

Together we are being called to....



EMBRACE

God's Mission

EQUIP

God's People



Bishop Jon V. Anderson

*¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And **remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**'* Matthew 28*

The word "synod" means to be on the road together. Christ Jesus has inspired, given guidance, called for repentance, forgiven, and sent us to live and serve in the world as disciples. We are called in this text to share God's grace in baptism and in the teachings of our Lord Jesus. Thanks for serving as a voting member at this year's synod assembly and as a disciple

serving in the world and your congregation day after day.

Our synod is made up of thousands of baptized ones living out their faith in their daily lives. They gather in congregations where God works through word and sacrament to create and sustain faith. The baptized work together in many institutions of the church like conferences, camps, social ministry agencies, colleges, seminaries. It is easier to give a report about the synod office than to give a report about the synod in all of its dimensions and networks.

This is the mission statement of your synod. God places us in cities, farms, and towns together under one prairie sky. The Risen Christ surprises us with opportunities to plant God's Word in the world. Walking together in confidence, we cultivate life-giving congregations, nurture partner ministries, and cooperate in the life of the ELCA. By God's grace, together we have what we need.

As synod staff we remember and give thanks for the life of our synod in the past year. I witnessed a congregation "baptizing...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" yesterday at worship. As I drove up I saw all the cars and knew that the congregation was passing on the faith in Christian education. They were developing disciples. At worship I heard the law and Gospel proclaimed in sermon, prayers, and hymns. We gathered at the table to be fed for the journey of the coming week.

God acts, we react. This past week I attended a Book of Faith event about seminary interns sharing the story of how they approached Bible study in their internship congregations. They were working on figuring out how to develop disciples in our changing context to reach "all people." God works in our life and we respond.

Through God's Word we are called, gathered, and sent so that we might know the "Theology of Cross." While we celebrate the lives of our congregations, faithful leaders, rostered ministers, and the work of our institutions, it is all about Jesus. In his life, teaching, suffering, death on a cross, and resurrection, we know that God is with us "always." There is no God-forsaken place or person. God redeems us from all our sin and the graves in our life. We are justified by grace. We are sent to answer God's many callings as a joyful response. We get to love our neighbors and share the Good News with them in all ways. God has a mission for this world that is larger than our lives and congregation, but in Christ we are called to be a part of God's mission.

Embrace God's Mission † Equip God's People: *deepen congregational vitality, enhance local and global mission, and develop servant leaders.* This is our vision statement for our synod. God equips us and we are called to equip the baptized, congregations, and care for God's world.

Thanks for your congregation's work to share the Good News and for the resources you share to make the life of your synod possible. To gather resources to turn our synod toward its future, we have begun a funding initiative. As part of that funding initiative, we have received a Lilly Foundation grant to address the economic challenges of pastors and our congregations. We will share more about those efforts in this report and at the assembly. I will briefly explore all three areas of our vision statement and our work.

Deepen Congregational Vitality: We work as a synod staff and governance to grow the life of our congregations deep and wide. As our Bible text exhorts us to do, we are focused on developing disciples. God is the main developer. God is the main actor. Yet, congregations are the seed bed where God grows, sustains, and develops people as Christ followers. One of our emphases is to deepen and widen faith practices. Secondly, we believe congregations need to plan to discern God's preferred future for their community of faith. We are encouraging congregations to study their assets and use assessment tools to increase the odds they are listening to God, listening to one another, and listening to their neighbors. Finally, this year we are highlighting the area of communications in congregations. Communication happens in all kinds of ways. We are seeking to support this important and everyday part of congregational life.

Enhance Local and Global Mission: To be in mission is to be sent by God to touch lives in Jesus' name. Congregations that are healthy have a strong internal sense of mission. They engage the work of mission in their community and beyond. In our local mission research, we were surprised to learn about the persistent issue of food insecurity in our midst. As we address spiritual hunger, we also seek to address physical hunger. As we do this, we are also seeking to deepen our capacity to engage diversity. In the work of Global Mission, we are focusing on growing the next generation of leaders for our companion synod work with the Southeastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa.

Develop Servant Leaders: God is the creator, developer, and sustainer of all the baptized as they live their faith out in many callings every day. We believe God has called us to be a part of God's work of developing ministers to serve in all kinds of ways in God's Church and beyond. As the supply of clergy is growing tighter, we have become more intentional about growing the theological, technical, and ecclesial capacity of lay ministers through synodical initiatives that are new or by transforming events like the synod assembly into an equipping event. Synods came into being to evaluate and grow rostered ministers. We are grateful that this work is the work we share in our network of synod. Thanks to all who invite, encourage, challenge, and support our rostered ministers and those who are in formation.

The synod office depends on the work of many. I am deeply thankful and appreciative for our entire team. The synod's governance system and much of our work depends on people willing to step up and share their gifts to build up God's Church. Thanks to all of you who have given time, wisdom, energy, and resources. We give thanks to God for all our baptized ministers who are serving in all kinds of ways across Southwestern Minnesota and beyond.

God equips. We respond by sharing the grace that God has first showered on us. On good days and hard days, we remember. On days when we are struggling to figure out how to move forward and when we are clear, we remember. When we are excited or discouraged, we remember. Jesus promised, "...remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."



Rev. Linda Pedersen, *Synod Minister*

*“But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift... to **EQUIP** the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to measure of the full stature of Christ.” Ephesians 4:7, 11-13*

In our synod we are focused on the word **EQUIP**. I am so pleased to be involved with congregations and individuals who equip God’s people. My primary energy has been working with call process, especially on the eastern side of our synod. Plus I work with the Equipping Congregations Day, our synod mission partnership with the Southeastern Diocese of Southern Africa, our synodical board of Women of the ELCA and relating to the five conferences that make up our eastern side (Great River, Crow River, Lakeland, Minnesota Valley and Watonwan River).

Summary of new Minister of Word and Sacrament (Ordained Pastors) calls extended and begun May 1, 2016 to May 7, 2017

Your synod staff is very active talking to both pastors inside our synod and outside our synod about the benefits of serving a call in Southwestern Minnesota. Over this period of time our congregations and institutions have extended and had accepted calls by 22 Pastors. Five of these calls were to new seminary graduates (assigned to our synod or not placed in the synod to which they were assigned). Nine came to us from outside our synod and eight moved to new calls within Southwestern Minnesota. This number is about average for our recent years.

Ministers of Word & Sacrament May 1, 2016 – May 7, 2017			
Crow River	2	MN Valley	0
Glacial Ridge	1	Prairie	0
Great River	5	Scenic Valley	1
Lac Qui Parle	2	Shetek	4
Lakeland	6	Watonwan River	1

The chart shows where these new calls have happened during the period. Already we know that the most recent three seminary graduates have received or are close to receiving calls in our synod.

We are grateful for all the call committees and candidates that have been faithful in the work of reflection and

discernment. As one of your Synod Ministers, I witness the gift of this partnership between our synod office, our congregation members and the candidates. It is a beautiful way we are church together.

Equipping Congregations Day

We are many things together, but what I hear often when we talk about our synod, is the Equipping Congregations Day in February. The event on Feb. 25 was no exception. Both Vinje and Bethel Lutheran Churches in Willmar were filled with enthusiastic learners from across our synod. This event has provided both keynote inspiration and 30 practical workshop options for congregation participants to pick from in this one day event.

Important to note is our keynote speaker for 2018 will be Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and the event will be February 10, 2018 to accommodate her schedule.



Women of the ELCA

During the summer of 2017, the Women of the ELCA will conduct its triennial Convention and Gathering in Minneapolis. The Gathering open to all women is July 13-16. As one who has attended national youth gatherings with passion for



many years before coming to serve as a Synod Minister, I would call the Women of the ELCA Gathering a Youth Gathering for adult women. So if you have never considered attending a national event, this summer is a great opportunity for you to participate. Our synod has arranged for two buses to travel to the Gathering for one day, July 14. One will take a more southern route and the other goes along Highway 12 as a little more northern route. This is a great opportunity for you to catch the spirit of ministry throughout our Church.

Locally, the Women of the ELCA have just completed their 31st Synodical Convention with 217 women attending (more than 50 were what we call walk-ups arriving for the one-day convention). The enthusiasm was high for the generous offering of quilts, personal care kits, school kits and baby care kits put in a semi-trailer for delivery to many needy locations. There is no doubt in my mind our women's organization is awesome. Some of you may have checked out the workshop "This is Not Your Mother's Ladies Aid." This is an active ministry serving up blessings, community, Bible Study and faithful service for all God's people.

I continue to be grateful for the opportunity to journey with wonderful people and congregations in the Southwestern Minnesota Synod. May God continue to bless our vision and ministry as we serve the risen Lord Jesus Christ.





Rev. Dr. Kathryn Skoglund, *Synod Minister*

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" Isaiah 6:8

Often when we think about God calling us to ministry, we think about the women and men who feel the Spirit leading them toward rostered ministry, either in Word and Service or Word and Sacrament. But God calls each of us to service in many and various ways. This year as I reflect on my areas of responsibility, I want to lift up the faithful service carried out by all of the teams of people to whom I relate in order to carry out God's mission in our synod, and to tell you a little bit about some of their work.

Engaging Leaders Team

The description of this team indicates the overarching nature of its responsibilities. "The Engaging Leaders team promotes and supports

- Individuals working toward rostered and lay ministry in the ELCA
- Newly rostered leaders in their first three years of parish ministry
- Boundaries in ministry awareness training
- Grant distribution for seminarians and debt-reduction payments
- Congregations and mobile rostered leaders in call processes
- Training through the annual theological conference for rostered leaders
- Writing of compensation guidelines
- Synodically authorized ministry matters
- Ecumenical worship service each January"

Without the oversight of the people on this team, much of the important work of our synod wouldn't get done. I am grateful for the time and wisdom they have shared with me this past year.

Candidacy Committee

I am grateful, too, for the deep faith and commitment of the members of the Synod Candidacy Committee. These women and men, lay and clergy, take their work very seriously. They spend hours reading essays and evaluations in preparation for the candidate interviews that take place throughout the year. They read an individual's paperwork with theological and practical lenses as they discern how that person might best serve the wider church and our synod in leadership roles. Each member of the team is also assigned to a specific candidate as a contact person to help shepherd that person through the candidacy process by keeping in touch with them and answering questions and concerns. The congregations in our synod and the ELCA are blessed by the work of this group.

Lilly Implementation Team

The \$500,000 Lilly grant we received was the first gift toward our Embrace God's Mission + Equip God's People Funding Initiative. The purpose of the grant is to increase financial literacy in our congregations and rostered leaders and to reduce financial stress faced by our rostered Word and Sacrament Ministers due to educational debt, medical crisis, and pension equity. With such a great gift comes a great responsibility, and the members of this team work to develop and carry out the programs to fulfill the parameters of the grant. Their wisdom, creativity, and compassion help our synod become more financially knowledgeable and thus a healthier place to serve.

Compensation Guidelines Committee

Taking into account both the financial needs of our rostered leaders and the financial realities of our synod's congregations, this group of people work to write compensation guidelines that are fair and equitable for both. Committee members research guidelines from neighboring synods, review our synod guidelines from previous years,

make recommendations for the coming year, and present these recommendations at the synod assembly to be voted on by those in attendance.

Synod Assembly Worship Planning Committee

As Christians worship is at the heart of everything we do, not just on Sunday mornings but in all aspects of our lives. The Bible encourages us to, at all times, give thanks and praise to God. This sub-committee of our Synod Assembly Planning Team spends hours creating meaningful worship services that begin and end our synod assembly, giving us the spiritual nourishment we need to do the work of the church. The people on this team know how important prayer, music, word, and sacrament are to our Lutheran heritage, and they want to be sure that each service is a faithful witness to that heritage.

Congregational Call Committees

Perhaps the group of people I meet with most frequently in my work are the congregational call committees that I visit to help them as they prepare to find the person who will serve as their next rostered leader. A pastoral transition is an anxious time in congregations and the call process always seems to be more difficult and take more time than the members of the committee first imagine. They understand that the hopes and dreams of their congregation rest on their ability to find the right person to be their pastor and that responsibility weighs heavily on them. I have found that the women and men chosen for the call committee truly want what is best for their church and they do the hard work necessary to make that happen. They spend time in prayer, exploration, conversation, and careful discernment. There may be times when they are disappointed and feel discouraged with the process, but they keep going, knowing the importance of the task they have been chosen to do. Finally, when they find the person they believe is the best choice, their excitement is obvious and they know all their time and effort has been worth it in the end.

I hope all of those who are currently serving or have in the past served on one of these teams or any other committees in our governance realize how essential they are to our synod and how much they have helped me in my work as synod minister, and I want to express my deep gratitude to them for all they do. I also want to encourage you who are reading this to consider using your gifts and passions to look for opportunities to serve and make a difference in our SW MN Synod. You may not feel the Spirit leading you to rostered ministry, but listen carefully; you may hear God calling you to some other kind of service.

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"
And I said, "Here am I; send me!"
-Isaiah 6:8*

Rev. Kathryn Skoglund
Synod Minister



Rev. Larry Streng, *Director for Evangelical Mission (D.E.M.)*

“So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” *John 8:36 (NRSV)* -- “Make love your aim.” *1 Corinthians 14:1a (NJB)*



I spend a lot of time with Martin Luther. More accurately, I spend a lot of time trying to portray him. Through that portrayal I aim to bring a message to congregations and other groups in our synod about Martin’s story and show how God moved him from fear and uncertainty to faith. For Martin, faith is “*a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, so sure and certain that a person would stake his/her life on it a thousand times. This certainty of God’s grace, and knowledge of it, makes people glad and*

happy and bold in dealing with God and with God’s people.” (Romans Commentary) Much of my work is similar.

Through prayer, stories, and lots of partners I try to help congregations and their leaders live into that “glad, happy, and bold” movement of trust in God’s promise (+), direction, and presence – a movement from fear to bold faith.



One fascinating thing I learned in my study of Martin Luther – including two visits to the Minneapolis Institute of Art to see the Luther exhibit – was that Martin changed his name from “Ludher” to “Luther.” He did it to reflect the Greek word, *leutherius*, “the free one.” In my portrayal of him, I try to get across that we, too, have had our names changed in

our baptism. When God speaks the promise, we are “marked with the cross of Christ forever” (+) and sent into the world to be witnesses of that freedom in Christ. So we, as disciples and congregations of disciples, are being daily formed into “the free ones” for a purpose: to love God and serve our neighbors.

Freedom continues daily. Grace is given to renew us for our callings in life and congregations. Daily we discover that our freedom comes as we – these imperfect but set free, forgiven beings – become whole in Christ. We live into Paul’s, “Make love your aim.” (1 Cor. 14:1) Love for the sake of the world. That is where “the free ones” live. We claim and live that freedom in this life. We claim it into the life we await beyond death as we declare, “I believe in the resurrection of the body.” Martin protested that true freedom doesn’t come through a coin dropped into an indulgence box. Today we, like all the others who live in this consumer-driven culture, can get drawn into our own version of the indulgence box.



There are LOTS of freedom schemes. They come at us thousands of times a day declaring false promises of our day, “More is better!” “There isn’t

enough.” And a most dangerous one that breeds cynicism, “That’s just the way it is.” We, who as disciples and congregations have heard the Good News, return daily to the Crucified and Risen One where we hear and live into His promise (+), “I made you. **You are enough.**” “In God’s economy **there is always enough.**” And, best of all, the One seated on the throne says, “I am making all things new!” (Rev. 21:5) A new day dawns daily. Daily the Spirit continues to make us and all things new!

Are we paying attention? Or are we stuck in that false story of fear and scarcity? These promises keep us centered for the work we do **together**. **Together** we grow into God’s freedom in Christ. Now, in our synod, I’ve witnessed this freedom. It is happening as **together** we stand up to fear and these freedom schemes to tell a different story, God’s story. So, let me name **some** of those ways I was honored to witness in my synod callings.

Our Embrace God’s Mission + Equip God’s People Funding Initiative (EEFI) targets three areas. **Enhance local and global mission** helped bring about this Better Together event in St Cloud. Partnerships were formed. Neighbors worked together to package more than 225,000 meals for local food distribution. Most importantly, new relationships were built as people of many cultures worked side by side. Look at this picture with Bishop Jon. Who else do you see at this table? Young and old. Somali descent women. I see freedom in Christ being lived!

Ministry and Money (pictured here) launched an incredible year of people talking about generosity and the way money is used in our culture.

Henri Nouwen in “A Spirituality of Fundraising” says, “Fundraising is ministry.” We’re learning how that is true. And it’s one of the ways our EEFI is connecting to **Develop Servant Leaders**.



As people learn to talk about money in healthy ways, I’m witnessing conversations that are **freeing**. Most of us grew into a culture where we see money conversations as bragging or shaming. Now we are learning to talk about the Spirit’s gift of generosity so God’s story is told more effectively to grow local and global mission. We’re witnessing freedom as these stories grow joy in communities and families. Pictured left, our synod council talked through “A

Philanthropic Autobiography,” a tool provided as leaders from our synod attended Executive Certificate for Religious Fundraising seminars. Pictured right, we see our planned giving coordinator, Amy Bigot, doing a PIE (Prosper Invest Endow): A Recipe for Generosity event. We’re seeing how the use of story and ways of giving make families grow rather than fight when a family member dies and the assets are shared. Freedom passed on, not fear. These all reflect how we **Develop Servant Leaders!**

Through funding in our EEFI, we have utilized the Lilly grant to **Deepen Congregational Vitality**. Strategic Visioning, Strategic Budgeting and Fundraising, and Strategic Communications and Marketing were events presented both in person and livestream so that renewal could be widespread. I witness freedom growing as people make comments like, “I am seeing our congregation talk about new areas of ministry.”



When a fire burned down the Hawk Creek church building, hundreds of people offered their love through prayers. Then came the other forms of love including financial support. Here, a baptism takes place. What do you see? I see the declaration, **“We are Church Together.”** We live in this time of competing stories. Let’s let love be our aim.

Finally, I am grateful to be able to serve alongside an amazing synod staff, synod council, and numerous congregational leaders as I continue to live into my callings. Let’s continue to ask, “What does it mean to walk **together** in the way of Jesus?” The indulgence box didn’t work in Luther’s day. It won’t work now either! But freedom in Christ, set free by the promise (+) – now that’s a story to live into! Thanks be to God!



Sarah Hausken, *Youth Ministry Coordinator*

Embrace God's Mission. Equip God's People. Deepen Congregation Vitality

What a wonderful time it is to be serving God! I'd like to highlight a few ways I have seen God active through synod youth ministry this past year.

Youth Ministers in Congregations

Young people need adults who walk on the road with them as they discover Jesus. Our synod is full of these adults, both paid and volunteer. God is doing amazing things through you. Thank you.

The SW MN Synod Lutheran Youth Organization

This board of 15 youth and 10 adults serves as a leadership lab for young people to embrace God's mission and equip God's people. They work hard to create youth gatherings that will open the eyes of youth to Jesus in their midst.

Jr. and Sr. High Youth Gatherings

Youth gatherings planned and coordinated by the SW MN Synod Lutheran Youth Organization are super events where the love of Christ is proclaimed with creativity and joy. Gathering participants particularly appreciate Faith Talks shared by youth, Christian music and service projects.

Youth Worker Retreat

Our annual retreat this fall was held at Shetek Lutheran Ministries. Our theme was "Mental Health First Aid for Youth" and was led by Paige Thompson, Mental Health Consultant for the Southwest Central Service Cooperative. The people attending the retreat received education on how to help youth who are experiencing a mental health crisis.

Youth and Family Ministry E- Newsletter

Please join our mailing list to receive bursts of information on events, resources, education, and more regarding youth and family ministry. Go to www.swmnelca.org to join.

Preventing and Responding to Abuse

I have learned that 1 in 5 people are abused. As congregations we have a responsibility to prevent abuse within the ministries we shepherd. I've put together 4 steps you can follow to prevent and respond to abuse in your congregation. http://www.swmnelca.org/preventing_responding.html



SW MN Synod Youth Ministers Facebook Group

When youth ministers have a question for their colleagues or want to share news of an upcoming event, they often turn to our synod's youth minister facebook group. If you're a youth minister in our synod, please know this is a resource for you. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/swmnsynodyouthministers/>

ELCA Youth Gathering

Our church will be hosting our triennial youth gathering in 2018. We've already started equipping leaders to take youth to this incredible faith formation event, which will be held in Houston this time. Ashley Gilbertson is our synod's coordinator for the ELCA Youth Gathering and is available to help you find answers to all your questions. (320) 235-2508

ashley@calvarywillmar.org

It's been a wonderful year and I am grateful to serve alongside all of you as we seek to share Christ's love and deepen the vitality of our congregations in God's name.





Gwen Arneson, *Synod Vice President*

It is a delight to reflect about the year just completed through the lens of this year's Synod Assembly theme Scripture text of Jesus' words from Matthew 28:20b, "*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" Since our 2016 Synod Assembly, your Synod Council and Executive Committee have met with the confidence that our deliberations and actions are enveloped in God's promise to accompany us at every point. We have been keenly aware of God's provision of inspiration and strength, imagination and faithfulness, joy and thanksgiving.

Our year began with the annual September retreat at Green Lake Lutheran Ministries in Spicer where new and continuing council members spent time in orientation to the tasks and expectations to come in this way of serving in God's mission. Additional meetings took place at the Synod Office in Redwood Falls in November 2016, January 2017, and April 2017, with additional conference calls and ZOOM technology meetings, as needed.

Highlights from throughout the year:

- Heard reports from those who attended Churchwide Assembly in New Orleans in August of 2016 and looked at constitutional amendments adopted at 2016 CWA.
- Made plans for the ongoing distribution of the Lilly Grant funds and the Embracing God's Mission + Equipping God's People Funding Initiative at events in the coming year.
- Set a goal of \$2.5 million for the Funding Initiative, which includes \$500,000 from the Lilly Grant. Were updated by leaders in the Lilly work and the Funding Initiative even as leadership transitioned in the latter months of 2016.
- Developed policies for undesignated financial gifts.
- Had recurring conversations about conference boundary revision.
- Discussed transitional ministry matters.
- Considered the impact of demographic data on our ministries.
- Continued to work on board development at each meeting, including conversations about money, racism, diversity, poverty, storytelling, and accountability.
- Heard reports from partnership ministry leaders and representatives.
- Imagined future goals and objectives and set council goals.
- Acted upon selected outdated policies from the synod council archives.
- Met newly-assigned seminarians in our synod.
- Distributed funds for disaster response for other synods in the ELCA, as needed.
- Approved funding for ministries and ministry sites.
- Gratefully received financial gifts for the shared work we do inside of God's mission for this synod.
- Reflected upon those qualities of our synod life for which we are grateful.

Thank you for the privilege of serving in governance on your behalf and for the glory of God.

Gwen Arneson

SW MN Synod Vice President



Andrew Hermodson-Olsen, Lilly Project Coordinator, 2017

If you had \$500,000 given to you, what would you do!? In a sense, our synod has enjoyed living out that scenario. In 2015 we applied for a grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc. in Indianapolis and we got it! So, from 2016 through 2018 we are working on utilizing these funds as a part of our Funding Initiative.

The Lilly funds came to us with certain guidelines on how we use the \$500,000. We are to pursue financial literacy and financial relief. Lilly Endowment, Inc. has found in their research data that financial anxiety and financial strains are major and recurring problems that are negatively affecting church leadership. Their **National Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders** has provided grants and resources to select denominations and church organizations with the purpose of making a difference in congregations across the nation.

In our synod, we call our work with these funds the **Lilly Project**. We are using the Lilly grant to equip and support our pastors so that they may in turn lead flourishing and thriving congregations. The Lilly funds will not make a difference by trying to pay away financial problems. Rather, we seek to leverage change in some lives and some areas believing that it will help our whole synod. You know that change in one area leads to change in other areas. This is what we are counting on. For instance, if pastors are more literate in financial matters, they may be less anxious and healthier. That in turn can affect both the way pastors feel about their ministry and the way they lead their congregations. Healthier leaders may also lead to congregations that are better able to thrive.

So what have we been doing with the \$500,000? With half of the Lilly grant, we have provided matching funds to begin our Ministerial Excellence Fund (MEF). The MEF seeks to assist pastors with financial strains caused by educational debt, medical crisis, or reduced amounts of saving for retirement. Pastors in our synod may apply for these non-competitive grants. (For more information, please see our synod's website.) In establishing the MEF, we are also raising awareness of the financial strains some pastors face and we desire to show care in both addressing it and talking about it.

With the other half of the Lilly grant, we are providing educational events and resources that will help with financial stewardship, financial literacy, and other education about finances. Here are some of the things we have done: Ministry & Money Workshop (Oct. 2016); Energizing and Mobilizing Congregations (Jan., Mar., Apr. 2017); Facebook Book Club on Financial Literacy (ongoing); First-Call Family Camp with a financial literacy emphasis (Jun. 2017); promotion of both Lutheran Social Service's financial counseling and Portico's financial counseling and resources.

How can you help? Attend future events! Participate in the Facebook Book Club! Use promoted resources to improve your financial literacy. Learn how to talk about financial issues with others and in your congregation. Donate to the MEF so we may get it on a secure footing for years to come.

In Christ's service,

Pastor Andrew Hermodson-Olsen

Lilly Project Director