



*"Saved by grace, assembled by faith, we journey to make Christ known"*

## The West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod

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It is the hope and intention of Synod Council and its executive committee that all voting members come to the Synod Assembly well-informed and prepared for the issues that may be brought before them.

The purpose of this letter is to serve as a catalyst for discussion prior to this year's assembly. My hope is that this letter gives your leadership and voting members a few days to think, discuss, and pray about the future of the West Virginia – Western Maryland Synod.

Expenses have, as we had predicted, exceeded all revenue, from mission support and all other sources. There continues to be a trend of decreasing annual mission support to the Synod from its many churches. Deficit spending is not sustainable, and at our current bleed-rate, we should expect to see this come to a head within 10 years. If mission support continues to decline exponentially, we should expect it even sooner.

It is my hope that the assembly will rise to a discussion around spending. The finance committee has pared back spending as far as we can, while maintaining what past Synod Assemblies have lifted up as our values and goals. In order to cut any further, there needs to be clear direction from the Synod Assembly as to where we are changing our compass in order to rein in spending. For example, past Synod Assemblies have vocalized putting value on supporting education, seminarians, ecumenical relations, full-time ministry of the Bishop, full-time office administration, support for social services, support for youth, etc. If revenues continue to decline, and we want to keep the Synod, something, and possibly multiple things, will have to be scaled back, or dispensed entirely. This decision needs to come from the Assembly as a whole, and this letter serves as your prompt to be prepared for that discussion.

Of course, there are other options: if there are ideas for increasing revenues, we can, and should, pursue them. However, if we put all of our hope in that basket, and it falls through as it has in the past, we will be worse off for having stalled. We can also do nothing – that's always an option. If your congregational leadership feels that there is no benefit in being a member of this Synod in particular, then your leadership may choose to hunker down and ride it out. It should be noted that losing the Synod would likely mean Synodical realignment, splitting up our many churches, but it *does not* mean an end to Word and Sacrament ministry in your community – and this is the ultimate church function we need to protect. To be a Synod means to 'walk together;' if there is no value in the churches of WV-WMD walking together, then there is no value in defending the Synod. The promise of the Gospel is not that we do not have to face temporal death, but that we do not have to fear it. We do not fear it because our hope is in resurrection through Christ Jesus. We are His church, and His church is the Church Triumphant, regardless of the earthly structure it does or does not take.

Wherever we go, and whatever we choose, we must choose it together, and as a Synod, we must go together.

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*Our vision as Lutherans is to be Christ-like servants of hospitality sent to share God's gift of grace in Jesus Christ in the community of Appalachia.*