

Together we are being called to....



EMBRACE

God's Mission

EQUIP

God's People



Bishop Jon V. Anderson

⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it...¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4 – The Message

God loves to see people grow deeper in faith, hope and love.

God loves to see congregations thrive as they live in and live out the Good News we know in Jesus our Lord.

What is a synod good for?

- We are called to proclaim God's embracing grace we know in Jesus and embrace God's mission.
- We are called to equip God's people for lives of ministry and service in God's world.

God has chosen to embrace this world. We know this through Jesus whose life, teachings, death and resurrection give us a glimpse into the heart and mind of God. God has a dream for this whole world and a dream for each of our lives.

We have an equipping God who works through us to build up the body of Christ. Each of us is differently gifted in our creation. Together we are called to care for God's world and one another. All broken in different ways, God works to redeem us and redeems our failures like God redeemed the cross. God's Holy Spirit breathed life into us and continues to inspire us to love and serve. This paragraph is also true for your congregation.

Let's start with this question, "How is your faith life?" When we invite people to talk about their faith, the room fills with a holy buzz as people share how God is nourishing them. In our life it is easy to slip into worshipping a household idol (who only is concerned about my life and my household.) Our communities of faith are called to deepen and broaden the faith lives of our people beyond our natural self-centered instincts so people might come to know our loving and living God. Our living God is beyond our comprehension and cares for the whole world, seeks to redeem all of creation, and is at work in the world before any of us go on our daily mission trip or participate in a special mission trip. God calls us toward maturity of faith and life in Christ. As we grow deeper, we realize we are all synod ministers and missionaries. God is calling our synod to support the work of nurturing congregations and deepening the faith of all people.

How is your community of faith doing? A healthy congregation is clear about its sense of identity as Christ followers sharing their life which starts at the font and gathers weekly around God's table of grace. When congregations lose sight of who the Lord of the Church and the center of their life is, then things spin out of control. A healthy congregation is proclaiming that God is up to something distinctive and unique in the life, death, resurrection and ongoing work of Jesus. Congregations keep turning around to grow deeper in prayer, living in conversations with scripture, gathering for worship, giving themselves away generously in love of neighbor. God is calling our synod to support the work of congregations because we have Good News to share in a world that is hungry for meaning and purpose.

How is your sense of mission? Lutheran Christians believe God gives each person distinctive callings. When we talk about equipping people, we are not only concerned about the callings that serve and build up God's Church, we are also talking about equipping Christ followers to live out and act out their faith in their daily life in all seasons of their life.

How is your congregation/institution's sense of mission? Healthy congregations have a mission beyond themselves. They do not worship a congregational household idol (who only cares about their congregation); they worship the living God who cares about the whole world while deeply treasuring and valuing each person and each community of faith.

We are encouraging congregations reform themselves to serve the mission field of the present and future with courage. We worry about those congregations who mostly are looking back and failing to notice what God has placed in front of them and around them. We are grateful for the signs of deepening capacity to engage the diversity and gifts of people whom God has called to live in our communities. We are thankful most churches have figured out that they are called to be welcoming places for all people. I believe God wants more than a welcome from us though. I believe we are called to be an inviting church that invites people into faith, love, hope, our service life, our fellowship life, our learning life and our worship life. Our living God calls each of us and each of our congregations to live out our distinctive callings while building up God's whole Church and loving God's whole world.

In the past year, your synod staff has supported the baptized, congregations and institutions of your synod in many ways. Often the best work is invisible or hard to measure. But here are some things we can quantify.

- a. We have supported 46 congregations in call processes for rostered leaders.
- b. We have walked with 29 candidates and recently approved six for ordination.
- c. We have finished visits to every congregation of our synod in nine of our ten conferences in our **Together in Ministry** visitations.

Your synod staff is called to oversee the life of congregations and all the baptized in our 240 congregations of SW MN. We want to lift up several challenges and opportunities

- a. **Clergy Supply** – Our number of vacancies is remaining steady but we see a reduction of seminarians nationally, increased retirements, and your staff is working harder and harder to find potential candidates for calls.
- b. **Theological Education** – We need not just worry about our seminaries, we need to find ways to deepen the faith lives and formation of all our baptized ones – youth to adults. The challenges of our seminaries are significant as we seek better ways to form the next generation of pastors.
- c. **Equipping the Baptized for Congregational Service** – As many congregations move from two pastors to one pastor (or form new partnerships) the formation of staff – theologically, technically, ecclesially in churchly culture— will continue to grow in importance.
- d. **Equipping the Baptized for Their Daily Mission Trips** – We are all ministers in our baptism. While we measure congregations by people in worship, membership and dollars, God measures congregations by their sending capacity...into local and global service.

As we look forward we want to equip deeper people and congregations. We are growing a new generation of lay preachers. We are seeking to get more people to the classes of the Worship and Music Center led by Jay Beech. We have been blessed with resources from the Lilly Endowment to deepen the management and financial skills of our pastors and all the baptized. We know that faith formation is crucial work in homes, our congregations, and as we do mission work.

You will hear more about our **Embrace God's Mission – Equip God's People** funding initiative, but notice the strategic planning that it seeks to serve. We have identified strategic priorities we seek to address as we seek to do synod in new ways to serve the unchanging Gospel of Jesus.

I want to thank the whole synod ministry team. I want to thank all those who serve on committees, boards, task forces, our conferences and synod council. I treasure my staff partners who faithfully serve your synod's life. We are thankful for Pr. Joyce Piper's past service. We are excited about Pr. Kathryn Skoglund's arrival. We also celebrate the contributions of Pr. Bill Nelsen's ministry as the Equipping Minister working with the Lilly Endowment grant and our funding initiative. We also appreciate Deb Hess's presence and gifts as she supports this work for the next few years. In a broad sense all the congregational and institutional leaders also are synod ministers. And in the broadest sense, all the baptized who serve God and contribute financially are synod ministers as well.

We are constantly reforming to serve our synod's local and global mission field. Healthy systems have great ideas bubbling up locally and then are shared with others. Sometimes our best work as a staff is being honey bees who share ideas. Sometimes because of our movement through the system diagonally, we see things that local leaders would not see. Together we serve the Gospel.

God will take care of this Church. We are called to be stewards of the Gospel and what has been passed on to us. May God guide us as we embrace God's mission and receive the Gospel. May God continue to equip us all through the power of the Holy Spirit.



Rev. Linda Pederson, *Synod Minister*

“But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. The gifts Christ gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to EQUIP the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to measure of the full stature of Christ.” - Ephesians 4:7, 11-13

Equip has been the word that we have been working on throughout this past year and will continue to carry us into the future God calls us to live. We have experienced success as we equip both individuals and congregations to live out their callings to use the gifts that God has given them. Sharpening, nurturing and developing those gifts has been a part of my ministry as one of your Synod Ministers for more than 12 years. I am incredibly grateful for the privilege I have served you as an “Equipping Synod Minister.”

Equipping Congregations Day

Ask just about anyone in SW MN Synod about what they appreciate about our synod and you will hear the Equipping Congregations Day. In February we filled two of our largest church buildings for a one-day event of learning and inspiration for the second year in a row. The day provides a keynote speaker, 30 practical workshops for congregational ministry and a chance to have informal conversation with people from across our synod. The combination has been serving up a day that keeps people inviting others and going home inspired to do ministry in our local settings.

Each year we hear stories of what people have carried back to their congregation. It could be a new idea, or a conversation with someone struggling with the same concern. Or maybe it is just the opportunity to sing hymns in a sanctuary filled with praising voices. The whole day provides inspiration and affirmation for lay and clergy in their local congregation. If you have not experienced this day, come for the first time this year on February 25, 2017 in Willmar.



Companion Ministry with the Southeastern Diocese of Southern Africa

All 10 of our conferences have developed a relationship with their partner circuit in the Southeastern Diocese of South Africa (SED). Each conference/circuit relationship has grown out of person to person visits both in Southwestern Minnesota and in southern Africa. Each



conference/circuit has exchanged prayer requests and through their partnership committees determined how to join together in mission and ministry, including participating in a variety of projects. The

projects include scholarships for education, digging a well for clean water to supply an orphanage, caring for elderly, help with community gardens and raising money for packaged food to be delivered to some of the poorest areas. High on the needs of the SED has been prayers for rain in their drought stricken land and lay leadership training needed because of a shortage of pastors.



Call Process: Listening, Recruiting, Matching and Celebrating



One area that has changed the most in my time serving in SW MN Synod is the call process. More specifically, it is not the process that has changed, but the expectations of congregations and candidates. In a time when we hear a lot of news about the number of candidates for many jobs in America, congregations also have an expectation there is a large group of pastoral candidates for every call. However, the number of people attending seminaries, the number of pastors reaching the age of retirement and the number of congregations seeking pastors are no longer in alignment with each other. More and more energy goes into helping call committees and recruiting potential pastors to serve in SW MN Synod. With higher expectations for pastoral service and lower financial resources, the challenge matching congregations and pastors has required more prayer and patience.

That said, we continue to welcome incredible pastors into new calls and congregations are celebrating their gifts.



Rev. Dr. Kathryn Skoglund, *Synod Minister*

It seems hard for me to believe that it has been a little over six months since Rev. Joyce Piper passed the baton of Synod Minister to me. The time has flown by and I feel blessed to be a part of the staff that makes up your Synod office. Although I have been involved in this synod since I first started my candidacy so many years ago, I never fully realized the extent of the work that goes into walking together with pastors and congregations as they strive to faithfully carry out God's mission in the world. Below is a list of some of the things in which I have been involved so far.

Candidacy: There are currently candidates of all ages and background going through the candidacy process. From the first nudge felt by the Holy Spirit that rostered ministry may be in the future, an individual is accompanied by Synod staff, the candidacy committee, professors, congregations, pastors and mentors to discern God's call to a ministry of Word and Sacrament, or a ministry of Word and Service. We are currently working with traditional seminary students, Distributed Learning students, and TEEM candidates in this process of discernment and formation. One of the ways we assist in this process is through scholarships to help defray educational costs. Since I started in November, 26 scholarships have been awarded to candidates currently in their studies for rostered leadership.

Conference Work: I am enjoying making connections with rostered leaders in five of our Synod's ten conferences: Glacial Ridge, Lac Qui Parle, Prairie, Scenic Valley and Shetek. During our recent Together in Ministry visits in the Lac Qui Parle, Watonwan River and Shetek Conferences I have been able to meet with congregational leaders and their pastors and to see parts of the state that I have not had the opportunity to see before. The days those visits take place are long and full, but well worthwhile because of the connections we make as we travel from church to church.

Call Process: In my role as Synod Minister I have the privilege of working with churches that are in the process of looking for interim pastors, interviewing pastors for a settled call, or welcoming a recently called pastor into the ministry of that congregation. I have been able to participate in a number of clergy installations and it is extremely gratifying to see the joy and excitement of both pastors and congregations as they begin their journey together.

Lilly Endowment Grant: You may have heard that our Synod has been awarded a \$500,000.00 grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. Joyce wrote the grant that resulted in this marvelous gift that will benefit our congregations and pastors for years to come. I am now serving as a member of the Lilly team that will be responsible for the implementing the programs that will be using these funds over the next three years. Look for more information about this during this assembly and in the future as we move forward with this exciting endeavor.

Future Responsibilities: Some of the events in which I will be involved include our Fall Theological Conference, a Boundaries Workshop for rostered leaders, and a deeper involvement with our First Call Theological Education program. I am looking forward to continuing to grow into my call and being part of the lives of the congregations, and their leaders in the years to come.



Rev. Larry Streng, *Director for Evangelical Mission (D.E.M.)*

“...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” (Ephesians 4)

The verse above—key to our Embrace God’s Mission (+) Equip God’s People funding initiative—comes from one of my favorite chapters of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. Just prior to these words Paul says, “**Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.**” I am grateful to work with LOTS of people who have numerous gifts of grace and call forth mine, too. As a result, the Spirit provides sightings of that grace. Here are a few over the past year in my areas of work...



New immigrants are coming to SW MN. We’ve known Willmar has a large Latino population. Worthington is the most culturally diverse community in the state of MN! In St Cloud there is a growing tension as fear infects our psyche with the spread of terrorists and extremists. Especially this has been seen in the Muslim community. Working to address this fear, our SW MN Synod is partnering with others to build bridges. Our Serving in God’s World Board worked with a Gustavus Adolphus College sorority to do a “Spread the Love” food packaging event. Combined with packing food for local food

shelves, backpack programs and disabled veterans persons built relationships with persons of other cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds. A similar event—“Better Together: Feeding One Community” is planned for St Cloud on July 28, 2016. A food packaging event will take place at Apollo High School with a special emphasis to build relationships as people of diverse cultures, religions and races package food side by side and offer this food to synod wide to the local agencies mentioned above. As Dr. Todd Green said in his talk on Islamophobia at St John’s University, “The long term solution to Islamophobia is having a lasting relationship with a Muslim person.” Our synod is working with others to make these relationships happen. (An interesting fact: The resource by LSS/MN called, “My Neighbor is Muslim” was created after a group of pastors in the St Cloud area spoke with LSS/MN CEO, Jodi Harpstead and asked for such a curriculum. Dr. Todd Green was the writer of this curriculum about the Islamic religion along with seminary professors from Luther Seminary.)

Our SW MN Synod partnered with other synods and our ELCA’s Churchwide Renewal Team to provide leadership in congregational renewal through a day called “**Discovering Hope.**” Designed as a renewal tool for smaller member congregations we saw people from SD, NW MN, Eastern ND and SW MN learning together.

“**Grace Based Evangelizing: Living and Telling the Story of Jesus Today**” on April 14, 2016 offered an opportunity for our synod to work with Regional partners on the topic of evangelizing. Four speakers, including Pr. Salim Kaderbhai, Madelia, (left) joined together to present four TED talk style presentations covering topics of evangelizing.

P.I.E. (Prosper Invest Endow): A Recipe for Generosity

P.I.E. ministry is about the use of story and planned giving as people consider their legacy. Jim Barkley, member at Celebration/Sartell, has been a key contributor to this ministry. We have called upon Jim once again to develop an essential component to the ministry, the ways stories are gathered. Using grant money we received along with partners from the SD Synod from a Stewardship of Life Institute (SOLI) and Lilly grant we are extending training to first call pastors and others to develop our “Story Shepherd” ministry.

We often celebrate older congregations who the Spirit planted in our synod. Now we are seeing several emerging ministries. This includes House of Grace (HoG), Montrose, MN, with Pr Kimberly Buffie. This new ministry center is part of a small congregation making a big impact. For example, HoG was featured in an ELCA video for its work on “God’s Work. Our Hands” one Sunday in September. Laotian leaders gather in St Cloud for Bible Study every Sunday. We celebrate with River of Hope as it now becomes a “chartered” congregation of our ELCA. And we remember God’s work in other places where ministry is emerging. The ministry of Paz y Esperanza in Willmar is developing a new leader and Bethlehem Lutheran, St Cloud, our synod’s largest congregation by membership is training leaders through its African Ministry and our partnership with Agora. This ministry continues to add excitement to the work of God’s Spirit among us



It is impossible to cover all the areas of ministry for which a Director for Evangelical Mission is called to coach—or is it “referee”— in a synod where the Spirit is alive and working through leaders—rostered and lay—to steward the grace we have been given. I am honored to continue to serve with Bishop Jon and the team he has called together, walking with that team into times of death and new life—both personally and in our settings. I have witnessed an incredible partnership among those who serve as the SW MN Synod staff. And I have come to deeply appreciate all the gifts of grace being lived out by rostered and lay leaders who serve throughout this synod in its variety of congregational and other ministries. As we come to the end of the 2016 Synod Assembly I’ll be deepening some learning through an ELCA model sabbatical. What that means is a time to do some “retooling” and “renewing” in my soul, mind, and body. I’ll be taking a “Mini MBA” at Augsburg College (6/12-17) and then work on areas of storytelling to finish out the weeks that are not vacation through July 25th. I’ll continue that in summer 2017. When I return I am confident that the good work begun in areas related to our Congregational Vitality project, a group of pilot congregations who are doing a Missional Assessment Profile (MAP) and the work with a team of “Navigators,” will offer new excitement for ministry in this place called SW MN. It is exciting to see what will happen as we enter this Funding initiative and talk intentionally about the role of money for pastors and others using funding from our Lilly Grant. Much will happen! So, I am grateful to serve in this calling. And I look forward to continuing in this role for as long as health permits and it continues to be challenging and life-giving.

Oh, did I mention we became grandparents this year? It is another wonderful calling for this next part of God’s Story being lived out with you in this time and place.

“We are Church TOGETHER!” I look forward to serving among you. And, I am grateful that God has called us to use those gifts of Grace to tell the Story of Jesus being lived out in each of us.





Sarah Hausken, *Youth Ministry Coordinator*

Embrace God's Mission. Equip God's People

I love our assembly theme this year. I feel like it describes the spirit and heart of youth ministry throughout our synod. I'd like to highlight a few ways I have seen this theme in action this past year.

The SW MN Synod Lutheran Youth Organization

This board of 15 youth and 10 adults serves as a leadership lab for young people to embrace God's mission and equip God's people. They work hard to create youth gatherings that will open the eyes of youth to Jesus in their midst.

Jr. and Sr. High Youth Gatherings

Youth gatherings planned and coordinated by the SW MN Synod Lutheran Youth Organization are super events where the love of Christ is proclaimed with creativity and joy. Gathering participants particularly appreciate Faith Talks shared by youth, Christian music and service projects.

Youth Ministers in Congregations

Young people need adults who walk on the road with them as they discover Jesus. Our synod is full of these adults, both paid and volunteer. God is doing amazing things through you. Thank you.

Youth Worker Retreat

Our annual retreat this fall was held at Shores of St. Andrew Bible Camp. Our theme was "Real Solutions for Involving Parents in Faith Formation at Church and Home" and was led by Amy Kippen, Director of Faith Formation and Katie Burrington, Youth Director, both serving at Faith Lutheran and Journey in Faith in West Fargo, ND. The thirty-two people attending the retreat were treated to a day of truth, inspiration, practical tips and hope.

Youth and Family Ministry E- Newsletter

Please join our mailing list to receive bursts of information on events, resources, education, and more regarding youth and family ministry. Go to www.swmnelca.org to join.

Preventing and Responding to Abuse

I have learned that 1 in 5 people are abused. As congregations we have a responsibility to prevent abuse within the ministries we shepherd. I've put together 4 steps you can follow to prevent and respond to abuse in your congregation. http://www.swmnelca.org/preventing_responding.html

Practice Discipleship

Grow deeper in your knowledge and practice of youth ministry through online webinars and in-person trainings. The theme this year is Wonder. Thanks to the ELCA Youth Ministry Network and the ELCA Youth Gathering, the

courses are free! Contact our synod's Practice Discipleship Coach, Jenny Aleckson to schedule your Practice Discipleship experience. jaleckson@StJohns-Annandale.org, 320-274-8827.

SW MN Synod Youth Ministers Facebook Group

When youth ministers have a question for their colleagues or want to share news of an upcoming event, they often turn to our synod's youth minister Facebook group. If you're a youth minister in our synod, please know this is a resource for you. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/swmnsynodyouthministers/>

A Story

I've given you some facts and reports and now I want to share a story about a youth in our synod who embodied our theme of embracing God's mission and equipping God's people. Let me tell you about our current LYO president, Cole Woltjer. Cole is a multi-cultural/multi-racial kid. His dad is Pilipino and his mom is American. Cole was raised by his mom and Grandpa, and grew up largely without a father. That left a large hole in his life. But Cole was a member at Vinje Lutheran Church in Willmar and Vinje was a place where he felt cared about and at home.



Cole (front) and the youth of the LYO board

When Cole was in Jr. High his Grandpa died and Cole really struggled. He doubted God and stopped going to church. He even attempted to take his own life. After quite a while Cole's mom convinced him to go back to church. Cole talks about walking into that building and being greeted and welcomed as if he had never left. Through his congregation, Cole felt the depth of God's love. He started to become more involved in his faith community and eventually went to a Jr. High Youth Gathering. At that gathering he experienced a style of worship he had never seen before. Youth were dancing and singing at the top of their lungs. And there were lots of people. Cole realized that the church was larger than his congregation.

When Cole reached 9th grade he ran for the LYO board. He was not elected to the board but decided to try again the next year. In the meantime, I met Cole at an Equipping Congregations day. I was really impressed that as a youth he was attending this event about equipping us for ministry in our congregations. When he was in 10th grade he ran for the LYO board again and was not elected. But thankfully, our LYO board has 2 board appointed positions that allow us to add diversity to the board in whatever way we see fit. We asked Cole to apply and decided to invite him to join the LYO board. Cole thrived in that atmosphere. He said he felt accepted for who he was and he was able to form close relationships with both youth and adults who all care deeply about sharing God's love. In 11th grade, Cole was not only elected to the board but elected as the board's president. Cole went from doubting God and feeling hopeless about life to leading a board of people to share the love of Christ in amazing ways. Cole personifies our call to embrace God's mission and equip God's people and I am grateful to serve alongside him and the many others who do the same throughout our church.



Synod Council & Executive Committee Report - 2015

What does “embrace” mean to you? When I think about it beyond the obvious definition of physically wrapping arms around loved ones or dear friends, I envision people positioned quite literally, heart-to-heart. To “embrace the day” is to meet, with vigor, all it will bring. To “embrace the notion” suggests one accepts the validity or goodness of an idea. It’s in similar ways that the Synod Council and Executive Committee do their work. On many occasions, we come together as diversely equipped people of God, heart-to-heart and faith-to-faith, to steward and embrace with vigor the good work God has given us to share inside God’s mission.

Looking back over 2015, here is a sampling of what we embraced together:

- Received reports from the ongoing, unfolding work of “The Listening Project” around our synod to hear the voices of faith-filled people giving input about where God may be leading us in the years to come.
- Supported the ongoing discovery of new ways to fund our ministries; developed a Case Statement related to this work; and recommended the formation of a funding initiative to be named, “Embrace God’s Mission + Equip God’s People. Pastor Bill Nelsen was asked to lead the Funding Initiative work and Deb Hess is the administrative assistant.
- Supported the needs of the Bishop Election process and the Bishop Forums held in advance of the 2015 Synod Assembly. (Participants in the election process were: The Reverends Jon Anderson, Steven Olson, Laurie Skow-Anderson, Lyle Snyder, and Tim Wittwer.)
- Welcomed ELCA Secretary Chris Boerger to oversee the election process at Synod Assembly where Bishop Jon Anderson was re-elected to a third six-year term.
- Made the decision to reduce the budget percentage of support to our Churchwide expression from 52.5% to 51.5% after meeting with the Rev. Margaret Payne, Mission Support Director for the ELCA.
- Gave thanks for the Lilly Grant work and award, with special gratitude for Pr. Joyce Piper’s leadership on the grant writing.
- Called Sarah Hausken, newly commissioned as an Associate in Ministry, to continue her work as our Youth Coordinator.
- Gave thanks for Pastor Joyce Piper’s many years of ministry as her work as a Synod Minister concluded in December, allowing her to pursue new adventures.
- Gave thanks for the calling of Pastor Kathryn Skoglund to serve as a Synod Minister and begin her work in November.
- Continued to learn and grow together in faith; in governing skills; as informed people; as stewards of this synod’s resources; and as vibrantly-connected members of the larger church in the world to better serve in our role as your elected Synod Council.

+ Gwen Arneson, Vice President, Southwestern Minnesota Synod



Conference Ministers

Pr. Joyce Graue, *Lakeland Conference*

One of my joys as the Lakeland Conference Minister is meeting with a Congregation or Parish Council as they entering into (or already are in) the Call Process. This is an important time for the leaders of congregations to know that “we are church together” (to borrow a phrase from ELCA Presiding Bishop). There are interim pastors willing to serve and whose presence means that there is no need to rush. Yes, the congregation or parish has a Ministry Site Profile to prepare before they can call a pastor, but our Bishop, our Synod ministers and others have their eyes and ears open for potential call candidates for them and they are praying for them and with them in this process.

For our Synod I am also working on a Policies and Procedures Manual. I am going through our SW MN Synod Council and the Council’s Executive Committee minutes as well as Synod Assembly minutes looking for resolutions which impact our on-going life together as a Synod. This includes resolutions like location of our Synod Assembly, the frequency of our rostered leaders attending Boundary Awareness workshops, who is responsible for nominating individuals to serve on the ELCA Church Council, who can set up displays at Synod Assemblies, etc.

Aim Signe Gray, *Great River Conference*

Being the Conference Minister for the Great River Conference has been a great opportunity to be church together in a new way for me. Most of my time has been walking with congregational leaders and rostered leaders during times of transition in these congregations. These times of transition or change in leadership can be full of anxiety for all involved in the process. Through exit interviews, meetings with congregational councils and call committees, I strive to give thanks for the past, examine the present, and encourage preparation for the future. It has been and will be a privilege to walk wet in our baptisms together as we reflect the love of Christ to people of the Great River Conference and around the world. Signe

Pr. Ted Kunze, *Shetek Conference*

I serve as the Lead Team Pastor at Christ Lutheran Church of Slayton, MN and Faith Lutheran in Avoca, working with Pastor Dawn Quame. I am also the Shetek Conference Minister, serving in the southwestern-most corner of our Synod. Many of our congregations are in transition right now, so I have been able to represent our Synod helping congregations to begin the call process, or to think about some options for their ministry in the future. I have also worked on drafting some potential policies about part-time ministry, and about the use of the Vice Pastor model in times of transition.

Pr. Kirk Meseck, *Lac Qui Parle Conference*

I was raised, along with my brother and three sisters, in Harvard, Illinois - baptized and confirmed at Trinity Lutheran. After graduating from high school in 1975, I enlisted in the US Air Force and spent four years at the Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO. I ended up graduating from Carthage College, Kenosha, WI in 1981 and then worked as a social worker at the Glenwood School for Boys in south Chicago and the Allendale School for Boys in northern Chicago for a total of three years. In 1984 I enrolled at Luther Seminary and a month before graduating from there, Debora Klegstad and I were married in Hallock, MN. After a summer of CPE I was extended a call to Salem Lutheran, Turtle River, and First Lutheran, Hines (both in MN) on February 7, 1988. Both of our sons, Nick and Tony, were born during my first call. My second call was to Fertile, MN and I have been serving Faith Lutheran, Madison since November 2, 1998. To keep it as simple as I can, I love to read, run and to remind us that God calls us to be the church wherever we are.

In the past year I got to witness the deep commitment of lay leaders in congregations going through pastoral transitions. In addition, the value of the synod staff interviewing every congregation in a conference in one day was awesome.

Pr. Art Wiese, *Glacial Ridge Conference*

I served continuously in the Southwestern Minnesota Synod area for thirty-four years. Currently I serve as the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Benson, the Dean of the Glacial Ridge Conference and the Glacial Ridge Conference Minister. During the past year I have had the privilege of helping the Glacial Ridge Conference to host two visitors, Dean Mandla Ndawonde and Gift Shobede, from its companion Eshowe Circuit, in the Southeastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa.