

...and the God of peace will be with you. Rejoice in the Lord always;  
again I will say, Rejoice. - Philippians 4

## 2021 Assembly Report - Bishop Jon Anderson

As our Assembly, the election, and transition in the synod office approaches, this is a good time to remember we can trust God to guide us into God's preferred and promised future. God's Spirit is working to pull us together after the year of COVID-19 separation. God's creating love calls us to focus on the main things and remember God's callings for each of us, our congregations, and our synod. As some things end remember that like pruning opens space for new life and new emphasis, so also God will work in hidden and not so hidden ways to guide us through this time of change and new life.

I will build my closing Assembly report around our vision statement. The text is broken out in the boxes that follow.

### Vision Statement

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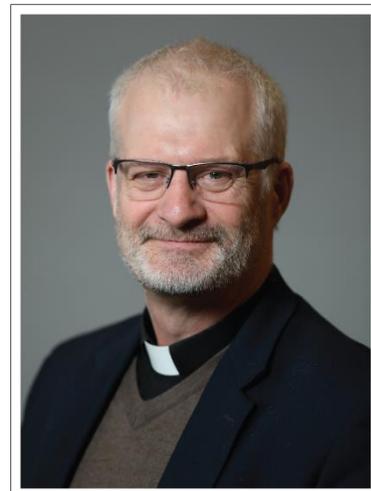
**Walking together in Christ's mission the congregations and all the baptized who are the Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are claimed by this mission: ...**

The word *synod* means, "on the road together or walking together". You are all synod ministers, all the baptized. The synod has a staff, a building, and a governance system. But the synod's most powerful expression is all the baptized living out their faith in daily life.

All the baptized ministers gather in communities of faith who have been stressed by our journey through the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been reminded that the church is not a building. Our Christian spirituality is not place-based nor are our communities of faith. We are Christ's disciples who gather at the foot of the cross. We have been reminded in this year that we follow and trust in Jesus to protect and guide us in the hardest seasons of life. We trust God's Spirit who calls us to faith and nurtures us in personal and household faith practices.

God's ongoing creative work has been more visible and obvious as we learned to be synod and congregations and Christians while not able to gather in larger groups. My prayer is that our personal and household forms of faith will continue to flourish as we return to our holy places and can gather in more normal ways as congregations.

I have been so grateful for the work of so many in the past year and years to sustain the faith lives of our people and engage our neighbors in need. God claims us in our baptism. God gives us all gifts to build up our communities of faith and our communities where we live. God decides to love and claim us day after day after day.



## **God places us in cities, farms, and towns together under one prairie sky.**

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We live in a time where people often feel like they are underappreciated. We are a synod with many diversities before we talk about the more obvious diversities of race, financial strength, and cultural context. I am thankful for the ministry of our open country, people, and congregations. I am thankful for those who reside in our cities and their ministry. I can see the churches in our towns and know their witness and ministry is strong like their siblings who God has called to serve in other contexts. I am thankful for the rich witness of you all.

## **The Risen Christ surprises us with opportunities to plant God's Word in the world.**

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I love to garden and propagate plants. This sentence always sings to me. During this year of COVID-19 my gardening and growing has been one of the things that gave me the most joy. God's grace is surprising. That God can use you, your congregation, our synod to love our neighbors and share the Good News we know through Jesus about God is a sweet surprise. We are called to share, encourage, love, forgive and challenge people to a deeper and wider faith, hope and love. Christ keeps planting.

## **Walking together in confidence,**

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Con (with)– fides (faith) With faith, we walk together. The Spirit calls us to faith, sustains our faith and guides us by faith. Our greatest treasure is the Good News we are saved and live by faith alone.

## **we cultivate life-giving congregations,**

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We are all called, as synod ministers in our baptism, to cultivate vibrant, life-giving congregational life. I want to express my gratitude to all the leaders in my eighteen years of serving as bishop who were key cultivators. I give thanks to God for presidents, council leaders, staff, pastors, quiet but important leaders who attend to the life of their congregation and encourage neighboring congregations as well.

I am remembering and giving thanks to God for eighteen years of walking together on the road of faith and through this chapter of the synod's history. It has been something. It has been a great challenge and an amazing privilege to serve in this way. May God continue to use you all to build up God's Church.

## **nurture partner ministries, and**

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We give thanks for our partners who enhance our mission, develop leaders, and sustain our rostered and lay ministers. We are thankful for our partners like Luther Seminary, Gustavus Adolphus College, Lutheran Social Service, Lutheran Advocacy of Minnesota, Green Lake Lutheran Ministries, Shetek Lutheran Ministries and Shalom Hill Farm. It has been a challenging year for us all.

## **cooperate in the life of the ELCA.**

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To speak for those in our synod in the moments of discernment and decision-making in our church body's life has been a rich privilege. I give thanks for our sister synods and the churchwide staff that support our work.

As I conclude my service later this summer, the legal team will be one of many folks who have walked with me (us) through times of serious challenge. Your synod bishop, staff and churchwide governance members like Church Council member, Cherrish Holland, bring your voice to the table.

## By God's grace, together we have what we need.

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I am confident the coming election process will not only open space for discernment about our coming chapter of synodical life, it will also provoke deep conversation as you call someone to serve as the bishop. I trust that the synod call committee of the Assembly will discern well and call a new synod pastor to walk with you. The staff and governance team of the synod will step forward to support this new leader and their staff team.

Your Synod's Vision Statement:

### Embracing God's Mission and Equipping God's People

Equipping Congregations  Engaging Leaders  Enhancing Local and Global Mission.

Your synod office is thankful for your ongoing generosity and support. Your support of your congregation and your larger church has been heroic, noticed and appreciated.

People frequently talk about the synod like the synod is your bishop or the synod staff. I know the truth. It is a team of committed and caring people who each bring their gifts to our shared-life in Christ with a confidence that "together, by God's grace, we have all that we need."

This team also includes our council, deans, conference chair people, committee, task force, and board members. As I looked through our calendar for the past year thinking of the journey, deep gratitude washed over me for all the ways God has worked through the faithful to care for God's Church and God's world.

As I prepare to conclude my service as bishop, I need to take a moment to thank all the people who have been part of the synod staff in my watch. I think of the former synod staff that graciously welcomed me and taught me so many things. I will always be grateful for Paul, Larry, Stephanie, Marcus, David. We will try to bless the next team as well.

I want to thank the staff who have served in my early years, middle years, and later years. There is currently a core staff that carries much of the weight. Thanks Tammy Schacher, Sarah Hausken, Kristin Bakeberg, Kathryn Skoglund, Stephen Cook, Dee Pederson, and Maggie Berggren. We have others who help in smaller part-time roles but that make significant contributions - Art Weiss, Dwaine Bruns, Alli Schiller, Stephen Rasmussen, Andy Hermodson-Olsen, Keith Pearson, Kelly France, Donna Ihrke and Keith Klawitter. These teammates have made amazing sacrifices and investments in the life of leaders, congregations, institutions, our synod, our churchwide organization, God's Church and God's World.

I give thanks to God for the work of so many in our synod who are not on the staff but join us as they support lay and rostered ministers, care for congregations in good times and hard and invested themselves in the work of stewarding your synod in many different dimensions of life. I give thanks to God for the ways they have offered up their life energy to serve the Gospel and steward our synod.

I give thanks to God for all of you because you also are synod ministers, too. Thanks for everything you do in Christ's name. May God continue to bless and guide the Southwestern Minnesota Synod.

Paul writes...

*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.*  
- Philippians 4