

Dear People of God of the Southwest California Synod,

Saint Paul, wrote: *“But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ...”*

Philippians 3:14

The content of this report looks to the past, from the time between your 2019 Synod Assembly to the time when you would have had a joint Synod Assembly with the Pacifica Synod in the Spring of 2020, had there not been a global pandemic. The reports tell the story of the mission and ministry of this Synod during that time in your history. It is good to have this summary of the past. When it comes to our life together in Christ’s Church, it would not be good to “forget what lies behind” as Saint Paul was suggesting he did about times in his life before he met Jesus.

I was not part of the Southwest California Synod during those days. I came onto the Synod staff August 1, 2020 as your Interim Bishop, following your beloved episcopal shepherd, The Reverend Dr. Guy Erwin, who took a new call to serve United Lutheran Seminary in Pennsylvania. I am only able to look to the future with you since I was not part of your past. That is my role for a brief thirteen-month season of time. There are several primary functions I am called to fulfill in the Office of the Bishop of the Southwest California Synod during these months. It will be important to continue to work with the Synod staff as we carry out the day-to-day ministries which have been entrusted to us. Working side-by-side with the Synod Council, its Executive Committee, a specially-appointed Transition Team, the Conference Deans, and other committees and groups within the Synod, will comprise much of the daily work. Becoming involved with congregations in transition or those facing particular challenges, as well as a pastoral care for the rostered leaders, is all part of this ministry. Already in place with more to come are various teams that are preparing for a 2021 Synod Assembly, the elections of a new Bishop along with a large number of leadership positions within the Synod. These and others are critical components of the ministry description for this year. A primary goal of anyone serving in an interim position is to “prepare the way” and “set the stage” for the person who will follow in that position. Together you and I are called to create as smooth of a transition as possible for the incoming new Bishop and the other elected officers in the Southwest California Synod.

We have much work to do between now and then. We are being asked to do this during a unique time in our history as we continue to enjoy the blessings and gifts of God, but also as we face the difficulties, uncertainties, tensions and unrest of these current days. As the people of God and the Church of Christ Jesus, we are called to continue to proclaim the Good News in whatever ways are possible. Opportunities to care for and love our neighbor and all of God’s people will be always before us. Being beacons of the Light of Christ and glimmers of hope in these unpredictable times is our challenge and our privilege. To tell and retell the stories of the grace of God and Jesus’ love, his sacrificial death and his resurrection, will be at the core of our Lutheran identity and theology, and will always be primary in our Christian mission and

ministry.

The events of the past as you read in these reports now bring us to the present as we also look forward to what is ahead. The next days will be filled with waiting and watching, as well as with wonder and expectation. We will set goals, then make plans for their implementation. While we pause momentarily to remember and understand our history, we are now invited to be on a journey of new beginnings and celebrations of things to come. The commission for the followers of Jesus is faithful and courageous ministry as we walk with him into the promises of new life.

Thank you for the privilege and the honor of serving you in the office of the Bishop of this Synod during this interim and transitional time.

Living with you and faith, hope, and love,

The Rev. Murray D. Finck
Interim Bishop

Querido Pueblo de Dios del Sínodo del Suroeste de California,

San Pablo, escribió: *“prosigo a la meta, al premio del supremo llamamiento de Dios en Cristo Jesús...” Filipenses 3:14*

El contenido de este informe mira al pasado, desde el tiempo entre su Asamblea sinodal del 2019 hasta el momento en que se habría tenido la Asamblea sinodal conjunta con el Sínodo Pacífica en la primavera del 2020, si no hubiera habido una pandemia mundial. Los informes cuentan la historia de la misión y el ministerio de este Sínodo durante ese tiempo de su historia. Es muy bueno tener este resumen del pasado. Cuando se trata de nuestra vida juntos como la Iglesia de Cristo, no es bueno "olvidar lo que queda atrás" como sugería San Pablo, de los tiempos de su vida antes de conocer a Jesús.

No fui parte del Sínodo del Suroeste de California durante ese periodo. Llegué al personal del Sínodo el 1 de agosto de 2020 como su Obispo Interino, siguiendo a su amado pastor episcopal, el reverendo Dr. Guy Erwin, que recibió un nuevo llamado para servir en el Seminario Luterano Unido en Pensilvania. Sólo puedo mirar al futuro con ustedes ya que no era parte de su pasado. Ese es mi papel para una breve temporada de trece meses. Hay varias funciones principales que estoy llamado a cumplir en la Oficina del Obispo del Sínodo del Suroeste de California durante estos meses. Será importante seguir trabajando con el personal sinodal para llevar a cabo los ministerios diarios que se nos han confiado. Trabajar codo con codo con el Consejo Sinodal, su Comité Ejecutivo, un equipo de transición que ha sido especialmente designado para esa función, los decanos de las Conferencias y otros comités y grupos dentro del Sínodo, abarcará gran parte del trabajo diario. Involucrarme con las congregaciones en transición o con aquellas que enfrentan desafíos particulares, así como una atención pastoral para los líderes enlistados, es parte de este ministerio. Ya están en marcha varios equipos, y se añadirán otros, que se están preparando para la Asamblea sinodal del 2021, la elección de un nuevo obispo, así como con un gran número de posiciones de liderazgo dentro del Sínodo. Estos y otros son componentes críticos de la descripción del ministerio para este año. Un objetivo principal de cualquier persona que sirve en un puesto interino es "preparar el camino" y "establecer el escenario" para la persona que seguirá en esa posición. Juntos, ustedes y yo estamos llamados a crear una transición lo más suave posible para el nuevo obispo entrante y los demás oficiales electos en el Sínodo del Suroeste de California.

Entre tanto tenemos mucho trabajo que hacer. Se nos pide que hagamos esto durante un tiempo único de nuestra historia a medida que continuamos disfrutando de las bendiciones y los dones de Dios, pero también a medida que nos enfrentamos a las dificultades, incertidumbres, tensiones y disturbios de estos días actuales. Como pueblo de Dios y de la Iglesia de Cristo Jesús, estamos llamados a seguir proclamando la Buena Nueva de todas las formas que sean posibles. Las oportunidades de cuidar y amar al prójimo y a todo el pueblo de

Dios estarán siempre delante de nosotros. Ser faros de la Luz de Cristo y destellos de esperanza en estos tiempos impredecibles es nuestro desafío y nuestro privilegio. Contar y relatar las historias de la gracia de Dios y del amor de Jesús, su muerte sacrificial y su resurrección, será el núcleo de nuestra identidad y teología luterana, y siempre será primordial en nuestra misión y ministerio cristiano.

Los acontecimientos del pasado, tal como ustedes leen en estos informes, nos llevan ahora al presente, ya que también esperamos lo que está por venir. Los próximos días estarán llenos de espera y observación, así como de asombro y expectativa. Estableceremos metas y luego haremos planes para su implementación. Mientras nos detenemos momentáneamente para recordar y entender nuestra historia, ahora estamos invitados a estar en un viaje de nuevos comienzos y celebraciones de las cosas por venir. La comisión para los seguidores de Jesús es un ministerio fiel y valiente al caminar con él hacia las promesas de una nueva vida.

Gracias por el privilegio y el honor de servirles en la función de Obispo de este Sínodo durante este tiempo intermedio y de transición.

Viviendo contigo y la fe, la esperanza y el amor,

Rev. Murray D. Finck
Obispo Interino

**Synod Assembly 2020 Report - Assistant to the Bishop for Rostered Leadership,
Pastor Brenda Bos**

God's grace and peace to you. I entered into this call on December 1, 2019, in the last weeks of Pastor Reg Schultz-Akerson's tenure as your previous assistant to the bishop. Pastor Reg was able to spend many quality hours with me, sharing with me his current workload, briefing me on our congregations in transition, all the candidates we had in seminaries, and which pastors were seeking new calls. He had a wealth of knowledge and was able to share much of that with me before his retirement.

It goes without saying that this position had already become quite different from what any of us could have imagined at the end of 2019. Bishop Erwin's departure and Interim Bishop Finck's arrival would be news enough, but of course shutting down in-person worship experiences and day-to-day congregational life due to COVID-19 has been a historic endeavor.

I have supported many congregations as they became experts at livestreaming, Zoom council meetings and digital congregational meetings. **Call votes** needed to be held in creative ways. Trinity Lutheran in Manhattan Beach called Pastor Douglas Barclay in a parking lot congregational vote, with all votes cast on post-it notes placed outside car doors and tallied on the church office door. I continue to monitor congregational and council meetings via zoom. In fact, I have deeper relationships with some congregations in the northern part of our synod than I might have, due to digital means rather than having to wait until we could drive to be together. God continues to work in our midst.

I believe a key piece of my role is to care for our rostered leaders. During the shutdown, this included starting "**The Haven**," an online forum for deacons, pastors and lay leaders to meet for support, information sharing and special topics of interest. We have discussed racism, re-opening strategies, VBS and Holy Week options on this call. Interim Bishop Finck was introduced to several congregations via The Haven. As the shutdown began, we hosted "The Haven" twice a week. Now we meet a few times a month as needs arise.

Bishop Erwin and I wanted to offer a **digital weekly worship service** for congregations who did not have the capability of creating their own service after the shutdown. We started the third Sunday of Lent and imagined we would need to continue through Pentecost. At the time of this writing, we continue to produce a synod worship service for every Sunday. At the height of these productions, we utilized leaders and musicians from 8-10 congregations a week. Now, in the interest of sustainability, we feature a preacher who reads most of the prayers and lessons themselves, with music offered from local congregations. These services have brought much joy and comfort and have highlighted the diversity of our congregations.

Candidacy met in person in November, 2019 and January, 2020. Rev. Dr. Pamela Challis continues to serve as our chair. Pastors Tracy Williams, Hongsum Kim and Deacon Shannon Savage-Howie. Pastor Reg Schultz-Akerson and I both serve from this position. We entranced

Jade Ortez (TEEM) from Our Redeemer, Oxnard, *Pedro Zaragoza* (TEEM from another Christian tradition) from Angelica and *Carlos Cortez* from First, Inglewood. We endorsed *Libby Denton* from Salem Glendale and *Amanda Berg* from Ascension, Thousand Oaks. We approved *Dr. Cecilia Travick-Jackson* for Word and Service, *Rev. Esteban Salazar* (Iglesia Santa Cruz in Santa Maria) and *Maria Paiva* (St. John's Gardena) for Word and Sacrament.

We continue to pray for five of our candidates who continue in seminary and those about to go on internship this fall, *Libby Denton* to First, Torrance, *Amanda Berg* to Mt. Cross, Camarillo and *Cole McGlynn* to Shared Lutheran Ministry, a four-point parish in Fayette County, Texas. *Kyle Johnson* continues to serve his internship congregation in Wilmington, Illinois as an interim after the completion of his internship.

We rejoice in the **ordinations** of *Marc Mohr* (Church of the Foothills, Sylmar) and *Thomas Voelp* (Trinity, Santa Barbara). *Erik Rude* (Prince of Peace, Covina) is awaiting an ordination date.

Additional roster changes can be found in the chart accompanying this report.

First Call Theological Education continues to provide challenging topics and collegiality to our first call pastors. We held our August 2019 event at First in San Diego and learned a great deal about urban and homeless ministries. The February 2020 event was held at the Mercy Center in Burlingame, CA and leadership styles in conflict were discussed. We have eight first call pastors attending these events. All first call pastors and deacons attend six events in three years and are in attendance with pastors and deacons from throughout ELCA Region 2, the western United States.

Transitions We continue to have approximately thirty congregations in various states of transition, meaning they are in call process, are being served by interims or are using longterm pulpit supply to fulfill their worship services. As COVID shutdown lingers, we have an opportunity for preachers to serve multiple sites on a Sunday. Some congregations enjoy guest preaching from other parts of the country. While we pray for God's guidance for our fragile congregations in this time, we are seeing new ways God is moving in our world.

Conflict – Of course congregations are filled with people, and people are occasionally in conflict. I am often the first person called as a congregation needs assistance to deal with internal conflict. My role is to provide constitutional support, that is, helping a congregation find their constitutional power and responsibility in times of strength and challenge. As Pastor Reg requested in previous years, I encourage congregational presidents and pastors to face conflicts as soon as possible, using the resolution principles laid out in their constitutions and in Matthew 18.

I thank God for the diverse and vibrant ministries of the Southwest California Synod. God is moving in unique ways in each setting. I pray daily for your strength and witness. And I am honored to serve you in this way.

Synod Assembly Report 2020: Director for Evangelical Mission

Rev Dr. Marjorie Funk-Pihl

2020 has not been the year any of us hoped for; still, a quick look from Synod Assembly 2019 to when synod assembly 2020 would have been reveals that God is working in all things for good! Here are some of the places and ways God is moving right here, right now.

New Starts:

We have six new start ministries. They are at various places on the path from brand new to ready to become an official congregation of the ELCA. Each of these receives some funding from both the synod and churchwide expressions of the ELCA and is reviewed annually by the EOMT. Here's our group:

AdoreLA: Pastor Joseph Castenada Carrera serves a parallel development that involves AdoreLA and Hollywood Lutheran. AdoreLA's focus is on LGBTQIA Latinx and those who love them.

Another Level Ministries: Pastor Jonathan Hemphill serves both Another Level Ministries (ALM) and Ascension Lutheran LA. ALM focuses on younger African American people, Ascension is an established congregation of older African Americans.

Fruit of the Spirit: Pastor Hongsun Kim serves a Japanese and Korean focused ministry and is a parallel development with Pastor Dale Krumland at Christ the King, Torrance.

Glory Lutheran Church, Pastor Newman Chiu is a Mandarin speaking Chinese ministry hosted by First Lutheran in Torrance, with a large student ministry on the campus of USC. We were going to celebrate Glory becoming a recognized congregation of the ELCA at assembly 2019, but we'll have to do it in 2021. They will be taking all the necessary votes soon via Zoom.

Iglesia Santa Cruz: Pastor Esteban Salazar serves a Spanish speaking ministry in Santa Maria. He has completed the process to be received from another tradition, and will be officially received as soon as we can gather in person.

Redimidos, Oxnard, New Teem Candidate Pastor Jade Ortiz is developing our newest bilingual ministry as well as serving with Pastor Nancy Switzler at the Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer in Oxnard.

Strategic Ministries

This group of congregations are vital but not fully sustainable, therefore they are suffering the most during this pandemic season. The grants they receive from both the synod and the churchwide expressions of the ELCA are helping, but they are also working very hard in their own contexts.

Central Lutheran: Pastor Marsha Harris serves this bilingual congregation in Van Nuys. They partner with Hope of the Valley and others to provide food distribution as well as hot meals and other services to their neighbors. This is the first year that Central has received synod and churchwide funding to help support their ministry.

Fe Y Esperanza: Pastor Martha Moscoso Salazar pastors this congregation in Southgate. They lead a needed food distribution program as well as mental health support for their neighbors. This is Fe's first year to receive synod and churchwide funding to help support the ministry.

Pueblo de Dios: Pastor Samuel Nieva pastors this vital congregation in Compton. They show God's love for all worship, Bible Study and food distribution. They used to make tomas and papusas to sell to support their ministry, but Covid put a stop to that. Not to be deterred, they started making and selling facemasks! I hope you were inspired by Bishop Eaton to purchase and wear facemasks from Pueblo! If not – please do – contact Pastor Samuel Nieva!

St Matthew's North Hollywood: Pastor Stephanie Jaeger serves this hard working congregation. Their ministry to those experiencing homelessness is such a strong part of who they are as a congregation that they formed a 501C3 (NoHo Home Alliance) to help support it. This is the last year they will receive funding from both the synod and Churchwide.

Emmanuel, Bakersfield. Pastor Dawn Wilder serves this newly RIC congregation as they continue to discover ways to love their neighbors. Recently they began working inside the Mesa Verde ICE Processing Facility. This is the last year they will receive funding from both the synod and Churchwide.

[Synod Vitality Strategy:](#)

Twin Valley's Latinx Ministry: The Twin Valley's conference applied for and received a grant from Churchwide to begin a strategy among some of its congregations to develop a ministry with their Latinx/Hispanic neighbors. The strategy is a bit stalled by COVID-19, but will resume as soon as possible.

[Vitality workshops:](#)

This year I developed and began offering two single day workshops, both of them can be offered via Zoom.

Channeling Experience and Energy to Motivate Change uses Appreciative Inquiry as a change strategy. See our website for more info:

<https://www.socalsynod.org/category/congregational-vitality/>

Grieving Loss, Discerning Hope, Building Resilience: uses Appreciative Inquiry to move from people from loss to resilience. If you are interested in doing this workshop in your conference, or with another group of congregations- contact me!

Pandemic Blogging:

Somehow being isolated brings out the blogger in me – not very often though. The blogs are meant to help us recognize what God is up to in this time of pandemic. You can still find them, read and respond to them at

<https://www.socalsynod.org/category/congregational-vitality/>

EOMT:

Your Evangelical Outreach Mission Team is the best team ever: Joe Zheng, Zekiah Wright, Pr. Marsha Harris, Nolan Green, Todd Kolberg, Laura Wilcox, Valerie Shaw, Wanda Rosado. We annually review all New Starts and Strategic Ministries and recommend grant awards to the synod council for the next year. This year, because of the pandemic, we were able to award \$10,000 in grants from our EOMT fund for Food Distributio. Since we were awarded \$10,000 from the ELCA COVID-19 Appeal and \$35,000 from the Lutheran Disaster Relief-COVID-19 fund, we were able to fund our synod's COVID-19 Love Neighbor Grants. We gave away \$55,000 to 23 congregation. Without your gifts to the ELCA our cupboards would be bare. Thanks you for letting God work through you so freely!

MET:

The MET process is the first step as a congregation prepares to call a new pastor. This year King of Glory in Newbury Park and St Timothy in Lakewood have completed the process. The pandemic has slowed this process a bit, but Peace in Lompoc, Calvary in Morro Bay, Hope in Atascadero, Mt Carmel in San Luis Obispo are all on their way.

Closures:

Our new start ministry for Thai people in Hollywood closed in February. Pastor Golf Chutimapongrat returned to Thailand.

Living the Resurrection:

The third Learning Community was almost done with the 18-month Living the Resurrection process with the shut down shut us down. They soon rallied and figured out how to work with their neighbor partners in new ways. Adaptation and innovation are the keys to vitality. Lutheran Church of the Master, Lancaster, Resurrection in Redondo Beach and Lutheran Church of the Master, West LA have all learned to carry and use these keys!

LC4 in 2021: We are starting a fourth Learning Community in February of 2021. Recruiting will begin in the Fall. Two other synods will join us: Pacifica and Arkansas-Oklahoma. My goal is for each synod to have a team of leaders who know how to facilitate the Living the Resurrection process in their contexts. If you want to be part of that -- -contact me!!

I remain forever thankful that Bishop Erwin gave me the opportunity to be your DEM.

Yours in the mission of God through the ELCA in SWCA, Marj

Synod Assembly Report 2020 - Pastor James F. Phillips African Descent Coordinator

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Galatians 6:9

Fall/Winter

It's has been a busy time these last five weeks catching since before that I was on vacation. I am continuing to minister along two tracks: supporting individually the African Descent Pastors and supporting our African American congregations.

Individually, I have been reaching to provide pastoral care, advice on the call process, council conflicts and ELCA policy to mention a few. These relationships this past year have been significant and inspiring to me. The Ministry situations in which our pastors inherited are challenging to say the least. In spite the lack of human and financial resources all five of my colleagues continue to keep the faith and positively go forward loving, pushing, pulling, forgiving and leading for numerical growth and spiritual maturity within their individual congregations. I continue to be blessed by the individual gifts that my colleagues bring to the rostered leadership in our church.

Corporately, it has been one of my main goals to yoke our congregations more tightly together. To that end, we have been working to consistently do some joint major holiday and annual events. It is important for us to worship and fellowship together so we do not forget that we are all in this. So we meet bi-monthly to vent, pray, plan, and celebrate our past efforts. Our pastors go back to their individual congregations to recruit or assign lay people to different roles within joint program events.

We had been planning before Christmas to have a joint worship service in celebration for Black History month and honoring the late Bishop Nelson Trout. Time did not permit so it was cancelled. But we have rescheduled for June 14, joint Juneteenth worship service at Holy Redeemer, in Bellflower. Ash Wednesday morning Pastor Hemphill and I will be giving out ashes and offering pastoral care at My Friends House. Ash Wednesday evening worship service will have participating six of our Black congregations. Our recently retired Pastor Charlene Limenih will be the preacher. Last year we had our first "Seven Last Words" service in a long time which will be repeated this coming Good Friday, HT will host.

At our most recent meeting, we were sadden and hurt by the revelation of the racist incidents which occurred at CLU. We are prayerfully discussing how we can best support the African American students and positively assist CLU staff in the immediate after math but also proposing some preemptive teachable moments.

Staff meetings nearly every week not only bring information from our various synodical Ministries but also new ideas and the fellowship of encouragement. Staff meetings are proceeded by worship together which reinforces our dependence on Christ and allows us to be spirit led.

During Black history month I reminded our congregations that from struggle comes strength.

Spring

We discovered that this was still the time to be the Church: to exhibit faith, to serve, to worship and proclaim of love Christ. Before COVID-19, many folk were not only unchurched but we have a generation to whom God is largely unknown. We have adults that have never been to Sunday school, opened a Bible or inside a church. People need and are more willing to hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our pastors and our African Descent congregations are still witnessing to God's love and demonstrating their faith by love in action. It of course has not been easy during this pandemic, with meager finances and human resources; the restrictions of social distance and yet the proclaiming goes on.

I admire and I am encouraged by these pastors that go safely out to meet the needs of their membership and their particular communities at large. Pastor Keadle of St. Mark, Pastor John Miller at First in Carson, Pastor Jonathan Hemphill of Another Level and Ascension, Pastor Tracy Williams at Holy Redeemer, Pastor Rod Hines at Messiah, Pastor Ruth Siefert at Community, Johnel Barron at Olivet, and myself at Holy Trinity creatively offer their own individual worship on Sunday from Facebook live, YouTube and zoom. Pastor Charlene Limenih is retired but is still give pastoral care and bi-monthly worship virtually.

Don't get it twisted, these types of worship are not preferred. We wish to be together in our sanctuaries to lift up praise to God. However we are hearing from people close by and some far across the country that are watching our services on their home devices. We are reaching those who little attend or would never come into our churches.

Our food distribution stations at My friends' house Holy Trinity, Holy Redeemer, and Chapel of Peace continue to serve an even more community since the pandemic. Pastor Keadle generates virtual stuff to keep all of our youth to feel connected. We have been blessed to be one of the few preschools in L.A. to remain open but only for the children of the beloved essential workers, following the strict guidelines of state licensing.

We are not able to perform our traditional funerals and there have been long delays in burying the dead. But still our pastors are providing a sacred time and place for grief, comfort and hope. Most of our congregations are very vulnerable during this time of Covid-19. But our spiritual bandwidth is strong as God provides the will, the energy, and then faithfully blesses our efforts.

Yes-We are still here to reveal to the residents of L.A. Metro, the God in whom we worship. He Is Risen! He is Risen indeed!

The past five months with the shutdown from the pandemic have forced pastors and congregations to minister somewhat differently. Before Covid-19 many of our congregations were already challenged with meager financial and human resources. However, faith in God remains our most important asset. The Samaritan in the parable has been my recent guide of action to take. The Samaritan had compassion, then ministered to the wounded man at the side of road. The Samaritan used the resources that He possessed. This has been a team effort. Singularly and collectively we have played the role of the Samaritan for each other while also at times have been the wounded man by the side of the road.

I have always provided pastoral care in the form of prayer, counseling, and financial assistance to some of our pastors dealing with personal hardships but especially during this Covid -19 pandemic.

When called upon by a Pastor and/or the Bishop assisted as a mediator for a congregational conflict. Also I have provided "ELCA coaching" for a couple of individuals within the past 4 months.

Summer

Here is a summary of specific actions and events of the year.

Sharing of resources:

- a) Facilitate exchange between congregations with a high volume of specific food products with a congregation that has a low volume of specific food products for their food distribution centers.
- b) Sharing administrative resources between congregations such as ELCA council/congregational leadership materials, Sunday Worship, bulletin covers, Bible study curriculum and verbal instruction on Lutheran practices. (this has been helpful to some of our pastors that come from different denominational backgrounds and some TEEM program graduates.
- c) Offering joint confirmation classes.
- d) Sharing of information and secular resources that assist the homeless people of our communities. Also sharing a pool of licensed building repair contractors.
- e) Sharing technological "how to" for pre-recording and "live streaming" of our worship services.
- f) Sharing of the incorporation of African American theology and culture with Lutheran practices within a worship service.

Expended African Descent budget funds for emergency financial aid to some of our congregations' ministry programs in June. (Chapel of Peace, Another Level, Ascension, St. Mark and Olivet).

Meeting with the Black pastors by zoom monthly; also facilitating a zoom meeting with bishop Erwin in June.

Joint worship services: Ash Wednesday service with five of our congregations. Synod Pentecost worship; Juneteenth worship celebration.

Participated as one of the panelists for LA Metro Conference's "Black Lives Matter" panel discussion in July.

Weekly reporting to Bishop Erwin and Pastor Bos; Supporting other synod staff members and sharing/consultation when appropriate.

Participated as part of a team in Region 2 interviews of pastors seeking calls in July.

Attendance at conference meetings, special anniversaries/programs and some secular organizational meetings representing Southwest California Synod. (such as the city's LA Metro; Green Dot schools; Wayfinder Family Services)

Keep the Faith,

Pastor James Phillips

Report of Maria Paiva, Latinx Ministries Coordinator - Assembly Report 2020

“The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God in whom I take refuge, my shield, and horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” Psalm 18:2

God is faithful and sustains us in all circumstances and I think that we are all experiencing that grace in a special way at this time of our lives.

We have 11 ministries that welcome the Latinx population by providing worship in Spanish: Grace, Bell; Faith, Canoga Park; Pueblo de Dios, Compton; Saint John, Gardena; First, Inglewood; Angelica, Los Angeles; Redimidos, Oxnard; Adore, San Fernando Valley/Hollywood; Santa Cruz, Santa Maria; Fe y Esperanza, South Gate; Central, Van Nuys. All of our ministries accompany our community by providing worship opportunities, faith formation programs, hot meals, food bags, clothing distribution, immigration assistance, after school programs, English as a second language classes, youth programs, support groups (health and mental health), parish nurses, music and art classes, camping, and other ministries.

Several of our ministries have participated in the 2019-2020 offering of Letters to Congress sponsored by Bread for the World, a letter-writing campaign to improve the lives of millions experiencing hunger and malnutrition in the U.S. and abroad. Others are also involved with Matthew 25, CLUE and AMMPARO standing with our vulnerable immigrant communities, advocating for DACA and persons seeking refugee status, and working to stop unjust deportations. Many of our pastors and members participated in different marches in our cities in solidarity with the violence against our black siblings who are being killed and are committed to educate ourselves and work to end racism in our church and society.

Several women from our Latinx congregations attended the Southwest California Synod WELCA Renewal event, October 12 at California Lutheran University and the Winter Gathering on March 7 at Olivet Lutheran Church. Efforts will continue to promote more participation of Latinx women in the women’s organization of our Synod.

On October 18, our Synod hosted the first Latinx Theological Day of Learning at our Synod with the participation of pastors from the three Synods in California. Dr. Javier Goitia, Program Director for Theological Formation, Seminaries and Lay Schools in the Domestic Mission unit of the ELCA was the presenter. It was a great day of learning and discussion of Lutheran theology in Spanish. We hope to continue to have events like this at least twice a year.

I am glad to report that we have two Latinx candidates that are in the TEEM process: Jade Mohorko Ortiz, member of Redeemer Lutheran, Oxnard; and Carlos Cortez, member of First, Inglewood.

During the pandemic, our congregations are walking with our community that have been affected in many ways. Most of our congregations had several members suffering with the coronavirus and several had died. Spiritual and material support is being provided to members

and people in the community. Congregations like Fe y Esperanza; Santa Cruz; Pueblo de Dios and First, Inglewood and Saint John, Gardena increased their food distribution programs as well as hot meals. Worship services, support groups and bible studies are being shared using social media and others have outdoor services. We need to recognize the commitment of the pastors and volunteers who put their own safety at risk to serve with love to our community. Also, thanks to the ELCA, Lutheran Disaster Response and our own Synod, several of our ministries applied and received funds to help with food distribution programs and ministry in general. Most of our congregations also used the time that the sanctuaries were “closed” to deep clean, paint and renovate our buildings with many volunteers.

Sustainability of our ministries continue to be a challenge in most of our ministries as most of our members struggle to provide for the basic needs of their families. Many of our congregations supplemented their offerings with food sales in our own congregations or in other congregations, but during the pandemic all those programs were discontinued.

We trust that God will continue to provide for all the needs of our ministries as we continue to be church together for the sake of the world!

Synod Youth Director Report 2019-2020

In September 2019, I took on the role of Synod Youth Director with the following goals:

- to give increased attention to racial equity in our synod youth ministries
- to strengthen connections between youth ministries in our synod
- to continue connecting youth ministries in our synod to opportunities in the wider ELCA

I began by doing **youth-ministry-focused 1:1 meetings with youth workers, ministers, and pastors in most of our 9 conferences**. I managed to connect with nearly all of our 9 conferences, from the urban ministry of my home LA Metro conference to the suburban ministry of the Conejo Valley to the rural ministry of Tehachapi Conference. I also talked with our Synod's Latino Strategy Director and African Descent Strategy Director about how to most effectively support and reach out to their respective communities. I listened to what youth ministry was like in all of these contexts, and asked how the synod could be supportive.

I also tried to find at least **one youth worker in each conference who could serve as a point person for that conference**, and started to think about how we could build a team for synod youth ministry organizing - **perhaps the future is not one synod youth director, but a team**, with representation across communities. These were powerful conversations, and I'm grateful for them.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

In late spring, we started the train moving again. Every Friday in May, and monthly after that, I hosted **Zoom calls for youth workers**, to build connections, share information, and brainstorm collaboration. At some point, these Friday calls have included representation from nearly all of our 9 conferences, representation from all 3 California synods, and at least 1 ecumenical representative. Out of these Zoom calls, some collaboration has already borne fruit: a team of youth workers came together to plan and produce a **Synod Baccalaureate service celebrating graduates of all ages** in June.

After George Floyd was killed and protests erupted, we turned our attention even more intentionally to reckoning with racial justice. We shared resources on the Friday Zoom calls with adults, for use in their own youth groups. And we **hosted two synod-wide conversations on race, for youth, by youth** - one for BIPOC youth sponsored by New City Parish, and one for youth of all backgrounds throughout the synod. We are hoping to follow this up with some additional trainings and conversations offered for youth and adults in the coming months.

In late summer, we got news that the 2021 ELCA Youth Gathering - in Minneapolis - had been postponed until 2022. This is good news on a number of levels, not least because it will give us a longer runway to organize and prepare. **I hope we can send our most diverse group of youth ever to the 2022 Youth Gathering**. We've got work to do - let's get to it.

Respectfully submitted,

Pastor Matt Keadle
Synod Youth Director