



## **Vice President's Report to the Oregon Synod Assembly 2020**

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

I must begin by saying thank you for trusting me to be the Vice President of the Oregon Synod. You elected me to this position at our 2019 Synod Assembly in May of last year. How things were different then. To say this has been an eventful first year would be an understatement.

Bishop Laurie, me and Secretary Deacon Sue Best were all elected as officers of the Oregon Synod in the same year. We all took office on August 1<sup>st</sup>. Three days later Bishop Laurie and I were in Milwaukee Wisconsin for the Churchwide Assembly, along with an amazing group of voting members that the Oregon Synod Assembly elected in 2018. It was an overwhelming experience to be in a room with about a thousand voting members from the 65 synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. There were many significant issues that were brought before the Assembly, and several resolutions were adopted. Presiding Bishop Eaton was elected for a second six year term. Deacon Sue Rothmeyer was elected to a six year term as Secretary of the ELCA.

The day prior to the start of the Assembly I was in meetings with the other 64 Vice Presidents from the various synods, including the Vice president of the ELCA. It is a truly diverse group, coming from many backgrounds and possessing much knowledge and love for this church. Since COVID-19 the synod Vice President's group meets on zoom once a month to discuss issues that are common to all 65 synods of the ELCA.

Along with the three new officers of the synod, there was also a completely new staff in the office of the Bishop. I have had to learn to write contracts, deal with Portico (it has made me have deep respect for all of the congregation administrators out there), and wrestle with budgets; all the mundane things that many of you probably do for a living, but were somewhat foreign to a structural engineer. But dealing with numbers and digging into details is one thing that I can do, and I hope that I have a pretty solid grasp on some of these things after 16 months into the position.

In October I was privileged to accompany Bishop Laurie, Bishop's Associates Pastor Melissa and Juan Carlos, and former Assistant to the Bishop Pastor Susan Kintner on what was billed as the "Whirlwind Tour". We were fortunate to meet many of you as we traveled around the state, and to see the diverse splendor of the natural beauty of Oregon. We experienced tremendous hospitality in all of the places we were able to visit. We only wish that we had been able to visit more of you.

In early February I traveled to Milton-Freewater with Bishop's Associate Juan Carlos where we met with the call committee from Christ the King. As we were driving out of Pendleton we commented on how high and fast the river seemed to be. That night on the news we saw that there had been extreme flooding in the area. Our hearts go out to all of you that were and still are affected by the floods.

Also in February I traveled to Vale, a small town a few miles west of Ontario, with Deacon Doctor Laura Gifford. Deacon Laura and I were both members of the Synod Authorized Ministry (SAM) board and made the trip to meet with the congregation of Grace Lutheran Church, which operates as a SAM authorized site. We spent the evening with the three authorized SAM lay presiders, getting to know about the congregation, how they as SAM's interacted with them, and how the congregation interacted with the community. They are a wonderful group of people, showing how a small congregation can survive and thrive under difficult circumstances.

As Synod Vice President, my primary duty is to chair the Synod Council. The Synod Council at the beginning of my term was made up of the Bishop, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, representatives of the 13 clusters, 5 at-large representatives, a young adult (age 18 – 30) and a youth (age 14 – 18). We have met several times in the last 16 months. In late January we had a three day retreat, where we got to know one another, spent a lot of time going over synod policies and funds, reviewed and reduced the 2020 budget that was passed by the 2019 Synod Assembly, and heard from a new ministry. We also decided to meet every two months, with two out of every three meetings being held as a zoom meeting. This was being done to reduce travel time for many of the members and to reduce the cost of Council meetings. Previously, the Council met four times a year in person for two day meetings in congregations around the state, where half or more of the members had to drive many hours to attend meetings. I guess you could say we were ahead of the curve, because COVID 19 had not hit us yet, and zoom meetings were considered new technology.

Since COVID-19 we have held all of our Council meetings by zoom, as many of our congregations also now do. Regardless of the pandemic, the life of the church continues on. There have been as many as 20 percent of our congregations in some part of the transition and call process since the beginning of my term. Call meetings and congregational meetings still need to take place. We have tried to provide guidance on how these meetings can take place. You can find a written guideline document on the synod website under resources for congregations. I have acted as the synod representative for at least three call meetings, and although each was slightly different in approach, I believe the process has worked well for the congregations and each ended in a successful call of a pastor.

Synod Council has acted on several administrative items this year. We have voted to merge two of our clusters, PLUM and Mt. Tabor. We reviewed and revised the Personnel Policies for synod employees. We also have reviewed the synod constitution, adopted several continuing resolutions, and are recommending several bylaw changes and Churchwide proposed provision changes that will be voted on by the Assembly, of which you are a part. We have spent time reviewing and preparing a budget for 2021, which you will also be asked to vote on at the Assembly. I ask that you review the materials that are being sent to you before you attend the Assembly so that you are prepared to either ask questions that you may have or to vote on the motions that will be put before you.

Earlier this year the Bishop hosted several zoom meetings with congregation Presidents and Vice Presidents, Treasurers, Congregation Administrators, and congregation Music Directors. Our goal is to continue these

groups. I have been asked to host the President and Vice President meetings. I have not yet scheduled the next meeting, but hope to do so soon after the Assembly. If there are particular topics that you would like to discuss please email me. If you were not able to join the first meeting, I do not have contact information for you. I would like to be able to communicate with all of you, so please contact me with your email address so that I can get you on the notification list. I am also willing to take your phone calls if you have questions, regardless of whether you belong in one of the above named groups or not. My email is [greg.shea.se.ret@gmail.com](mailto:greg.shea.se.ret@gmail.com). My phone number is 503-432-5654.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that you and your congregations are the Oregon Synod. The Bishop, her staff, and the Synod Council are all members of the synod, but we are not the synod. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is comprised of three expressions: congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization. We are all dependent on one another. None of us exists as an isolated entity. I invite you to stay connected with the synod and churchwide. Both have websites with an immense amount of information about social issues and positions that we as a church believe and support. One way to stay connected to the synod is to visit the synod website ([www.oregonsynod.org](http://www.oregonsynod.org)) and sign up to receive email announcements. When you leave Assembly, please share what happened and what was accomplished with the rest of your congregation.

May the peace of Christ be with you always.  
Stay safe and stay involved.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gregory F. Shea". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gregory F. Shea, Oregon Synod Vice President