

## Rostered Leaders and Lay Staff Learn and Worship about Transition, Callings

As Christians we talk a lot about our “callings” – where God wants us to be and what God wants us to be doing. This year’s Southeastern Minnesota Synod Fall Theological Conference – an annual continuing education event for rostered leaders, lay staff, spouses, and anyone else interested in worship, fellowship, and learning – was all about where we are and what we should be doing.

### *Times of Transition*

Part of the calling to ministry includes dealing with change and transition. This year’s speaker, Dr. Craig Satterlee, associate professor at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, spoke on this part of the calling. Specifically, he spoke on understanding change and transition, preparing sermons in times of congregational transition, and how we listen in times of congregational transition. Based on the assertion that all change is neutral and that how we respond to it determines whether it is good or bad, he spoke on the difficult task of accompanying a congregation through a transition in a way that manifests God’s unconditional love and justice for all. The pastor or other leader starts by trying to understand the many layers of the transition, including any possible underlying transitions in addition to the obvious one and expectations of how to deal with the transition based on how transitions were handled in the past. Through understanding, pastors can move forward boldly into preaching effectively during the time of transition. He emphasized the importance of careful sermon preparation, but also being flexible and aware in order to change based on the rapidly changing details of the situation. Satterlee wrapped up his time at the Theological Conference with a session on listening, which is important throughout the process of transition, giving special attention to all the many layers and details to be aware of and that everyone needs to be listened to, not just the loudest or the one saying the best things.

Those who were not able to attend this year’s Theological conference can read more from Satterlee on times of congregational change in his book *When God Speaks Through Change: Preaching in Times of Congregational Transition*.



*Bishop April Larson, La Crosse Area Synod, welcomed the participants to La Crosse.*

### *Worship*

A central part of every Theological Conference is the worship. Especially for pastors and other worship leaders, worship at Theological Conference is a time for them to simply worship without having to plan, prepare, or lead.

Rev. Linda Gunderson was initiated into her new role as synod minister by preaching at worship on Sunday evening and through her installation Tuesday morning. In her sermon, she spoke of the moments in life and in ministry when God steps in, the moments we get stuck in and can’t get out on our own.

Dr. Craig Satterlee complimented his presentations with his sermon on Monday morning, preaching on our inheritance in Christ. This inheritance, he preached, includes the ones who came before us in “the ways God speaks and acts and works through them” as well as the ones who come after us, “the ones who hear about the word from us.” With us always “at the crossroads...thanking God for ones who have gone before and asking blessing for those who come after,” the present is always inherently a transition and we are always in the midst of it.

Worship concluded the conference on Tuesday as synod staff and conference deans assisted with the service. The service began with Rev. Linda Gunderson’s installation and the celebration of renewing of ordination and commissioning vows. In Bishop Harold Usgaard’s sermon, he clarified what exactly it meant to be called as a leader in the church. Those calls are about, “Responsibility, commitment, caring for those in one’s charge.” Despite many challenges in trying to live out that call, hope comes in the Old Testament reading, “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep...says the Lord God. (Ezekiel 34:15). We are “partners in ministry” and have the promise that, just as leaders are called to “Responsibility, commitment, caring for those in one’s charge,” so has God promised to do the same for us.

### **Mark Your Calendar**

Next year’s Theological Conference will be November 2-4. The speaker will be Rev. Susan Briehl, Affiliative Distinguished Professor for the Art of Ministry at Wartburg Seminary. Location is yet to be announced.