



EMBRACE
God's Mission
EQUIP
God's People



Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.



2017-18 Annual Report

+Bishop Jon V. Anderson

God's continues to reform. God works on you and me. God is not done reforming God's people and the congregations of this synod. God continues to reform this world and the many Lutheran institutions that seek to serve our mission field and the world. God's reforming and saving grace continues to be poured out upon us.

God's reforming presence brings change. God opens paths to greater life and restoration. God guides our change. God encourages us to reform our congregations and love our communities fruitfully. Through the seas of change we hold on to the unchangeable Good News that we know in Christ Jesus and the cross. This year we observed the 500th Anniversary of the reformation. We gave thanks for God's work of reforming God's Church back in time and also in our time. The reformation continues.

As I pray for our congregations and rostered ministers, I am mindful of faces that are absent this year because people have moved to new communities, retired or died. I give thanks for the new leaders God has called to bring their gifts to the life of our synod and congregations. I am thankful for congregations that are thriving. I am mindful of those that are struggling. I mourn with those who have experienced deep losses or preparing to close. I am thankful for the deepening signs of a commitment to experiment and innovate in our synod. People are learning from one another and experimenting to reach a new generation and serve our changing mission field. God continues to reform our lives and our life together so we might be more fruitful as we follow Jesus.

Though we are broken in many ways, God's reforming grace keeps chasing us bringing God's healing and forgiving grace. God's Word, Jesus our Lord, keeps speaking into our midst God's law. It confronts our sin. God's Word is also full of the Good News we need to live in this complicated world with all of its turmoil. We pray that God will bring focus to our efforts, excite us, deepen us, widen us, inspire us and guide us as we seek to encourage others and work for justice so all lives might be more whole.

Your synod office's work of supporting candidates for rostered ministry, congregations calling pastors, congregations planning and programming continues. Your synod's leadership works in reconciliation ministry where unproductive conflict has broken out or relationships are broken. We walk with restructuring parishes who reform their ministry into more sustainable forms. The regular business of a synod of 240 congregations moves forward day after day. We also participate in God's reforming work of our churchwide organization and institutions (camps, retreat centers, social ministry organizations, colleges and seminaries, etc). We build bridges with other leaders. We are thankful for the resources shared by congregations that make our work possible.

Where has God been at work in our life? Where is God working our congregations and our personal lives?

I have been praying about our life together. I invite you to join me. Our communities of faith don't gather to be busy, support a building or have a pastor. The goal is to be on the road together with Jesus and be a community that gathers around the cross to hear the Good News. The community of disciples then scatters to be "little Christs" in God's world. Congregations do best when they focus on our gracious God and living faith. Healthy congregations are passionate about passing on the faith, deepening and reclaiming ancient faith practices and engaging the communities and people where God has placed them advocating for justice and embodying love.

Equip - We believe as a synod all the baptized ones, congregations, leaders, rostered ministers, synod ministry team are being equipped by God's Spirit and we are called to equip God's people to live their faith in daily life and in congregations. God has a mission for this whole world, which embraces us. As a synod we embrace this mission as God's Holy Spirit helps us see it and participate in it. We are called and sent together in Jesus name.

Deepen Congregational Vitality - Growing deeper is a result of God's ongoing reformation. God touches our hearts and minds. We need to reframe expectations that there is some silver bullet, program or person who can turn around the lives of our congregation. It takes all of us guided by God. It begins with you and me. As we pray, invite, give, study, serve, encourage, worship, forgive and love God surprises us and we are transformed. God grows us deeper in faith, hope and love. God grows us wider in awareness and engagement in our contexts. We have Good News to share, but we always need to be hearing the Good News that invites us deeper into Jesus ourselves as well.

Our Ministerial Excellence Fund and Funding Initiative have provided resources for your synod and congregations to learn, explore, act and innovate. It has made possible the educational events, the useful assessments and encouraged planning. We have sought to deepen congregations' work of communicating and developing all as stewards. We support the work of Jesus with investments from our many funding streams. Grants to people and congregations have set them free to serve more effectively. If you or your congregation have contributed, thank you.

We live in a time where much of what has worked in church life is changing or not working any more. Pastors and congregations are figuring out that we both need to mourn losses and find new ways to grow deeper. Yet, we can float in God's grace. We can celebrate we are saved by God's amazing grace. Working together we have the best chance of experiencing the longed for renewal each of us and each of our congregations.

Enhance local and global mission – Our most basic mission is to live out our daily mission trip of our baptisms as we respond to the many callings God has given us in our life and world. We have focused on fighting food insufficiency and hunger in our synod, while also building bridges in communities. We also hunger to become more comfortable and capable at engaging our neighbors of many cultures so we can love them and invite them into relationship. We are called to become a more inviting people and church. We are thankful for the work of so many congregations in so many ways to love God and love their neighbors. That is one of the best parts of our staff and governance's work to see what God is empowering congregations to do as they are sent.

Develop servant leaders - Each generation is called to be developing its gifts, learning from others and passing on the faith and the wisdom to keep our congregations thriving. Leadership formation models in our church are changing. There is a return to an ancient practice of apprenticeship. Every effective leader is called to grow future leaders. Your synod staff is having to do more and more work to identify rostered ministers to lead our congregations. Our hunch about needing to prepare for a world where we have fewer pastors but more deeply equipped lay leaders continues to drive our work for the sake of all generations.

My word for the year has been "**Enjoy!**" I have enjoyed serving as your bishop in the past year. I am thankful for all the times we have talked and you have shared an answer to my question, "What is something sweet God is up to in your life of congregation?" I am enjoying our new practice of having a vibrant congregation share their story and insights about sharing God's Story at staff meetings. I have enjoyed working with so many great and gifted people living out their faith, loving their congregations and loving God's world. I am thankful for the staff I have enjoyed the privilege to serve alongside. I am thankful for our synod council, boards, committees and task forces. I have enjoyed the opportunity to represent this part of God's Church in the larger church.

I am hopeful, because we have a gracious God who continues to reform each of us and God's church to serve our changing world effectively. Thanks for all that you do to build up your congregation and bring God's transforming love and grace to this world that needs it so deeply.