



# Equip: Always Reforming

**+Bishop Jon V. Anderson - 2016 Annual Report**

*Boldly living in Christ's mission by **taking risks and changing lives ...**  
+ Engaging **More Leaders** + Equipping **More Congregations**  
+ Serving **fruitfully** in God's World **as God grows more Christ followers.***

We are doing synod in new ways. This is what we have been doing in the past year. In our synod and congregations, as our world changes and our communities change we will need to grow more committed to innovation and sharing what we learn with one another for the sake of the Gospel. This fits our identity as a church that is committed to always reforming to best steward the Gospel we know in Christ Jesus.

Our Equipping God sends the Holy Spirit to blow new life into our communities of faith and inspire us to create new sustainable structures for our regional expression of church. God surprises us by working in all kinds of seasons to deepen our faith and life. God agitates God's people and the leaders of our church. We need to remember, as William Willimon loves to say, 'Jesus Christ loved the world...not just the church.' And "Congregational contentment is a fierce competitor with faithful mission."

God equips through the work of the Holy Spirit in our personal and communal lives. God calls us to faith and sends us out into the harvest. God equips us for ministry – to heal the sick, to announce God's reign, to proclaim God's justice, peace and grace.

I will propose the new words in our vision statement (shown above) to your synod council. I have put them in bold print. As we move forward we need to become clearer about what we are doing together in Christ's name and for the sake of our neighbors.

We believe we are called to "Embrace God's Mission † Equip God's People." We are committed to deepening congregational vitality. We intend to help people see their assets and better engage in the work of inviting people deeper into the life of Jesus and the community that bears his name.

We will be encouraging congregations to notice their assets and see them as hints about what God is calling them to do in ministry and mission. We will be introducing assessments to move beyond "anec-data (anecdote data - those are the stories we tell) to actually gather data from our whole community not just those who speak most loudly and often. We will be working to deepen our leaders and congregations ability to communicate the Good News to our changing world. That is why we are already doing experiments with new ways to staff the synod. Our Conference Ministers bring staff energy closer to your congregation. We have five people serving in this way. We are thankful for what we learn as they engage this work.

## LUKE 10

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

We are also committed to enhancing congregational and synodical mission effectiveness. We have dreams and plans to deepen our capacity to do local and global mission more effectively. God is doing great work through the faithful leaders (pastors and lay leaders) who make the life of our 242 congregations happen – proclaiming the Gospel, loving their neighbors, caring for the sick, walking beside the anxious, supporting the ill and dying. Our local congregations are mission stations in God's great mission for this whole world.

We hear God calling us to sustain our mission through churchwide, seminary support, campus ministries, Lutheran Advocacy of Minnesota, the Minnesota Council of Churches, our camps, retreat centers and Gustavus Adolphus College. We hear God calling us to equip people to engage the deepening issues of poverty on our synod's territory. Like the early disciples were surprised on Pentecost, we are called to become a multi-ethnic church learning to receive the gifts and engage the lives of people who are not from the historic contexts of the Lutheran Christian movement.

In the coming years, we will be observing the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. Don't imagine a big bash on Oct. 31, 2017, rather see a journey of exploring and deepening our Lutheran Christian identity as the anniversary of the events of the reformation unfold over the next twenty to thirty years. We have an important voice in the Christian choir which we want to become more comfortable and competent singing.

We are committed to developing servant leaders. We are thankful for all the prayers and invitations that have led our synod to have increased numbers of candidates for ordained leadership. We are thankful for the courageous reforms of our church body and seminary leaders to create more paths for pastors and other disciples to develop their leadership abilities to serve God's mission and God's congregations. Our synod increasingly focuses our energy on equipping Christ followers so that they might better serve the Gospel. We are an equipping synod.

The way money is moving in God's world and church is changing. That is why we are preparing for a funding initiative with leaders already meeting to develop resources and plans. We know people love to see where their gifts go in this time, so we are creating additional paths for individuals to join the congregations of our synod providing mission support. Together these efforts will create energy needed to do synod in new ways.

Throughout the coming year and years, God will be guiding us as we seek to Embrace God's Mission † Equip God's People. God will equip us in all kinds of ways. For example, we are equipped by our tradition to serve our changing culture and context. In the season of Advent, God works to stir us up to be ready for the coming of our Lord and to hear God's deep longing for this world. In the season of Epiphany, God brings light into our dark lives and world with the light of Jesus, our Lord. In the season of Lent, we are reminded of our broken-ness and sin. As some are preparing for baptism, God calls us to turn around and repent as broken people and a broken world. But what God does in the passion of Jesus decisively breaks through it all. In the season of Easter, God's resurrecting grace restored lives and calls people to follow our God whose love makes all things new. In Pentecost, the Holy Spirit catches our attention and fires us up in excitement for God's ways and future. In the long green season, we grow as we gather to hear the story of Jesus with his teachings about God, healing and teaching us who God longs for us to be. Through the whole year, we are reminded God is the primary equipper, not the synod, not the pastor and not the congregations. Through the broken and beautiful lives of our communities of faith and the personal witness of sinner/saints, God transforms our lives and our world.

Thanks for your generosity and your ministry as one of the baptized. Every day, God’s work is done as God guides your hands to love your neighbors and this creation. I give thanks to God for each and every one of you. I know our synod’s life would not happen without all the people who serve in all our mission stations. I particularly want to thank the elected governance of the synod and the synod staff, I am blessed to serve alongside. We say goodbye with gratitude to Pr. Joyce Piper and welcome Pr. Kathryn Skoglund to your synod’s ministry team.

The icon below lifts up the work of your synod. I want to begin and end with our mission and identity as a synod.

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