commitment to first round participants, the synod will expand the local ministry grants initiative synod-wide. In that event, information about this will go out to every congregation.

There are more new beginnings to come!

Jan Wierima
Executive Assistant to the Bishop