



CENTRAL STATES SYNOD MINISTRY PROFILE



Voting members at Synod Assembly 2024 began preparing for the Bishop's election in 2025 by listening to the Holy Spirit and spending time in discernment with questions about the needs of the synod, its congregations, and its communities.

The discernment continued across the synod, with additional sessions hosted by the Discernment Committee via Zoom in July and August, and individual comments submitted online. The thoughts of more than 250 clergy and lay members were received through these means. Independently, the Synod Council considered the synod's mission priorities and the critical skills needed by the incoming Bishop. Their conclusions were consistent with those shared with the Discernment Committee, with some minor additions that are identified in this document.

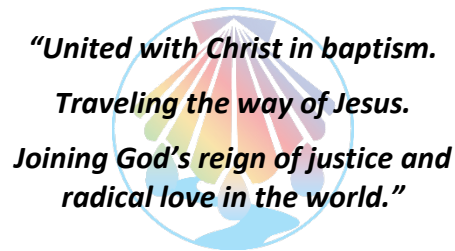
The Committee realizes that the views expressed in this document reflect a limited share of the perspectives and experiences throughout the synod. However, considering the thoughtful responses and engagement offered at these sessions, the Committee compiled this Synod Profile to provide a window into how the Holy Spirit is moving through the people of the Central States. The profile begins with our purpose and giftedness, our vision for mission, and identifies challenges to living out that vision. It continues with a description of how we are currently organized for mission and concludes with a picture of the synod's future.

We encourage you to use this profile to become better acquainted with what God is up to in the Central States Synod and what God is calling us to do together for God's preferred and promised future.

God's work. Our hands.

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Part One: Our Purpose and Giftedness



Congregations interpret this mission statement, adopted in 2021, to mean that we are here to proclaim the Gospel and serve families, the unchurched, the marginalized, immigrants, and others in our local communities. Our communities are both urban and rural, and our congregations are both large and small. Each congregation must be equipped to minister to the needs in its local community.

The Central States Synod's unique gifts for fulfilling its purpose include:

- Knowledge of the Gospel and excitement to share it within our communities;
- Being located in specific communities because we understand where God's love is needed, and we can be God in that place;
- Having facilities that can be available for community use; and
- Creativity which has led to a variety of ministries that spread the Gospel and God's love for others.

The obstacles to completing the work God calls us to do are:

- An inability to develop ways to "do" church differently or collaborate with each other even though we are willing to do so;
- Overcoming fear of change or, alternatively, a self-belief that we are incapable of change;
- Scarce resources which include fewer rostered leaders, decreasing membership, and decreasing financial resources; and
- An inability to share knowledge or stories of successful ministry that could promote further proclamation of the Gospel and sharing of God's love in our communities.

Part Two: How we organize for Mission



Current Synod Staff

- Bishop - Rev. Susan Candea
- Rev. David Whetter, Assistant to the Bishop (full-time)
- Rev. Donna Simon, Director of Evangelical Mission (half-time)
- Rev. Aimee Appell, Director of Evangelical Mission (half-time)
- Rev. Adam Wutka, Director of Lay Ministries (part-time, monthly stipend)
- Rich Gates, Synod Administrator (full-time)
- Tim Anderson, Synod Communications Director (full-time)
- Michelle Goodwin, Bookkeeper (part-time)

Congregations describe the Office of Bishop as supporting congregational growth and ministry by:

- Providing vision for the church's future ministry;
- Equipping congregational leadership (both rostered and lay) to proclaim the Gospel, identify God's mission for their congregations, minister in their communities, and encourage each other's faith formation;
- Assisting in situations that require conflict resolution skills;
- Guiding congregations through pastoral transitions and the call process; and
- Providing education on theology, lay leadership development, and financial sustainability.

The Central States Synod's operating budget is primarily funded by Mission Support from congregations. In addition, the ELCA funds two part-time Director for Evangelical Mission positions, and external grants fund various specific programs.

The synod currently maintains relationships with and provides ministry through a wide variety of entities identified on this [information page](#). Additional information can be found on each entity's website.

Challenges at the Synod Level - Six months after Bishop Candea's October 2019 installation, the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. This delayed the synod's ability to focus on its mission of building inclusion within the synod, encouraging women in ministry, and becoming a Reconciling in Christ Synod.

Conferences - Five geographic conferences connect similar area congregations for mission and support. Congregations prefer a structure that supports communication among congregations with similar missions (regardless of geography) and enhances ministry to local communities.

This may be accomplished in various ways such as:

- Decentralizing responsibilities to rely on the autonomy of local congregations. This could also include identifying congregational partners who share similar missions regardless of whether they are geographically close.

- Continuing the current structure with a clear delineation of duties between specific synod staff and the Deans.
- Housing synod staff in various geographic locales.
- Relying on or delegating more to the Deans.
- Relying more on technology to enhance communication between the synod and congregations or among congregations with similar missions or challenges.
- Relying more on Synod Council for leadership because it, by definition, is diverse both demographically and geographically.

Challenges at the Conference Level - Scarce resources may hinder the effectiveness of each proposed structure. Financial resources may not support adding synod staff, absorbing travel costs, or investing in appropriate technology for remote communication. There is also a scarcity of Rostered Leaders and, despite their willingness to accept additional synod leadership responsibilities, their schedules may not permit them to do so.

Snapshot of Congregations

- 153 congregations across Missouri (58) and Kansas (95), a majority of which are in rural or semi-rural areas.
- Concentrations of congregations in St. Louis and Kansas City where movement from inner city to suburban areas have left significant numbers of congregations in areas of declining population.
- 17 of the synod's 153 congregations either cannot support full-time Rostered Leadership or are currently served by alternative means (i.e., Synod Authorized Ministers, Parish Ministry Associates, or Supply Pastors).
- 76 of the synod's 153 congregations reported total annual receipts of less than \$200,000.

Challenges Facing Congregations - The pandemic significantly decreased in-person worship attendance and, consequently, financial resources for congregations and the Central States Synod. Neither attendance nor financial support have fully recovered, and hybrid remote/in-person worship has been only sporadically successful.

A significant cultural trend that has also impacted congregations is the increasingly strident public discourse which values conflict more than unity. This has entered congregational conversations as people fear discussions of mission and justice will be interpreted as "politics" instead of a Gospel-oriented call.

Over the next six years, congregations must embrace flexibility on how to "do" church (e.g., with or without dedicated buildings, various worship styles, and opportunities), and develop sustainable funding models.

Congregations must boldly and widely proclaim the free grace of the Gospel and model how to live in Christian harmony with those who may hold alternative views.

Part Three: God's Future for the Central States Synod



The top three mission priorities identified for the Central States Synod during the next Bishop's tenure:

- Embracing diversity in all of God's creation - both welcoming people in and reaching out. This includes reaching out to the unchurched, those in all demographics, and our local communities;
- Encouraging and equipping congregations to adapt to the fact that church will look different as congregations become more diverse and, as a result, may require different worship styles and locations; and
- Developing and empowering lay people to minister as the number of Seminary-trained leaders decreases.

Although implicitly included in these three mission priorities, the Synod Council explicitly noted a need to work for justice and inclusion, to communicate the Gospel where "popular Christianity" doesn't live out the love of Christ, and to reconcile with those who have been hurt by the organized church.

The critical skills needed by the incoming Bishop to support the Central States Synod in fulfilling its mission are:

- Gospel-oriented and able to clearly proclaim the Gospel;
- Excellent interpersonal skills including a calm disposition, curiosity, a sense of humor, and humility;
- Ability to recognize and develop others' spiritual gifts (whether rostered leaders, lay leaders, or staff) and use them effectively;
- Being a flexible, bold visionary in following the Holy Spirit's call;
- Able to successfully handle tense situations and resolve conflict in a constructive way;
- Experience in a broad range of ministry settings (and, as the Synod Council observed, this includes being skilled in supporting both struggling and new communities); and
- Strong administrative skills.

The Central States Synod is most excited about:

- Becoming more inclusive by, for example, building more diversity in rostered leadership and congregational membership.
- Building on the 2024 decision to become a Reconciling in Christ Synod.
- Becoming bolder in proclaiming the Gospel to provide unity and healing in these divisive times; and
- Learning how to walk together with each other, our ecumenical partners, and local community leaders and service agencies.

In Christ,

Bishop Election Discernment Team - Cathy Hohl, Chairperson

Central States Synod Council - Nancy Nagel, Vice President