



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

## **We Give to Thanks to God for....**

*\*Bishop Jon Anderson*

+ calling people to worship on Ash Wednesday and as we follow Jesus into Lent. I have talked to several pastors who had larger turn-outs than normal. The numbers are not as important as our daily call to return to our baptisms and the promises of our God.

+ the many connections to people in Japan in our synod. I keep finding people who have family, friends and who support our missionary work there. We give thanks for their sacrificial ministry in a far off country. These days we also pray for their protection.

+ for the life and ministry of Pr. Paul Ranum in our synod and the district that preceded it. I was thankful for all the pastors who were able to come to his funeral. I was grateful for the ministry of the folks and pastors at the Crosswind Parish and particularly Fron Lutheran in Starbuck where the funeral was held. I would like to give a gift to Caryl (Paul's wife) and Paul's children. If you have a sweet story about how God used Paul to touch your life, I would be thankful to receive it. I have already given several to the family. We give thanks to God for Paul...and ask God to strengthen and give peace to his family as they grieve his death. May the promises of Christ Jesus sing in a new and deeper voice.

+ a great Sr. High Youth Gathering in St. Cloud with over 300 young people and adults present. My favorite part was what was called "Dish with the Bish." I had fifteen minute conversations with youth groups from across the synod. The most poignant was a group where we discussed how they had lost multiple classmates and friends from a neighboring town due to suicide. As I walked through the work of our Lutheran Youth Organization board and watched the loving adults supporting their youth and as I watched our young people worship, learn, serving and having fun I was filled with hope.

+ our conference meetings that will conclude this Sunday. There has been a different tone this year in almost all with more concern about local and global mission. Our world is in a time of significant challenges and our communities are under serious stress. God has a mission for this entire world. We are called to be God's Church in these days, reforming our ministry and mission to fit the mission field of today. We are called to be building up God's Church (that is bigger than our denomination). God's Church is sailing in a world with heavy winds, currents and frequent storms. By God's grace, together we have what need."

+ the ministry of Pr. Laura Aase at River of Hope in Hutchinson. We also hold that town and area in our prayers as they go through a serious economic loss with hundreds of jobs coming to an end.

+ for the invitation of Pr. Eric Hullstrom to a gathering to discuss the unique gifts and challenges of small membership congregations. "I want to invite you to a workshop that Salem Lutheran Church will be hosting on **Saturday, March 19 at 4pm** titled "**Celebrating Healthy Small Congregations**". Dr. Marilyn Johns from Virginia Theological Seminary (coordinator of the summer collegium he attended) will be leading a workshop at Salem in Jackson on Saturday at 4pm March 20<sup>th</sup>. Call Eric if you are planning to attend and bring leaders with you to the workshop. Even if you cannot attend he has found a helpful web site for small membership congregations related to their work. <http://www.vts.edu/smallchurches>