

# Report to Southwestern Minnesota Synod Council

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*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. Phillipians 4:8-9*

These days I need to keep reminding myself to follow Paul's advice because there have been many times in these past few weeks when what I have been thinking on has not brought anything even close to feeling God's peace, but rather has filled me with feelings of anxiety, dread, grief, anger, weariness, depression, and fear to name a few. Despite these long days of isolation, I know I am not alone because I know others too have been struggling with these same things.

As part of our work with the Leadership for Faithful Innovation project we are encouraged to always ask the question "Where do you see God in this?" And so, as I sat down to write this report I took time to ponder this question and came up with many, many examples.

First of all, working from home has made me deeply appreciate my colleagues and coworkers. Though we have twice daily Zoom check-ins I miss seeing them at their desks, walking through the building, or joking around in the break room. Though they have all been pushed into circumstances that have tested and stretched them, they have excelled in their work. I've realized how much I depend on each one of them and how glad I will be to be able to once again be in the office, surrounded by professional, faithful, and dear friends.

I have been able to interact on a weekly basis with pastors from all over the Synod through our regular Zoom meetings with pastors and ministers on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Through the chat feature we are able to share how we are feeling on that particular day, things that are going well, questions, concerns, and examples of where others too have been seeing God in the midst of this pandemic. We have also been able to reach out to lay leaders in the church through Zoom meetings with congregational presidents and leaders to answer questions, give them information, and make them aware of the work that is going on in the Synod and other in congregations.

One of the things I have appreciated most is the ability to attend online worship services and Bible studies with multiple pastors, sometimes several in one day. To see our ministers being creative, learning new skills, and experimenting with different tools to reach out to care for their members is a joy. I know my own spiritual life has deepened through their work and faithfulness.

Finally, being forced to stay home has given me opportunities and time to reflect, read, pray, and learn to trust that God is always here, even in the anxiety, dread, grief, anger, weariness, depression, and fear that I still experience from time to time. For that I am very grateful indeed. And so...

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