

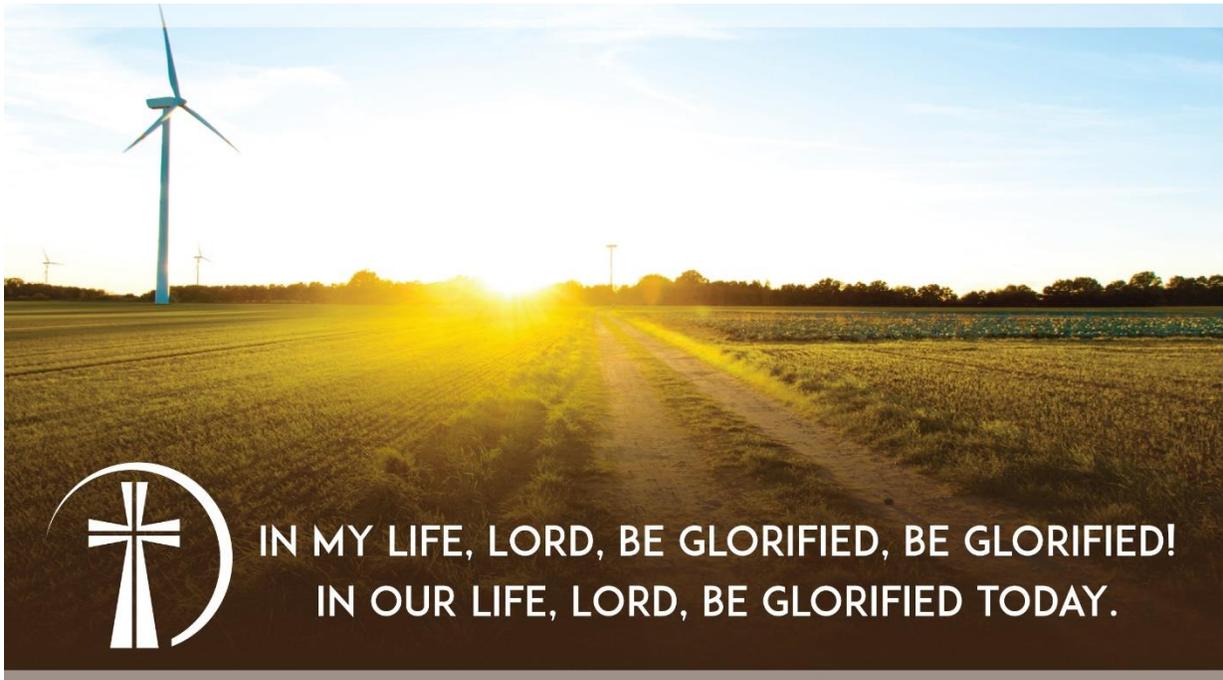
# Everyday Spirituality

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**Rev. Jon Anderson, Synod Bishop**

*2019 Synod Assembly Report*

*I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. – Joshua 1:9*



**Every day. Every day God is with you and me as we live out the gift of our lives.**

Every day. Every day God is with you and me as we live out the gift of our lives.

Every day we go out into our daily mission trip of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving our neighbors as ourselves in our many callings.

To sustain us, God gives us the gift of an “Everyday Spirituality” both as a gift and a call. It is a gift we receive from God as part of how the Spirit works in our life personally and our lives communally. It is a calling, because our spirituality is not only about God and me, but also about how God calls us together into communities of faith and stewards our gifts, experiences, and even mistakes toward God’s deepest longings for this world.

Our Everyday Spirituality is a sacramental spirituality that begins at the font and is fed at the table gathered around the cross. It is a spirituality that trusts that God's Word together with God's earthly elements can become means of grace and proclaim the claiming power of our gracious God. It reminds us of God's healing presence in the face of life's brokenness. God's forgiving and resurrecting grace redeems us from our little and final graves. It is a spirituality that is rooted in the real world and many moments of our daily life. Our Everyday Spirituality sends us to love and care for God's world and God's children.



IN YOUR **SYNOD**, LORD, BE GLORIFIED, BE GLORIFIED!  
IN YOUR **CHURCH**, LORD, BE GLORIFIED TODAY.

As we look back through the months of the past year, we have much for which to be thankful. Our synod is made up of all the baptized, the congregations, institutions, our conferences. We are part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. None of our lives are perfect, but we sing a hymn of praise to God with our life and lives. Know that God loves to work through common, ordinary, broken, confused people like Jesus worked through the disciples long ago. Christ's Spirit continues to work through you and me. God's Spirit continues to sustain and redeem people who need to hear the Good News we know in Jesus.

We thank God for the many children and adults who were baptized or invited to the table to live their life of sacramental discipleship. We give thanks for the deep work of the Spirit gathering us for worship, Bible studies, servant events, and times of fellowship. We give thanks for the faithful and generous sinner/saints who invested themselves in many ways to make the lives of our congregations possible and serve in the great mission field of our region. Thanks for all the ways you have given yourself away to fuel the work of God's Church and your local congregation. Thanks for the generosity that is much larger than merely the sharing of wealth. All of our buildings, all of our parishes, all of our programs, all of our worship services, all of our lives are an offering we make in response to our gracious and surprising God, who loves to work in the untidy realities of this world and life.

What were the special times in your lives and the lives of your community when you experienced the presence and work of our God? We forget to look for the presence of God and the work of Christ's Spirit in the common and everyday life, yet this is the primary arena where God works, in the midst of our messy and broken lives. Every day. In the midst of even our darkest days and when we feel most forsaken, God's Son reveals through the cross, his life, teaching, and resurrection, God is there redeeming.

**Embrace God's Mission † Equip God's People: Deepen Congregational Vitality † Enhance Local and Global Mission † Develop Servant Leaders** – Your synod staff seeks to do that in all our different callings. I am thankful to serve with such faithful and creative people. I wish you could walk with your synod staff through a week. You would be thankful. I am honored to serve with this team.

This year we have said goodbye to Pastor Linda Pedersen, who served as a synod minister, and soon will to Pastor Larry Strenge, who has served as our director for evangelical mission. Deb Hess, who worked on the funding initiative, retired. Gwen Arneson has reached the end of her calling to be synod vice president,

along with many council and board members. All of their contributions were priceless, just as yours were as you lived out your callings in your Everyday Spirituality.

God is calling forth new leaders who will step forward with their vision and gifts. Each member of your team, your part-time staff, your consultants we engage, your boards, task forces, committees, and council are part of this mission. We trust God works through us in ways we don't even imagine to equip God's people for ministry every day.

**Deepen Congregational Vitality** – God calls us toward more of a participatory spirituality instead of a performative/spectator spirituality. If we have imagined doing church meant that we gathered enough resources to pay a pastor to do our ministry, then God's Spirit is taking that world apart. People's lives are the center of vibrant parishes. The offering is understood to be something in addition to what we have done as we lived out our sacramental discipleship and practiced our faith in the rough and tumble of everyday life. Healthy congregations make sure their pastor focuses on the core faith practices and teaching people to practice their faith. Healthy congregations pray for one another and for their community with its blessings and struggles. Healthy congregations are high-expectation places, but they have the lightest weight governance and institutional structure so that people can be freed to enjoy and celebrate life using just enough energy to keep the institution going. We believe we need to reframe congregational expectations to serve the mission field of today and the days to come. We need to prune things that served God well in the past but are not doing so now. What will best serve the Gospel now and in our shared future?

Our Faithful Innovation project with Luther Seminary and six congregations has been a rich experience of wrestling with what we need to hold on to and what we need to let go of so that we can innovate for the sake of our children and grandchildren as well as people who have no faith or no history of being a part of a community of faith.



**IN YOUR WORLD, LORD, BE GLORIFIED, BE GLORIFIED!  
IN YOUR WORLD, LORD, BE GLORIFIED TODAY.**

**Enhance Local and Global Mission** – We are sent to share the two pillars of the Lutheran Christian movement. First we think that God is up to something decisive in the cross. God is willing to engage our not-so-tidy lives, bringing the Good News that God is with us and for us, even in what seem to be the toughest and most God forsaken places. We must find ways to invite people into awareness of how they are already a part of God's great story of life. We are called to love people of other faiths and no faith, trusting that God will do what God needs to do with our witness and invitations of many kinds.

If the first pillar is justification and the cross, then the second pillar of our Lutheran Christian movement is our celebration of the ways God works in our many callings or vocations. We live out those callings inside and outside of God's community of faith. "God cares about what you were doing on Tuesday at 1 p.m." God cares about all your life – planting longings, redeeming experiences, opening opportunities. Look for the everyday presence of God. Our God invites us into God's mission and uses you and me.

**Develop Servant Leaders** – God equips the baptized, some of whom become rostered ministers. Things are shifting and changing, if you have not noticed, in a number of ways. We have to get beyond the “healthy pastor conversation” to talk about how we are called to renegotiate roles of rostered ministers and congregations to serve God’s mission and gather around the Gospel. Instead of pastors doing ministry, we need to be doing church and leading with apprentices so we can multiply our ministry. We need to shift toward being and serving together instead of doing stuff because we have always done it. We have to say, “No,” to say, “Yes.” We need to shift pastors out of the center and reconsider our definitions of success and failure.

Congregations exist to foster connections to God. They exist to encourage people in their Everyday Spirituality. They exist to provide places and ways for people to experience what they long for, spiritual growth. We need to invite others and ourselves to look for the presence and work of our God, who is inviting us to into the party of God’s reign and deep dream for this world. Forces are eroding what has been our traditional way of doing church. God is calling us through the wilderness. God is calling us through the wildfire of too much change. We can look back or we can look forward. I do both, but finally I keep being called as I live out my everyday spiritual life to look for what God is up to on the horizon, confident that, as I practice my faith, I will hear where God needs me/us to go.

That is a beginning of the conversation and work we will do at our assembly. Thanks for coming to be part of our great family reunion of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod.



**IN MY LIFE, LORD, BE GLORIFIED, BE GLORIFIED!**  
**IN MY LIFE, LORD, BE GLORIFIED TODAY.**

# Everyday Spirituality

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## Rev. Dr. Kathryn Skoglund, Synod Minister

### *2019 Synod Assembly Report*

As I look back at all the areas of synod life in which I've been involved in my role as synod minister, I realize it has been a year filled with acronyms. Some of these acronyms may already be familiar to you, but others will be new, so this report will serve as a kind of glossary of terms as I describe what I've been up to this year.

**SALMs:** In the past couple of years we have changed the way we refer to SALMs. We prefer to use the term to refer to the **congregations** as **Synodically Authorized Lay Ministry Sites** rather than the person serving there as the Synodically Authorized Lay Minister. This helps clarify that the bishop's authorization for the lay person to perform the sacraments in the congregation is for this specific site only, for a specific time only, and does not transfer to other places and times. We also prefer that the lay minister serving in that site is called a "**Vicar.**" This makes clear that the individual is not a pastor but a lay person in theological formation of some kind. We currently have seven vicars serving in our synod, and I, along with members of the Engaging Leaders Board, do yearly evaluations with the vicars and their leadership before they are authorized by Bishop Jon for another year.

**TEEM:** This stands for **Theological Education for Emerging Ministries**. It is a seminary program where a candidate in our synod serves as a vicar in a congregation while taking online and intensive classes at either Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, or Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California. In the past several months we have had five graduates of the TEEM program become ordained and are currently serving here. We have others who are hoping to enter the program in the near future.

**CL: The Collaborative Learning program** at Wartburg is similar to the TEEM program, but online classes are attended in real time through Zoom technology and the student serves as vicar part-time in a congregation. Currently we have one student in the CL program.

**DL: The Distributed Learning** program is similar to a traditional MDiv program, but the classwork is done online and through weeklong intensive courses held at the seminary. We have a number of DL students in our synod at various stages in their seminary journey.

**MDivX:** This is a two-year, accelerated program introduced this year at Luther Seminary in which a student is embedded in a congregation while taking year-round classes and completing concurrent part-time congregational internships. We do not have any candidates in the program for the first cohort, but we have had some inquiries about participating in future cohorts.

**GoG:** This year we were invited to apply and have received an additional grant from the Lilly Endowment to further the work we have been doing with our Ministerial Excellence Fund, helping pastors as they face economic challenges related to their retirement funds, educational debt, and medical crises. We have

named this new grant of \$250,000 and matching funds ***Gifts of Grace: Toward Financial Wellbeing***. We are thrilled to be able to continue to offer this gift to our pastors to enable them to continue to lead vibrant and flourishing congregations.

**LFI:** This year we have formed a partnership with Luther Seminary and several other synods across the ELCA for a project called ***Leadership for Faithful Innovation***. This is a three-year program funded by Lilly to foster congregational vitality. Seven of our congregations and their pastors are involved in spiritual practices and holy experiments that we believe will serve the mission of God's church in fruitful and exciting ways. When the three years are done, we envision that wisdom gained by those participating will be shared with other pastors and congregations who are adventurous to try new things for the sake of the Gospel.

**CGP:** Yet another Lilly grant will enable our synod to partner with Gustavus Adolphus College and Southeastern Minnesota Synod in a project called ***Continuous Growth Pathway***. The model is based off of the Pastor to Pastor program, and its purpose is to provide resources and encourage pastors to participate in continuing education opportunities suited to the various stages of their ministry from first call to nearing retirement age. Cohort groups, mentors, spiritual directors, and coaches will all be utilized as part of this partnership.

**IDI:** Because our communities are becoming more diverse, the ***Intercultural Development Inventory*** has already been used in our synod office, governance, and some of our conferences to help individuals become more interculturally competent. Our goal is to have this tool used with congregation councils and members with the help of trained administrators who will interpret the results and work to design a developmental plan with those who have completed the inventory. I and three others have already been trained for this and will continue to identify and train more leaders.

**MSPs & RMPs: *Ministry Site Profiles* and *Rostered Minister Profiles*** continue to be an important and challenging part of my work as I meet with the councils and call committees of congregations that are in the call process.

**SWMN:** As always, I am blessed and grateful for the privilege of serving in the ***Southwestern Minnesota Synod*** of the ELCA as one of your synod ministers. In the words of the apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians: *I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.*

# Everyday Spirituality

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## Rev. Stephen Cook, Synod Minister

### *2019 Synod Assembly Report*

*“...how can people call for help if they don’t know who to trust? And how can they know who to trust if they haven’t heard of the One who can be trusted? And how can they hear if nobody tells them? And how is anyone going to tell them, unless someone is sent to do it? That’s why Scripture exclaims, “A sight to take your breath away! Grand processions of people telling all the good things of God!” But not everybody is ready for this, ready to see and hear and act. Isaiah asked what we all ask at one time or another: “Does anyone care, God? Is anyone listening and believing a word of it?” The point is: Before you trust, you have to listen. But unless Christ’s Word is preached, there’s nothing to listen to.”*

Romans 10:14-17 (paraphrased) The Message

#### **“An unchanging Christ for a changing world”**

This was a theme for a while in the church of my youth and has come back into my mind in recent weeks. Jesus Christ – crucified, risen, ascended, and present in the world today – is the hope of the world. Therefore, the church – the only body Christ has in the world – is the hope of our communities. The church in all its expressions – your local congregation as part of the Synod and ELCA churchwide ministries, our partnerships in the Southeastern Dioceses of the ELC-Southern Africa, with LSS-MN and Lutheran Advocacy, campus ministries, bible camps and all the rest – make Jesus Christ known as the One who may be trusted.

Of course, the world – our mission context – has changed a great deal since I first started in public ministry. I have served in many contexts, from very small rural communities to large urban congregations. In all these places I observe the tendency to think that some other kind of church has it made – because they are bigger (more resources) or smaller (stronger relationship bonds). Because they have a program or a building or...something!...that we don’t have and if we could just figure that out and get it for ourselves, all would be well.

Sorry. It doesn’t work that way. As our Synod Mission Statement puts it, “By God’s grace we have everything we need.” Not *all* we might wish for but *everything* we *need*. We have the promise in Jesus of a God who can be trusted and the commission to tell others of that promise.

#### **Equipping Congregations**

I focus in the Equipping Congregations area of our work. This year’s **Equipping Congregations Day** was faced with challenging weather which significantly lowered turnout. Despite this, the day went forward as planned. Save Saturday, February 29, 2020, for Equipping Congregations Day 2020.

**Worship Equipping Day – Saturday November 16, 2019!** There will be three focus areas – worship planning, worship leadership, and new approaches to music. The day will emphasize gathering new ideas and learning new skills. Everyone is welcome, but we think this will be of special interest for smaller congregations who would like to take their worship practices in new directions.

### **Thinking in new ways about “Who will our next pastor be?”**

The realities of congregations finding, supporting, and retaining rostered leaders – pastors and deacons – has changed dramatically in recent years. Helping congregations and pastors find each other and sustaining a long-term productive relationship takes up much of the time and energy of your synod’s staff. The ELCA and its seminaries have responded by creating multiple new paths toward rostered ministry. The needs and realities for new pastors is different. Student debt is a burden and this synod is a leader addressing this.

While there is no quick fix to this, I suggest that we have a role in finding a way forward. Who in your congregation might have the gifts for rostered ministry in the ELCA? Many of those who are now in formation for ministry have prior careers as farmers, teachers, and in other vocations. Confirmation students and even younger children can be encouraged to consider ministry. Plant a seed that may bear fruit in years to come.

The way we think about this reality shapes the options we see. In the coming weeks we will develop a team to meet with congregations early in the call process to help them begin to think about:

- Challenges and opportunities in finding a pastor who might not fit an established picture of who a pastor is.
- Challenges and opportunities in different models of multi-congregation partnerships to share staff and resources.

We believe that congregations will be helped by having broad ranging conversations earlier in the transition period.

### **Synod Endowment Fund Congregational Mission Grant**

The Synod Endowment Fund is offering a new resource to support your great new ideas – the 2020 Congregational Mission Grant. It is open to any congregation or campus ministry in our synod who would like to start a new mission outreach or make a significant expansion of a current program – especially those which involve a community partnership. More information and an online application is on the synod website. **APPLICATION DEADLINE IS JULY 1, 2019.**

### **The present is not like the past...**

...and the future is uncertain. It is, however, God’s future. The unchanging promise is that God can be trusted in whatever comes.

# Everyday Spirituality

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## Rev. Larry Strenge, Director for Evangelical Mission, SW MN Synod, ELCA *2019 Synod Assembly Report*

With my “re-**fire**-ment” coming on June 28, 2019, I’m regularly attending my “last” this or that in the call I have lived into for these past 10 years as our Southwestern Minnesota Synod’s Director for Evangelical Mission (D.E.M.). It has been a good 10 years! I am thankful to God and to the people the Spirit has privileged me to serve alongside in the many levels of this call – congregations, synod, ELCA churchwide organization, and other areas this D.E.M. call has called me to serve. I’ll say more “gratitude” later!



Among those “lasts” was in late March attending our ELCA’s churchwide offices as a part of our ELCA’s Domestic Mission Unit (DMU). I serve as a deployed staff person and it is always good to gather for this annual All-Staff Gathering and D.E.M. Conference. This year it was especially meaningful for me not only as one of these “lasts”, but also to hear from our new director, Phil Hirsch. Phil and I started together as D.E.M.s in 2009. He began as the new executive director on February 1, 2019. We’ve been friends and D.E.M. colleagues over the years. We often compared ideas via email, phone, or at conferences. So when Phil talked about why he is passionate about leading the DMU, I listened carefully. What I heard him say is that he recognizes there will be changes as the ELCA turns its focus to [Future Directions 2025](#), our ELCA’s goals that focus on congregational vitality and leadership development. (Note: These are two of our three goals from our synod’s “**Embrace God’s Mission + Equip God’s People**” funding initiative!) However, what excited me the most in Phil’s talk was how he centers his work in prayer and a strong emphasis on evangelizing. He shared, “The Church is not Church without people.” What he was talking about was a key priority NOT so we could get more butts in the pew and more bucks in the offering plate for struggling congregations. As he said, “That never worked.” He challenged us to ask, “Why do this work?” And for him it is because God has a vision of healing and hope for the world in Jesus Christ. And we are called to partner with God’s Spirit to invite people into a community that cultivates healing and hope in an age of fear. As I leave this ELCA’s D.E.M. calling, it gives me great hope for our ELCA to have Phil in this leadership position and to pray for him even as I am called to “re-**fire**-ment.”



I’m especially grateful for Phil’s word about evangelizing because it fits well with what Bishop Jon has been calling us to do **together** in our Southwestern Minnesota Synod! Since January, a key priority of Bishop Jon for your D.E.M. has been to work on something we’re calling, “Invitational Evangelizing.” The 90-minute workshop builds on the work of Dave Daubert and book, “The Invitational Christian.” In the workshop we teach people the importance of what some of our leaders have been hearing in another “investment” of our synod, Faithful Innovation (FI) with Luther Seminary. That’s where I/they heard Michael Binder, one of the FI leaders say, “Let’s expect God to show up.” This fits well with Dave Daubert, “Let’s be aware of God’s presence in our lives.”

Grounded in prayer practices and the work of the Holy Spirit, we are teaching people how to be inviting. By our synod assembly, I'll have given some form of the workshop six times (see above). In each, responses have been promising! We're seeing lay leaders realize that inviting others to be part of their "community of Jesus who nurture life-changing relationships with God, one another, and God's world" (ELCA Vitality description) is an important part of our work **together**, both lay leaders and rostered ministers, as the Holy Spirit leads us into a new day. I'm excited by this work of the Spirit.



And there is more! In February we collaborated with seven other synods to present "Hope in the Heartland"; 104 smaller member congregations – 27 from Southwestern Minnesota – participated. This picture shows a moment when our teacher, Rev. Nancy Nyland, D.E.M., Indiana-Kentucky Synod, used balloons to teach how the Spirit's work can't be controlled.

As participants released them, the balloons flew everywhere! We saw a visual image of how the Spirit can't be controlled. Now, with coaching these congregations and prayer beyond the event, what will the Holy Spirit do next to see more vitality and leadership development happen in these places? And it was this event that prompted us to write a Synod Vitality Grant with our churchwide organization and receive a \$25,000 grant for Cultivating Generous Congregations Among Smaller-Member Settings. The grant has enabled us to begin the work to invite smaller-member congregations with worship attendance of less than 100 to be part of three times of training (September 28, 2019, November 2, 2019, January 11, 2020) in the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving's course, Cultivating Generous Congregations (CGC). Rev. Dwaine Bruns and I have both been trained by the Lake Institute in cooperation with our ELCA organization to teach this course. As part of my "**re-fire**-ment," I'll continue to do this work. What especially excites me about the training is that it is more than a "one-off event." We are working with our ELCA coaching coordinator, Jill Beverlin, to provide an ELCA Level 2 Stewardship Coach to walk alongside the congregations who participate in the CGC training *for one year*! This will allow time for experiments and other work necessary to begin to see stewardship as discipleship, one of the four goals of CGC. In my final weeks as a D.E.M., I will work to begin this inviting of smaller-member congregations to be part of this in the Fall.

Finally, let me end by saying thanks be to God for all of you.

This area we call our Southwestern Minnesota Synod is where I grew up. It is where I have spent much of my 67+ years of life. Many of you have been the coaches, teachers, pastors, farmers, business people, and other mentors throughout my entire life – childhood, teen years, and some of the years as a young adult working as a commodities trader, as well as these adult years as a pastor in this synod. Through you, the people who have occupied this geography, the Spirit has utilized your gifts to grow me as a person and as a child of God. Through you, I have been able to live into my many callings, both through the good times and especially during one very difficult time as we experienced the terrible grief at the loss of our son, Daniel, in 2014. Through these times the Spirit provided, through each of you, God's presence, promise and guidance to live into the next chapter of God's story.



So, now I end this time of doing the best I can with a heart filled with gratitude. I am especially grateful for the numerous congregations who allowed my main traveling companions – Martin Luther and John the Baptist – to come into your places of worship and to be moved by the Word these characters bring with them. You have helped me discover countless times what our friend, Martin Luther, discovered and wrote in his Romans commentary so many years ago, that “faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace.” And when that grace becomes real, it does indeed “make people glad, and happy, and bold in dealing with God and with God’s people.” Both characters have appreciated your warm hospitality!



I am certainly glad for this experience to have served you in these 31+ years in my calling as a pastor, mission developer, and in these last 10 years as your D.E.M. I have been honored to be part of a synod that has such a wise and creative bishop, Jon Anderson. It has been a joy to be part of the various teams he has led and through which I’ve been called to part of what those teams accomplished in these 10 years. For that which the Spirit has allowed me to contribute toward “building up the body of Christ” and “equipping the saints for the work of ministry” (Ephesians 4) in this time as I’ve worked alongside you, in whatever capacity, for that I am grateful.

Let me close with this word, a favorite from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. As he finishes his framing of God’s grace in Christ and now moves to its application in our lives, Paul says this, “Now to God who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations.” For me, these words say this: May God’s story continue working through us as we each discover and become more aware of God’s unending promise in Christ for you and for our work together.