

Synod Assembly Report from the Assistant to the Bishop for Leadership and Authentic Diversity, the Reverend Toni Castañeda Carrera, MPP

June 2022

Dearest God of All Creation, grow within us the will and boldness to love our neighbors loudly, create verdant connections between the people of our congregations and the people of their neighborhoods, send us out into the world accompanied by the Holy Spirit to proclaim your Gospel message of unconditional peace and relationship. Bless us to hold our cultures, liturgies, and traditions respectfully but lightly, so you can hold us tightly in your ever-changing church. Amen.

Candidacy

- On May 17, the SWCA Synod's Candidacy Chair, Reverend Tracy Williams, the Regional Candidacy Manager, Dr. Deacon Laura Gifford, and Reverend Toni Castañeda Carrera held a Candidacy Cultivation Gathering to support the vocational discernment of diverse and potential candidates for rostered leadership. The intention was to forge relationships with interested people needed to lead the church ten years from now.
- Partnered with Pacifica Synod to coordinate the Combined Candidacy Committee and oversee candidate's progress through candidacy.
- Supported four candidates on internship, including Laura Salazar, Rebekah Nelson, Diana Washington and Nichole D'Onofrio.
- Held three sessions of Zoom office hours for all seminarians to inquire about the candidacy process, share their experience, and address any issues.
- Held three support and check-in sessions with seminarians on internship or in contextual learning with congregations.
- Served on selection committee for churchwide's Fund for Leaders scholarship process, providing a lens of diversity and accountability.
- Supported two seminarians who struggled academically to create an intervention plan in coordination with the Candidacy Chair.

First Call Theological Education

- Contributed to the Region 2 First Call structure to start an andragogy process focusing on goal setting, development of life-long learning practices, and grounding content in the expressed needs of our first call candidates.
- Met with First Call Pastors to set goals and identify needs, contributing to synodical regional curriculum design.
- Hosted the first synodical first call gathering at Serra Retreat Center.
- Participated with other Assistants to the Bishop for First Call as FCTE was re-evaluated and developed further to meet current needs and increase capacity.

Mobility

- Guided eight call committees through initial transition period to complete Ministry Site Profiles and provided candidates (Rostered Minister Profiles) to ten congregations.
- Collaborated with lay leadership to identify and arrange for more than ten interim solutions, including all nine conferences.
- Launched the synod's Transition Coach project to provide thorough and holistic interim support for congregations and develop benchmarks, working with seven astounding coaches who also are partners in piloting the new strategies.
- Gathered Interim Pastors twice to connect, share better practices and difficulties, and review Transition Coach Benchmarks for weekly oversight.
- Held one interim ministry recruitment event to increase synod's pool of interested candidates and to remediate pastor shortage.
- Provided pastoral support to many rostered leaders who are discerning vocation and call to ministry, including support in refining Rostered Leaders Profiles.
- Met with dozens of rostered leaders throughout the national church to discuss synod's open Ministry Site Profiles and identify fit for congregation.

Authentic Diversity

- Co-led a book study on *Rediscovering the White Church* by David W. Swanson with more than 25 leaders throughout the synod.
- Collaborated with the Regional Candidacy Manager and churchwide to review the process of transcript interpretation and distribution of credits for prior education with a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens.
- Collaborated with Bishop Bos to begin engaging the Executive Committee and Synod Council in diversity conversations and practice-building.
- Provided pastoral care to rostered leaders struggling with diversity-related conflict and partnered to create innovative and care-centered solutions to move forward.
- Supported and advised Bishop Bos and synod team with diversity issues and long-term interventions with ethnic-specific congregations and leaders.
- Hosted a series of ethnic-specific meetings for rostered leaders and now rethinking strategies to enhance support for rostered leaders and congregations.
- Served on national Strategy Team for Authentic Diversity Task.

Goals

- Create collection and support systems to facilitate each congregation to submit an annual Authentic Diversity goal.
- By conference, support Deans and local leaders to review congregational wellness and support leaders in execution of dialogue and strategies.
- Create access for lay and rostered innovators throughout the synod to experiment with different ministry and vitality development models.

Deep and sincere thanks for the companionship of the synod in my life, transition, work and the explorative journey forward. Let's keep going.