



Southwestern Minnesota Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

## Annual Report for 2025

Bishop Dee Pederson



# Rooted in Redwood Flowing into the Future – Bringing Healing and Hope

[www.swmnelca.org/rooted-in-redwood](http://www.swmnelca.org/rooted-in-redwood)

Perhaps you recognize this as the focus for our Capital Appeal, and that's just fine! Although this report is not an "ask" this focus describes so well who we are, what we do, and why we do these ministries. They serve as a great summary of our ministries in 2025.

### **Rooted in Redwood**

*"Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality."* – Romans 12:12-13

This is who we are: rooted in Redwood. Since 1989, Redwood Falls has served not only as the geographic center of synod ministries, but also the theological grounding for this Synod. We praise our Creator God who calls us to care for the land - God's good creation - 24/7/365. Tied to the land, our people know what it means to walk by faith and live in grace. For more than 150 years, the congregations of this area have been proclaiming the good news of grace alone, word alone, faith alone—soli Deo gloria - and sending out disciples of Jesus Christ to live out their baptism in their congregations and in their daily life. We give thanks for the strong foundation of faith and theology that has shaped who we are as a synod.

### **Who are we today? Created in the image of God, children of God, we are:**

223 Congregations, including 1 strategic ministry and 2 ministry developments

94,00 Baptized members

14,700 people worshiping on-site; 12,400 people worshiping online

72 people avg. attendance on-site; 93 people avg. attendance online

147 Called Pastors and Deacons

163 Retired Rostered Ministers

13 Pastors On-Leave

0 Ordinations in 2025

14 People in candidacy process

61 Congregations in transition

38 Open call processes

25 Lay Ministers or Synod-Authorized Ministers

10 Conference Deans

24 Synod Council Voting Members, 5 Advisory

18 Voting Members to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly

389 Voting Members in person and online - 2025 Synod Assembly

I am grateful for all these leaders and for our synod staff who serve our ministries.

All of these provide the picture of how we are **Church Together**.

## Flowing into the Future

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*  
– Romans 15:13

Our ministries build on a strong foundation and point us to God's preferred future. This year we made a significant decision to better-steward our nearly 8,000 sq. ft. office building by welcoming Anfinson Thompson Financial to rent the east side of our building. Past and current leadership exercised wise financial management, and we are able to borrow from ourselves in order to renovate the west side of the building as office space. In August, your staff worked hard to move all of our earthly belongings into the large space that has been the resource center. Since that time, we as staff have been adapting to work in one large room together. We are grateful to Gloria Dei Lutheran for allowing us to use space for meetings.

As you as congregations and individuals consider your generosity in the coming months, please consider a gift for this Capital Appeal. We are grateful for the early gifts we have received, especially by congregational endowment funds. Please know we are grateful for any and all gifts shared. We look forward to construction work beginning late this winter. We also look forward to welcoming everyone for an open house and dedication this summer!

## Bringing Healing and Hope

*"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life..... On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."* – Revelation 22:1-2

There is no doubt that our world, our nation, our communities, and our congregations need healing – the healing that only the way of Jesus can bring.

We know that life in the church will not return to the way things used to be. We understand that this new reality causes uncertainty and discouragement for congregations seeking a pastor. But the other reality that we see is the Holy Spirit raising up lay leaders who are sensing that their gifts can be used by God for leadership in their congregations. We are grateful to Wartburg Seminary and Lilly Endowment, Inc., for the grant of \$50,000 we received last year, and now \$27,600 for this coming year, for the development of a Mentor Program to support our lay leaders who will begin to serve as Synod-Authorized Ministers (SAMs). Our goal for this program is to equip people in our congregations to live out their baptismal calling in their daily lives, wherever and whatever that may be.

Your synod staff is dedicated to working with congregations and rostered ministers who find themselves in any point of transition. We are here to listen, provide guidance, and to support and encourage the work of the Spirit across the synod.



Synod Office



Synod Staff



Mentor & SAMs Retreat

We give thanks for the leadership of youth and young adults! The Jr. High Youth Gathering held annually the weekend before Thanksgiving in Willmar continues to gather over 600 youth! The Sr. High Youth Gathering is growing back year by year post-pandemic. The LYO Board provides ever-new and refreshing leadership for these events. And our gifted Synod Youth Band leads worship for the gatherings and for Synod Assembly.

We give thanks for the revitalization of the Companion Synod relationship over the past few years. Thank you for the leadership of our long-time and previous Co-Chairs of the Companion Synod Committee, Rev. Rebecca Sullivan and Peg Hatlestad, who have retired from their roles after 20 and 15 years of involvement with our Companion Synod. We are so grateful for their faithful leadership and continued interest in this important ministry.

From Dec. 7-22, four of us had the privilege of journeying to South Africa at the invitation of the ELCA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA). Rev. Janel Kuester, Rev. Hollie Holt-Woehl, Randall Holt-Woehl, and I joined leaders from six other ELCA synods and our ELCSA companions to talk together about lay theological education and our companion relationships. These relationships are based on “accompaniment” values of mutuality, inclusivity, vulnerability, empowerment, and sustainability, to which this ministry remains committed. During our time in the South Eastern Diocese we were able to worship with over 650 young people, learn from some of the earliest congregations and mission stations in the SED, and celebrate the 50th Jubilee Anniversary of ELCSA. Standing out for all of these celebrations was the commitment to God’s Word, and the music, joy, and dancing of worship.

As we live in this time of uncertainty and change, we give thanks for the gift of being Church Together in Jesus Christ. Thank you for your partnership. In Jesus Christ, we as the church know healing and this healing is truly a source of hope.

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South Africa Journey



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