



2011- 2012 Annual Report - Bishop Jon Anderson

Boldly living out Christ's mission by...
engaging leaders + equipping congregations + and serving in God's world...

⁵For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. 2 Cor. 4

We are called to proclaim Jesus Christ. We proclaim that God has sent Jesus to enlighten our darkness.

Our church body, our synod and our congregations all exist to proclaim Christ Jesus. Communities of faith, baptized ministers young and old, lay leaders, pastors and other expressions of God's church all are the clay jars or "cracked pots" that God uses to serve the Gospel. It is easy to forget that at our best we and the communities of faith we serve are like a pointer dog in a pheasant hunt. We point to the one who matters. It is crucial we remember our focus.

We continue to hear God's call to be a synod full of vibrant Christians being formed by faithful and fruitful communities who gather in Jesus name. I give thanks to God for all of you - for your faithful service as you lift your praises to God through prayers and hymns, but also as you practice your faith, love your neighbor and serve in your many different callings from God. God is calling us personally and communally to a faith that is deep and wide. We focus on God's grace. Justified by Christ's work on the cross, we are set free to love and serve as a response to what God has done, what God is doing and what God will be up to in the days to come.

As I look back through the past year I cannot help but remember the winter of storms of many kinds. But in the darkness of winter, God's resurrecting grace was working on people and congregations who were struggling in one way or another. The synod staff started to notice a trend in the midst of winter that continued in most events we sponsored. People were showing up in bigger numbers than we expected. Not only was the response stronger, but there was a new tone as people gathered to support one another and walk through a complicated time in the church's life and also in our larger society's life.

We celebrated as a staff this week some of the moments where we saw God working in our midst last year.

- † We focused hard on seeking the strongest leaders we could to provide word and sacrament ministry in our congregations.
 - We have placed and ordained almost 20 newly ordained pastors in the last 18 months.
 - It has been encouraging to receive the gifts of young leaders and also to watch congregations and councils be caring stewards of their leader's potential.
 - Our First Call Theological Education process has grown stronger with the leadership of Rev. Susan Engholm and the commitment of mentor pastors who lead colleague groups to support and form our young leaders.
 - We continue to have a large group of leaders God is calling toward ordained service. We have forty people in formation to serve in the future. Thanks to our Candidacy Committee and Pr. Joyce Piper for working with these candidates.
 - Most of our pastors have been working to deepen their capacity to serve and lead in ways that make me thankful.
 - We continue to learn more about how to reform theological education to serve God's mission and the mission field of today.
- † We are a community of faith where God grows disciples and fuels them to become apostles living out their faith in families, neighborhoods, workplaces, communities and God's world.
 - We have been encouraged to see congregations working to plan how they might better serve the mission field of the present and future.
 - We are gathering congregational leaders in what we are calling, "**Inviting and Welcoming: God's Preferred Future.**" Watch for the invitation to your conference as we continue to work through our synod with this emphasis.
 - Our Lutheran Youth Ministry board continues to host youth events that feed young people's faith from congregations that are large and small.
 - Parish redevelopments have been happening in a number of places in our synod. Some are partnerships of large and small membership congregations. Others are multiple congregations talking about working collaboratively to

INVITING  WELCOMING
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serve the future. It is impressive to see courageous leaders gather to consider how to do ministry in the future as effectively as possible in their changing mission fields.

- Pr. Linda Pedersen and the Equipping Congregation's Committee have been hosting excellent equipping events.

† We are "Serving in God's World"

- Our newest start, **River of Hope** in Hutchinson shepherded initially by Pr. Tom Heyd and now by our Mission Developer Pr. Laura Aase continues to be an exciting example of how important it is to not just welcome people, but make it personally clear, "You are welcome here."
- We were excited to host the first Companion Synod trip with the Bishop Buthelezi, all the deans and other leaders from our Companion Synod in South Africa. Many people made this happen. We hope to take a similar delegation to South Africa in the fall of 2012.
- I notice congregations working hard to develop ways to care for the poor in their midst in this time of economic challenges. I also am thankful for the ongoing support of the World Hunger Appeal.
- We continue to be a synod that gives among the highest level of direct congregational support to missionaries around the world.
- I want to thank the Serving in God's World board and Pr. Larry Strenge our Director for Evangelical Mission – ELCA.

Your synod staff's best work is often invisible. When a president calls needing help to work through a pinch I am thankful that Pr. Joyce Piper and Pr. Linda Pedersen and our excellent support staff and program ministers are available to help. We continue to work at growing new leaders to serve as synod ministers in conferences and other ways we organize the life of our synod. We give thanks for the completion of Pr. Jay Grave, Sarah Hausken, Pr. Joyce Graue and Karen Koeder service as Interim Synod Ministers. We are excited to announce the acceptance of a part time synodical letter of call for Pr. Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl (the former bishop of South Dakota) to work as our .6 time Synod Minister of Networking. We give thanks for the service of Marlis Jacobsen who served 22 years as our synod's bookkeeper and support staff. We also are anticipating the retirement of Bill Elmstrom our synod's long time planned giving coordinator. We keep working at right sizing our ministry team.

As we look into the coming year I am excited for the many places I see God calling forth new life in people's faith life, in communities of faith and in our larger church. We will keep lifting up the importance of congregational planning in our **Inviting and Welcoming: God's Preferred Future** events. There we seek to help leaders with not only helpful tools but also by connecting them to other leaders and with inspirational stories that should be told. I invite you to be aware of these upcoming gatherings.

† **Leadership Day – Feb. 11th**. Bring a van load of leaders. Invite and bring someone under 25, another young leader under 35 to help build your present and future.

† **Synod Assembly – June 8-9** Inviting and Welcoming God's Promised Future – We are excited to have Luther Seminary President Rick Bliese serve as our Bible Study leader. Pr. Stephen Bouman, Director of Congregational and Synodical Mission in the ELCA as our Churchwide representative and Lungile Nyathikazi, who serves as the HIV/AIDS coordinator in our Companion Synod with us as we gather to worship God, learn, enjoy fellowship, do communal discernment and make decisions such as elect our churchwide assembly representatives.

As we look into the coming year we will be tipping our energy towards the work of building up the household of God. By that we mean the households of single people, couples, parents with children, grandparents caring for grandchildren. Faith is formed and sustained in households. We also mean the households of our communities of faith where God calls us together to praise, pray, learn, share fellowship, learn and then are sent to serve in our many callings.

God's resurrecting grace continues to shine light into our darkness. God is at work in our midst and calls us to follow Christ Jesus whose Spirit is working on us all to prepare the way of the Lord. A little later in 2 Corinthians Paul writes.

⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation;... ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us;

Bishop Jon Anderson



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