

# Rev. Dee Pederson, Director for Evangelical Mission

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**2021 Synod Assembly Report Rev.**

**Dee Pederson, D.Min.**

**Director for Evangelical Mission (D.E.M.)**

*Jesus said, Say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' – Luke 10:9.* After serving in this role since September 2019, I appreciate how much the ministry of a D.E.M. involves being “a detective of divinity,” as one of our leaders puts it. Whether out and about or working from home, D.E.M. ministry is like that of the early followers who were sent by Jesus into the towns of that day to assure people that God is with them and to look for the ways God’s reign is unfolding among them. This is what I get to do every day. Or to put it another way, I have the privilege of seeing how our congregations live out our synod vision statement: *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.*

*Cultivating a culture of vitality.* The primary focus for D.E.Ms is congregational vitality, which looks different in each congregation, depending on where God’s planted us. During my work pre-pandemic, I enjoyed making in-person visits with rostered and lay leaders in conference meetings and in congregations. Back then, none of us would have thought it possible to do ministry at all without being face to face in the same physical space. But the Risen Christ has a way of surprising us! During the past 14 months, I, too, have adapted my work, and still have the joy of supporting the vitality of congregations to:

- have a clear sense of mission/purpose,
- host worship that nurtures people’s faith in person and online,
- deepen people’s relationship with God and each other,
- seek out the gifts of members of all ages,
- cultivate generosity and stewardship,
- interact as a positive force in the local community and address social concerns,
- equip people to share their faith and discover new ways to connect with new people,
- help people live out their faith in daily life,
- try new things and move forward into the congregation’s future.

As we discovered, this past year has been all about trying new things - ready or not. After over a year of watching, waiting, adapting, and learning new skills, many leaders and congregational participants are exhausted. We grieve so many losses. Yet as we meet in Zoom with rostered and lay leaders, I am moved at how God is present – strengthening faith, forming deeper relationships, and inspiring new conversations for partnering with neighboring congregations to make everyone better, together. Many leaders are ready to continue to experiment with ministry in new ways. “By God’s grace, together we have what we need.” The Holy Spirit is breathing new life into us and it is exciting to imagine how the Spirit will guide us into the future!

As my work moved online and on the phone this year, I also had the opportunity to do writing on generosity for Gifts of Grace and Mission Support, and to prepare numerous synod blogposts. I hope that some of these resources will be helpful for the future as they remain posted on our synod website: *Equipping Congregations: Taking Faith Home, Giving as a Spiritual Practice, Stewardship in Such a Time as This, The Word is Speaking in New Ways, The Offering Plate Transformed, Financial Giving in Such a Time as This, The Risk of Singing During a Pandemic, What Might the “Next”*

Normal Look Like for Your Church?, Worship Has Moved Online: So What's Next for Your Digital Ministry?, We Are Church Together – Apart, Creating a Narrative Budget Video/PPT, Webinars with Vanco and Tithe.ly for online giving and other resources, and a Ministry Basics session on The Three Great Listenings as a foundation for moving forward postpandemic when so much of life is transformed.

Important work in vitality during the past year involved the formation of a *Racial Justice Network* that includes approx. 70 people from congregations across the synod. We recognize that today, the ELCA remains one of the whitest denominations in the U.S. These leaders are committed to developing cross-cultural competence, deepening relationships with our neighbors, and working for equity for all people, especially in and through our congregations and the communities where God has placed us.

Because of the generosity of donors across the ELCA, our synod was able to receive and steward \$17,750.00 in two *ELCA COVID-19 Response Grants*, focusing especially on the food ministries congregations have begun or expanded during the pandemic. Recipients included: Faith – Becker; Rejoice – Clearwater; Peace – Cold Spring; First – Cosmos; Christ – Cottonwood; Gethsemane – Dassel; Zion – Hanska; River of Hope – Hutchinson; Winds of the Prairie – Ivanhoe; Fields of Grace – LaFayette; Healing Waters – Montevideo; House of Grace – Montrose; Bethlehem – St. Cloud; First – St. James; First – Worthington; as well as Green Lake Lutheran Ministries, Shetek Lutheran Ministries, and Shalom Hill Farm to express support for the continuation of ELCA Outdoor Ministries. These funds were available for us to share because of our life together as the ELCA, and I am most grateful.

Additional and significant ministry areas for me include working with congregations in updating their *constitutions*; developing a strong, supportive, network for *coaching*; and facilitating book reads – “*Becoming a Hybrid Church*” and “*Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church.*”

As we recognize the dramatic cultural shifts that have been occurring across denominations for decades, I am excited about our ELCA commitment to *activate each of us so that more new people follow in the way of Jesus and experience community, justice, and love*. We have Good News in Christ to share, and it is through local congregations like you that this hope in Christ transforms the world. It is my privilege, also, to walk with our new mission development congregations, and to encourage their vitality as they welcome new people to Christian community. These include:

- *Iglesia Paz Y Esperanza*, Willmar - a Latinx congregation, and Pr. Andrés Albertsen
- *House of Grace*, Montrose - a Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community, currently engaged in significant food and water ministries, and Pr. Cathy Jones.
- *Reborn Lao Lutheran*, Waite Park - our newest Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community, and their newlyordained, Pr. Peter Keomanivong. What a joy to see 3 adults and 2 children baptized there in this spring of 2021! We have much to celebrate as these ministries reach out to new people and bless their neighbors. These are *your* ministries! Please seek out ways to encourage, support, and learn from them.

While life is changing more rapidly than we can imagine, we give thanks that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” and continues to send us into our cities, farms, and towns with life-changing Good News. These days, I’m grateful for opportunities to be out and about and to see more of you in person once again. Thank you for the privilege of serving God’s Mission with you in the Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA.

+ grace, love, and peace,

Rev. Dee Pederson, D. Min.