

Bishop Dee Pederson's Report to the Assembly

*"For we are God's servants, working together,
you are God's field, God's building." - 1 Corinthians 3:9*

St. Paul uses beautiful images to describe the church: servants of Christ working together, a field, and a building! As we approach the 2022 synod assembly, my report echoes the assembly theme verse and reflects on those images.

We are God's servants

At my installation last October, and at the ordinations and installations of rostered ministers, we respond to the questions asked of us with the words, "I will, and I ask God to help me." After that, we are surrounded by circles of prayer and care. Every day for the past 9 months, I have begun the day and often awakened at night in prayer and remembering those promises and prayers. All of us as rostered ministers recognize that we are servants of God. God comes first: it is God's mission, Christ's church, the Spirit's fruits that we depend upon in ministry.

The same is true for you as lay leaders. You have served in congregational ministries for two years that couldn't be more challenging, taking on responsibilities you never imagined. You persevered because God called you into your leadership role.

None of us can see exactly what the church of the future will look like. Yet the ministries of our congregations continue because it is God in Jesus Christ who has walked beside us. We serve a mission that is greater and more life-changing than any of the obstacles that have come our way. We serve the One, "who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine." And in our serving, our task is to give God "glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever."

Whether rostered or lay, your calls and ministries matter. I am so grateful for you and to you. Thank you for the privilege and honor of serving God in this Office. Thank you for serving our God together with me.



Working together

We believe that *“God has planted our congregations in cities, farms, and towns together,”* and that *“by God’s grace, together we have what we need.”* Each of our congregations has unique gifts from God. You will hear me refer repeatedly to the importance of paying attention to the context in which God has planted us. Those relationships are challenged when we compare ourselves to others, forget the gifts God has given us, fail to see the gift each is to the rest of us, or act as though we do not need each other. It is by God’s grace together that we have what we need.

How are we working together? In so many ways! For all this I give thanks:

- Your staff: Synod Ministers Pr. Heather Culuris and Pr. Stephen Cook walking with congregations in the candidacy, transition, and call process; Director for Evangelical Mission (D.E.M.) Pr. Troy Pflibsen; and your Synod Administrative staff Tammy Schacher, Kristin Bakeberg, and Maggie Berggren.
- New candidates who have begun their rostered ministry in this synod: Pr. Hans Peterson, Pr. Janet Adams, Deacon Jill Davis, Pr. Jon Wendt, Pr. Jeremy Hallquist, and in May soon-to-be-pastor Susan Christianson.
- Synod governance: Synod Council, boards, and so many committees.
- Conference Deans and Chairpersons keeping us connected close to home.

The generosity of your Mission Support sustains all we do together in the synod and with our partners in outdoor ministries, campus ministries, colleges & universities, seminaries, across the ELCA, and around the world. Our Mission Support comes back to us by providing us with a whole, full-time staff member - our D.E.M. Pr. Troy who is working with many congregations right now in long-range planning and collaborations.

Thank you for walking together with the other 229 congregations who are part of this synod. We knew we were “church together” before, but as COVID-19 kept us apart, God has shown us how truly connected we really are. Each day we give thanks that *“by God’s grace, together we have what we need.”*

You are God’s field

When a seed is planted and tender shoots start to emerge from the soil, it’s hard to imagine the plant that will grow there. Corn or beans, daffodils, or iris bulbs, tomatoes or pumpkins, these small beginnings grow into plants that can be tall and beautiful and capable of sustaining life.

As we emerge from this global pandemic, we can see how the rate of change sped up innovation and creativity across our congregations and is bearing new fruit.

- Area ministry partnership conversations are emerging.
- Lay leaders are imagining ministry in new ways.
- The online presence of congregations is reaching people who are homebound, on the road, and on the other side of the globe.
- Candidates are preparing for ministry.
- Synod staff are providing pastoral care for leaders in times of illness or crisis, leading worship, preaching, meeting with congregations, and listening for how God is at work among us.



In challenging circumstances, our congregations and our synod are living with change in the same way the church always has: remembering that it is GOD who has planted the word among us. On our part, we have the privilege of bearing the fruits of that word.

You are God's building

When one begins to lay a foundation for a building, it's hard to envision the structure that will rise there. A sanctuary or office, a home or garage, a grain elevator or community center, the stability of the structure depends upon its strong foundation. We believe, *"The Lord is my rock and my salvation."*

We are a synod building on a strong foundation as we have moved forward with unprecedented changes in congregational leadership, retirements, synod staff, and the Office of the Bishop. Many of our congregations are celebrating 150 years of standing on a strong foundation of faith. The pandemic reminded us that indeed, the church is not a building – it is people! And God is building all of us in new ways to serve God's preferred and beautiful future.

We rejoice over new worshipping communities. We give thanks for our partnership with the Southeastern Diocese of the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa. We give thanks for the relationships we share with Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Disaster Response, and Lutheran immigration and Refugee Services. Through them, you are there, standing with people experiencing war, hunger, disasters, and unrest.

Thank you for your generosity and for your partnership. As a church emerging from a pandemic, we give thanks that it is God who is the actor in the story of Life in Christ and in our life as the church. *"We are God's servants, working together. You are God's field, God's building."* Thanks be to God!

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