



Your congregation matters! It matters because the *gospel* matters. The Good News of Jesus Christ proclaims that, in God's eyes, you are enough. The world is great at telling us we're not enough. "Do more. Be better." But God's *grace in Jesus Christ* says something else. Not only are you enough, you *belong*; you are welcome into beloved community. In that community, God provides food for the journey, friends in faith, and power to live out the presence of Christ in our daily lives.

The church matters because of the *gospel*, because of the *community* it forms, and also because the *world* needs the church's *voice*. Our communities need us to speak of God's love for all people, no exception; to advocate for the care of creation; and to build cities and neighborhoods where justice is the standard for all our work.

The church matters. *Everything we do in the synod office is poured into this conviction.*

Because the church matters, **congregations** matter:

In 2018, the synod walked with 58 congregations in call processes and assisted 52 congregations in work such as stewardship growth, conflict resolution, vision discernment, and anniversaries. Through the new Resurrection Fund Imagination Grants, we made legacy awards totaling \$270,230 to 40 congregations and ministries to further the mission of the gospel. And, in addition to our 145 congregations, the synod has five new mission starts: Tapestry, Intertwine, Tree of Life, Amazing Grace, Southwest Latino Ministry.

Because the church matters, **leaders** matter:

With nearly 700 rostered leaders, our synod has 313 in active calls, 31 on leave, and 347 retired. We work hard so the church receives the mature, faithful and theologically well-formed ministers it needs. In the years ahead, we will focus even more on raising the next generation of gifted and diverse leaders who will carry a message of God's love to a multiracial world.

Our Tool Kit gathering is a favorite for elected congregational leaders, and we invite you to consider bringing your church council to the 2019 Tool Kit at St. Stephen's Lutheran Church, Bloomington, on Saturday, February 23, 2019.

In 2018, we supported 69 persons in the candidacy process as they prepare to become deacons or pastors. We ordained 11 pastors and installed 25; we had a combined attendance of 463 pastors and deacons at our Ministeriums, Bishop's Theological Conference, and the Lunch and Learn gatherings; and we have 250 leaders meeting in peer groups. We also gave scholarships to 38 pastors to attend a conference on supervision and building healthy teams.

Because God's **world** matters, the **church's voice** matters.

Together, the congregations of the synod are working to foster racial, environmental, and economic justice. With grants from InFaith Community Foundation, the Bush Foundation, area Watershed Districts, and local congregations, we have called three synod staff members to lead congregations in this work. We also trained 65 leaders in faith-based community organizing.

It is the generosity of congregations like yours that make the synod's work possible. Thank you! We seek to be careful stewards of every gift. For the fifth straight year, we've been given a clean audit. For our fiscal stewardship as well as for the synod's excellent governance, I give thanks to our synod council and to Vice President Felicia Boone. Our synod is also blessed with an extraordinary staff who work with humility, tenacious commitment, wisdom, creativity, and hope. We also rejoice in the two full-time Lutheran Volunteer Corps Members on our staff and the age and ethnic diversity our growing staff brings.

I conclude this annual report with a word of deep gratitude for the privilege of serving as your bishop. Especially, I thank you for calling me to serve a second six-year term. I praise God for our shared mission and our vital partnership. Please let us know how we can serve one another better—working together so all experience ***gracious invitation*** into ***life-giving Christian community*** and live in ***just and healthy neighborhoods***.