



South Dakota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Advent, 2011

*“Stir up your power, O Lord, and come.
Protect us by your strength and save us from the threatening dangers of our sins....”*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ in our Congregations of the South Dakota Synod,

I am writing this yearly letter for inclusion in your annual reports just as a new season of the church year dawns. The waiting is over; let the waiting begin! Advent – the season of waiting has finally arrived! I could hardly wait! You hear the irony. We live in this back and forth between wanting to get on with ministry and waiting for God to reveal the path before us. It is a matter of discernment whether the next step forward, in both our personal and congregational lives, is a product of our own impatience or a nudging from God's Holy Spirit. Leaders, as you prepare plans and budgets for the coming year, and congregations as you meet in annual meetings: I pray that God will give you the patience to wait upon God's guiding, the wise discernment to hear God's voice and the courage to act with boldness on whatever God calls you to do for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Notice that the prayer in Advent is for agitation. “Stir up your power...and Come!” An Anglican version of the prayer goes, “Stir us up, O Lord.” Here in South Dakota, with a holy agitation, God has been stirring us up. I've heard the clear refrain, “Let us get on with ministry.” I give thanks for you and your courage when at the last Synod Assembly you responded to God's agitation by embracing our bold new vision. In that vision we declare who we are (people nurtured in word in sacrament) and what God calls us to become (a sign of God's abundant blessing) as we **PROCLAIM the good news of Jesus Christ to every hungry soul, SHARE COMPASSION with all who suffer, and FEED all whose bodies lack nourishment.**

I recently met with a task force of religious, state and federal leaders who, in response to your courageous vision, are meeting to find ways to eliminate hunger in South Dakota by 2015. Thank you for your faithful courage that made this come to pass.

There is a mountain of quilts in our synod office entryway on their way to Pine Ridge that this winter will lovingly warm many of the poorest people in our nation. Thank you.

There are five new congregations proclaiming the good news to hungry souls thanks to your generous mission support and partnership. Thank you.

There are 50 seminarians and 34 first call rostered leaders serving in South Dakota, thanks to your generosity and encouragement. Thank you.

There is the newest Bible camp in the ELCA that will serve children who have never had the opportunity to attend one of our camps, because of the vision of Joy Nelson and hundreds of individuals and congregations who have worked to make it happen. Thank you.

There were hundreds of volunteers that traveled to Pierre, Yankton and the Dunes to sandbag and help clean up after the floods had receded. Thank you.

I consider it a holy privilege to serve as your Bishop. Your faithfulness, courage and generosity make my call to serve you a joy. Thank you and God's blessings.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop David B. Zellmer