



**Southwestern Minnesota Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

## **Bishop's 2021 Annual Report**

Rev. Dee Pederson, D.Min.

“God has placed us in cities, farms, and towns together....  
The Risen Christ surprises us as we plant God's Word in the world....  
By God's grace, together we have what we need.”

These words from our synod mission statement provide both grounding and direction as we complete a year of significant change and look ahead to the future. And first I want to say **Thank You!** for your congregation's participation and leadership, and for your partnership with one another across our synod. I am inspired by your witness to Jesus Christ and grateful for your dedication! As I share this first annual report, there are key insights in this statement that I want to lift up.

*God.* I know: that is not a surprising place to begin, is it? But all too often, we do not begin with God or God's Word; we begin with us. Or me. And given the year we have just been through, that is understandable. There are so many concerns that weigh on our hearts. We have mourned the loss of loved ones, struggled with pandemic protocols and illness, seen our kids be on-again off-again with their schools, navigated worship and devotions online, worried about attendance and offering, waited for a pastor to come to lead us. But during challenging times especially, it is vital to begin with God, just as the stories of God's Word do:

- *In the beginning God created.* - Genesis 1:1
- *In the beginning was the Word.* - John 1:1
- *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.* - Revelation 22:21

As we consider how much the world has changed in the last 2 years, and as we consider the challenges our congregations and communities face in greater Minnesota right now, it is easy to get stuck on us and our problems.

Yet your congregation is not here by chance. It is God who planted you where you are – whether that was 155 years ago, 45, or 5. You have been baptized into the Holy Trinity, who now sends you to serve each other and your community for a time such as this. God is calling you. The Risen Christ does surprise us as we plant God's Word. God's grace will provide what you need. *“It is the Lord your God who goes with you. And God will not forsake you or leave you.”* (Deut. 31:6).

*Together.* “Synod” literally means “walking together.” Planted in cities, open rural country, and towns, no two of our congregations are identical; we are different from each other. We have different histories and traditions. That can lead us to think that because we may not have certain things in common, that we don't need each other. After serving in this Office for only 4 months, I have been blessed to see the varieties of gifts the Spirit has poured out on each of our congregations and rostered ministers. And one of the things the pandemic has taught us is that we are better together. This year we have discovered that “togetherness” in new and important ways:

- Presidents & lay leaders making connections and sharing best practices as they meet together.
- Rostered ministers forming long and lasting relationships via zoom, in person, in text studies, and conference gatherings for support, encouragement, and prayer.
- Neighboring congregations meeting together to explore how they might share ministry programming and pastoral care and leadership.

Together, your synod staff has been walking with you as we have been in a time of transition:

- I am so grateful for the leadership of Bishop Jon Anderson over these past 18 years. His legacy provides such a strong foundation for this synod as I have begun to serve in this new role.
- Synod Minister Pr. Stephen Cook will continue to serve in his call as pastoral staff and will relate to conferences in the northern tier of the synod.
- Synod Administrative Staff includes Tammy Schacher - Executive Assistant to the Bishop, Office Manager, and Call Process Administrator; Kristin Bakeberg – Communications Coordinator; Maggie Berggren – Administrative Assistant; Carla Klawitter – Temporary Administrative Assistant.
- Transition Synod Ministers Pr. Dwaine Bruns, Pr. Art Wiese, Pr. Stephen Rasmusson, and former Synod Staff member Pr. Linda Pedersen – sustained conference call processes and will conclude their transitional ministry at the end of January.
- Gifts of Grace staff Pr. Andrew Hermodson-Olsen and Pr. Kelly France.
- Pr. Keith Pearson, ELCA Planned Giving Coordinator – a position funded by the ELCA and deployed in the synod.
- Sister Sarah Hausken - now serving with the churchwide Deaconess Community after working with our synod for 21 years.
- Pr. Troy Pflibsen – Director for Evangelical Mission (D.E.M.) – a position funded by the ELCA and deployed in our synod.
- Pr. Heather Culuris, joining our pastoral staff January 1, 2022, will relate to conferences in the southern tier of the synod.

Together, your staff team has been doing a fantastic job of focusing on candidacy, interim ministries, call process, and the leadership transition. At the present time, there are 54 out of 230 congregations that are in some point of transition – the highest number ever. If you know someone in your congregation who has the gifts for full or part-time ministry, please be bold enough to encourage them; it may be the Spirit's way of calling forth a new leader. And if you have a rostered minister leading your congregation right now, please express your appreciation to them and let them know you are grateful for their ministry.

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

**I return to the place I began: gratitude.** Thank you for your continuing and generous financial gifts for Mission Support that sustain the ministries of this synod and our many partners locally and around the globe. We are grateful to all who have shared gifts for Gifts of Grace that enhance the financial well-being of our rostered leaders. In addition, this year Lilly Endowment, Inc. has awarded us a new grant that will assist rostered ministers impacted financially by the pandemic, as well as assisting congregations who will explore partnerships with neighboring churches. During a change in leadership, I am grateful for the staff and governance leaders who have ensured that we enter 2022 on a solid place financially and begin a process of envisioning how God's mission is leading us in new ways into the future.

Finally, thank you for your prayers as I begin serving in the Office of the Bishop. I have been overwhelmed by the power of your prayers and encouragement during these first four months of leadership and pray that I serve you and God's mission well as the synod's pastor. Know that you are in my prayers and in my heart. Know that I welcome and seek your ideas, feedback, visits, conversations, and insights as I begin the responsibilities of this ministry. I give thanks that, by God's grace, together we have what we need.

*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, forever and ever. Amen. – Eph. 3:20-21*

Respectfully submitted,

**Rev. Dee Pederson, D.Min.**

**Serving as Bishop of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod, ELCA**