



Gifts of Grace

Toward Financial Wellbeing

2021 Report to the Synod Assembly

Gifts of Grace: Toward Financial Wellbeing exists to change the culture around our relationship with money and finances in the Southwestern Minnesota Synod. Evidence of this culture change will be seen through improved financial literacy and stewardship training among our leaders, reduced financial stress among our rostered ministers, and the normalization of conversations around money. With this change we break through the silence surrounding financial struggles and the burden created by it and give people and congregations tools to live out the values as we confess a God of abundance.

With the pandemic affecting the ability to do educational programs, the most significant work of Gifts of Grace in 2020 was done by our Ministerial Excellence Fund (MEF). The MEF offered again three grants to our rostered leaders:

- The Grant for Unexpected Medical Expenses (18 given in 2020)
- The Retirement Readiness Grant (31 given in 2020)
- Grant for Reduction of Student Educational Loans (35 given in 2020)

I thank the many people, congregations, and endowment funds which made these grants possible with their donations. We also are thankful for the matching funds of the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

Now that programming is resuming, we will send a new group of leaders in 2021 to the Executive Certificate for Religious Fundraising (ECRF) course. We are also supporting other programs that enrich our conversations and leadership around stewardship and generosity. In February and March of this year, we piloted a new financial literacy program called “Six Weeks on Money.” The feedback on this new financial literacy program has been good.

We had our first annual Gifts of Grace Sunday promotion in the fall of 2020. Rostered leaders, along with their congregation(s), were asked to participate in this promotional work and resources were provided to use in worship or at council meetings. We will do this again in the fall.

The leadership of the Gifts of Grace program has been pretty much the same people for our five years of existence, so in the future we will look to bring on new people and rotate off current team members as seems best for the sustainability of the program. Our leadership is as follows:

- Gifts of Grace Staff: Myself, Pastor Kelly France, Bishop Anderson, Pastor Kathryn Skoglund, Pastor Dee Pederson, and Maggie Berggren. Pastor Kelly was added to our staff in June 2020 to work in the area of development for Gifts of Grace. He has brought valuable gifts to the program.
- Implementation Team: Cherrish Holland, Pastor Dwaine Bruns, Pastor Erik Karlson, Jennifer Philaya, Pastor Lori Wold, Susan Lange and those already named (staff). Pastor Nate Luong served on this Team and has now taken a call out of our synod.

Thanks to all these people for their service.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work with this program because I believe it has and will continue to make a great impact in our synod. I thank Bishop Anderson for his strong support of and involvement with this program and for his many years of service to our synod.

In Christ's service,
Pastor Andrew Hermodson-Olsen
Gifts of Grace Director