

Diakonia/Service

+Bishop Jon V. Anderson 2015 Annual Report

Boldly living in Christ's mission by...

+ Engaging Leaders + Equipping Congregations + Serving in God's World.



Life in Christ is a faith adventure.

It begins in our baptism, when we are called to begin to live our life in a daily mission trip of serving our gracious God as we live out our many callings. We sometimes turn service into a project, or a fund raiser, or something we do when we have time. Yet serving, or diakonia, is one of the marks of the Church. It is part of what we are called to do as we trust and follow Jesus our lord, the one who calls us to wash feet with him as we love our neighbors and world.

Washing His Disciples Feet - John 13:1-17

In our life together in Christ we serve together in the Southwestern Minnesota Synod. We serve on behalf of the great Servant who has called us to follow him deeper in faith, hope and love. We serve, at times surprised like the early disciples, as Jesus comes to touch us and make us clean. We serve as Jesus did as he journeyed towards the cross. Our theme word this year is diakonia. While it will not always be our focal word, it is a part of what it means to follow Jesus, we serve and love as he has done to us.

just before the Passover Feast... [Jesus] got up from the supper table, set aside his robe, and put on an apron. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with his apron...Then he said, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Master,' and rightly so. That is what I am. So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other's feet... If you understand what I'm telling you, act like it—and live a blessed life

The Message (MSG).

I always love to read our synod's mission statement. "The congregations and all the baptized who are the Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are claimed by this mission: 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, 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." The ending reminds me that God has given us one another to walk together into God's preferred and promised future.

Our synod continues to face change with all of its challenges and opportunities. Who could forget last year's winter? Crop prices oscillate. Our world seems full of threats...and wonder. How do we love our God and love our neighbors in this time? I had visits with leaders of small congregations on our western side of the synod last month. I was struck by their joy and excitement even in the midst of challenges. God's Spirit keeps breathing new life into you, me and our communities of faith. As I read the blog posts of our Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) I continue to wonder at how God works on us and through us in this broken and beautiful world.

Psychiatrist and spiritual guide, Gerald May, suggests a six step spiritual practice as we serve on our daily mission trip as the baptized ones whom God loves and as the community that gathers and is sent in Jesus name.



Pausing – We need to pause to give thanks, remember, mourn, lament and rejoice for the gifts of life. God's love has claimed us. Christ Jesus washes us free of all that traps us and seeks to destroy us. God's Spirit blows like the blizzard winds relentlessly seeking to set us free and bless us with new life.

Noticing – Christian leaders are called to be people who notice things. We encourage people to notice the abundance of gifts God has given to us. In a culture that loves the story of American Idol where only one person comes out at the end, God is at work blessing us with experiences, reclaiming our pain by using it to serve others like Jesus' cross was used by God to set us free and be a symbol of life. God's Spirit keeps inviting generosity in a world that focuses on scarcity.

DIAKONIA
Formed to Serve

Opening – God calls us to open our heart, our ears, our eyes, our mind and our hands. God calls us to faith and nourishes us in faith. That is why our synod’s congregations and leaders focus on faith formation so that people might grow into deep love and wide generosity. God’s Spirit keeps opening us up, breaking us open to God’s will and to see the needs of our neighbors.

Yielding – There is a dying that comes with each day as we are called back to our baptism. We die to sin and are raised to new life. This is not just something that happens to people. It also happens to congregations, synods, our church body and God’s church. As our synod office’s financial support declines because congregation’s financial life is changing; as congregations designate more giving and invest more resources locally, we have begun to distribute more of the work of the synod into the hands of leaders across our synod. Rather than look back to what was, we are working on developing multiple streams of funding to support the necessary infrastructure of a regional expression of God’s church. We thank each of you for your support and your congregation’s mission support that makes our synod’s life and church body’s life possible.

We are all called to build up God’s church and serve as synod ministers. We are a church committed to reforming. We are doing that in our staff’s life to focus our resources on forming leaders at seminary and campus ministries. We give thanks to God for the generosity of many with mindfulness of what would be possible if our people and congregations grew in generosity.

Stretching – A recent article in Scientific American magazine argued that healthy organizations master three capabilities to innovate and stretch to engage the work of this changing world and our changing mission fields. I love them. “Creative abrasion” is necessary in order to take off rough edges and fit new times. We have to be willing to face our differences and engage one another in conversations and work. “Creative agility” means congregations need to be willing and able to move with speed and lightness of step in the changing landscape of our time. “Creative resolution” is required to let go of differences and keep the focus on the mission of growing gracious disciples who grow gracious disciples through God’s Church. We have to stretch in order to stay limber and move to glorify God and love our neighbors.

Responding – We live in a time full of gifts. Our people have many gifts. Our congregations have amazing resources. I am talking about the people God has called into your community. We are called to practice our faith and pass on our faith with joy. Our mission is not just to raise enough money to have a pastor and a building. Our mission as Christians is to nurture our faith through the Word and sacrament that holds us together in community and then be contagious as we live out our many callings following the call of Jesus our Lord. We are not building monuments, but rather building a movement of faithful and fruitful disciples who love their neighbors and God’s whole world. Thanks for your response to the Gospel and your love which serves in all kinds of ways that we will never see.

I want to thank all the council leaders this past year in congregations and your synod. I need to thank the great group of people who make up our synod’s governance. I wish you could see your amazing synod staff serving in the flow of your synod’s daily ministry. It is a privilege to serve with them.

Please sign up at www.swmnelca.org to receive our almost weekly Enews. On Facebook you can find us at Southwestern Minnesota Synod, ELCA. May God bless you and your congregation as you serve in Jesus name.