



Dear South Dakota Synod,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Triune God!

On behalf of your close to 200 partners across the South Dakota Synod I come to you to say *thank you*. *Thank you* for your generosity! Your benevolence to the ministry of the South Dakota Synod doesn't just keep the lights on and pays salaries, but mainly supports ministry on the ground. Please take a look at the "2023 South Dakota Synod Ministry Celebrations" insert included in this annual report. You will notice that YOU showed up in many and various spaces. Sometimes your presence was felt close to home through a grant you may have received or a synod staff that came to visit. At other times your presence impacted ministry in other parts of the world, such as our companion partners in the Lutheran churches in Nicaragua and Cameroon. *Thank you* also for your generosity above and beyond your benevolence. Our partners in Cameroon appreciated the synod's \$52,000 gift to support putting roofs on churches. The generosity of the congregations in the synod never ceases to amaze me, and I give thanks for your continued generosity as we journey together in Christ!



While many places celebrated an abundant year of ministry, I also want to acknowledge that for other ministry sites 2023 has not been as hoped for. Our mission statement commits us to "Journeying Together in Christ" and is based on Luke 24:13-34. Two disciples are on the road post resurrection and ponder in disbelief all the things that have happened before their eyes. They were overwhelmed and didn't know what to make of it all. I have heard from many ministry sites a similar account about 2023. "Bishop, things in 2023 were not as we had expected and hoped for. What do we do now?" In Luke's story Jesus, unrecognized by them, joins them and walks alongside to listen and remind them of the promises in scripture. But it isn't until they sit down at the table, and Jesus breaks bread that their eyes are opened. They recognize who he is and that the 'holy heartburn' they had experienced along the way was a sign that their love for Jesus and the way he calls them to live has changed them forever.

How about your community of faith? Where do you hear the promises of scripture assure you that God's got a plan for you and your ministry? Where are you called to follow the 'holy heartburn' God's Spirit ignites in you as you are fed at the table of love? I pray that your annual meeting will be an experience where you can voice what you had wished for as well as lament the unmaterialized hopes. And at the same time, you can hear where God promises new life and renewed faith in your very own midst.

Your South Dakota Synod staff and partners across the church are committed to accompany you in your ministry ventures, whether it means to take small courageous steps or giant leaps of faith. We are here to journey with you in Christ. Therefore, it is with great joy and delight that I am announcing to you that we, the South Dakota Synod, are a recipient of a \$1,137,384 grant Endowment Inc. through its Thriving Congregations Initiative. Details about the grant can be accessed through the synod's website [www.sdsynod.org](http://www.sdsynod.org) as well as through the synod office. The STAR (Small Town and Rural) Table also offers two types of grants, which are only possible

through the generosity of the people and congregations of the SD Synod when we gather for rural ministry fundraisers. Again, details about the grant opportunities, and how you can apply for a grant are found on the synod's website [www.sdsynod.org](http://www.sdsynod.org).

Last but not least, I would like to invite you to the 2024 Synod Assembly on May 31st and June 1st at Our Savior's in Sioux Falls, SD. We will gather under the theme of "(Re)Connect." It will be a celebration of the partnerships we share across the synod and the wider ELCA. Stay tuned for more information about the business coming before the assembly and the fun opportunities. I hope to be able to welcome you to the assembly in person, be in conversation with you and hear about ministry in your world and how you might best be accompanied as well as accompany your fellow members of the SD Synod and the ELCA.

Journeying with you in Christ,



Rev. Constanze Hagmaier  
Bishop of the South Dakota Synod, ELCA