

UNITY: July 2026 Newsletter - Council / Call Team Update, Author Carole Syse

Headline: UNITY Lutheran Church: Looking to the Future

Anniversaries are a time to reflect and celebrate on what makes us who we are and look forward – with optimism and faith – as to who we can become. As summer unfolds, UNITY marks our tenth anniversary of joining Christ the King and Cross of Life congregations as one. It is a journey that is joy-filled and faith-filled. What we take for granted today took root in the seed of an idea more than a decade ago of how we could be stronger together. And we have made that vision real.

As I step in to the role of president of our UNITY Council, I would like to share more about my family. My history with UNITY and Cross of Life dates back more than three decades. It has been an honor for my husband and me to watch our children grow up in this congregation and be active in Sunday School, Confirmation, and Youth Group. Among my volunteer roles, I had the honor of serving on Call Teams for Pr. John Horner-Ibler and Pr. Josh Evans. In the early 2000's, I was Youth Director both at Cross of Life (my first day of ministry was 9/11/2001) and the Greater Milwaukee Synod office. I have always admired how UNITY adapts and grows in ways both expected and unexpected – and always led by the Spirit.

Please know things are humming at UNITY this summer! We “do” summers well!

- A high-energy week of Vacation Bible School
- Our 10 Year Anniversary Celebration
- ECRT road trip for Confirmation Youth
- Bible camp
- High school service trip to Appalachia
- August's trip to El Salvador
- Concerts at the Backyard Pavilion at CTK
- AND - all our “usual” services, ABC Sunday School, adult group meet-ups and more.

Keep showing up! All of you make UNITY who we are!

Like all healthy congregations, our Council takes to heart the value of stepping back to consider who we are and how we continue to evolve as a vibrant faith community. As we position UNITY for the future, our Council, under Phil Roemaat's leadership, recently voted unanimously to explore the evolution of our pastoral model. We recognize this may come as a surprise to many, and we will share more about the “why” here. As I learned more about this, there is great appreciation in how the Council has taken this approach after thoughtful, prayer-filled, and Spirit-led consideration.

What is happening?

When we say our “pastoral model,” we mean our organizational structure – the roles and responsibilities of individual pastors and staff and how they relate to each other and to the congregation.

Why now? Over the last few years, UNITY has adapted through multiple transitions. We have experienced the retirement of Pr. John Horner-Ibler, and Pr. Muriel Otto relocating close to her family in Washington. There have also been changes in Staff in this same season. We have been blessed by the continuity Pr. Sherrie Lorbeck has provided. We are also grateful the Synod provided Pr. Eric Silberschmidt as a transition pastor as we began our call process. Thanks to the efforts of the Call Team, we have been fortunate to welcome Pr. Justin Kierzek as a full-time pastor.

The reality is every organization experiences challenges in bringing new groups of leaders together, and it has not been as smooth as we had hoped. Each pastor came with different interpretations and expectations about what it means to work in a co-pastor model. Unfortunately, misalignment and misunderstandings became more apparent. To help facilitate a more cohesive working relationship, Phil Roemaat, as outgoing Council president, and our HR Team of Mark Krause and Nicki Shady became more actively involved to mediate and help define a path forward.

It became increasingly clear to Council that UNITY would benefit in a “pause” of the Call Process to assess our model. There is a shared sense that what had worked well in the past may need to evolve for our Pastors, Staff, and the congregation going forward.

How we will move forward

An **Advisory Team** has been formed to lead the process to define our pastoral model and gather data. It includes Phil (mentor as outgoing Council President); Bert Perrizo (Council Vice President); Mark and Nicki of our HR Team; and me (incoming Council President). The Team is committed to serve on behalf of the best interest of you, our congregation, collaborating closely with the Council and the Call Team.

We believe healthy congregations have the courage to choose to evolve and adapt. We trust the Spirit to guide us as we shape a promising future. We are committed to be prayerful and thoughtful in our approach. It also means we will **go slow to go fast**.

The Council has informed the Greater Milwaukee ELCA Synod of our plans. The Synod respects our leadership in this process. We are grateful the Synod team has offered insights, resources, and support from the best practice perspective on what congregations experience in transition.

Opportune time

This is an opportune time of exploration. UNITY is in a position of strength with an active, involved, multi-generational membership, while prayerfully on this journey together.

We will continue the Call Process for a third pastor following a time of discernment as to the needs of UNITY for today and into the future. While Pr. Eric is with us as a transition pastor during his call, we know he is only with us for the near term. We want to clearly define the pastoral model to ensure our Pastors, Staff and the congregation understand the roles and responsibilities to continue to grow this ministry faithfully.

In addition, we have upcoming staff retirements in the Fall. We have been blessed by the dedicated service of Michelle Aprahamian as Director of Christian Education and Lynn Key as Director of Music Ministry. Both Michelle and Lynn have shared that they will retire later this year. As we begin to recruit for these roles, we want to be clear about staff responsibilities, aligning our Pastors and Staff for success.

What do we need from you?

We appreciate UNITY is blessed by an involved and caring congregation. During this time, we ask for your perspective, patience, and prayers.

The Advisory Team is developing a plan, approach, and timeline. In recent weeks, we have gathered input from our Pastors and Staff about what is working well and where there may be confusion, overlap, or disconnects. Their feedback has been thoughtful, caring, and focused on UNITY's well-being. Please be assured that we will also invite your feedback on what you value and what is working well, as well as what could be improved.

We ask for your patience – the time to ***“go slow so we can go fast”*** – thoughtfully and prayerfully shaping our future. Stay tuned for regular updates, including bulletin announcements, emails, and live listening sessions to be scheduled as needed. Please reach out to a member of the Advisory Team with thoughts or questions.

Carole Syse: carolesyse@gmail.com

Bert Perrizo: bert.perrizo@gmail.com

Mark Krause: mark13krause@gmail.com

Nicki Shady: itsnix118@outlook.com

For now, please pray for the Spirit to guide our work. We are confident the future provides a place of renewed strength and vibrancy. We are the Church and we continue to be Jesus' hands and feet as we move forward together.