

South Dakota Synod Strategic Ministry Plan

Approved by South Dakota Synod Council
November 16, 2012

“That All May Be Fed”



**South Dakota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

South Dakota Synod Strategy “That All May Be Fed”

Nurtured in Word and Sacrament, God sends us to become a joyful sign of God’s abundant blessings as we:

- **proclaim** the good news of Jesus to every hungry soul,
- **share** compassion with all who suffer, and
- **feed** all whose bodies lack nourishment

Introduction

At the June 2012 South Dakota Synod Assembly the bylaws were changed in how the Bishop would be elected and a request was also adopted that asked for a Strategic Plan to be developed and adopted by the Synod Council, with the final report being presented to the South Dakota Synod by December 1st in the year preceding the Bishop’s election. The Synod Council met immediately following the Synod Assembly and began the planning for creating a Strategic Plan.

At the August Synod council meeting several decisions were made concerning the Strategic Plan. The Synod Council entered into an agreement to serve as the pilot synod for the Office of the Secretary of the ELCA as they prepared the “toolbox for the election of a Bishop.” The Office of the Secretary served as our consultant as together we prepared the questions that would be asked of the Synod during “Burgers with the Bishop”. The Synod Council also invited at least one person from each conference plus the elected officers of the South Dakota Synod to serve as the Task Force to listen to the synod and then write the Strategic Plan for the South Dakota Synod.

In August and September at seven locations across South Dakota the Task Force members attended and led the conversations around the questions developed with the Office of the Secretary. The South Dakota Synod and the Office of the Secretary activated an online survey that was available to every member in South Dakota who had access to the internet. This survey was available through the end of September. That online survey data was provided to the Task Force as they gathered at their October meeting.

The South Dakota Synod Council received the draft report at its October 12th meeting and spent time in conversation about the plan and offered suggestions to the Task Force. The Task Force finished its report in November and the South Dakota Synod Council gave final approval to the South Dakota Synod Strategic Plan at an online meeting during November. The final Strategic Plan will be distributed to the Synod on December 1.

The Current Reality...

of the South Dakota Synod:

The ELCA congregations of the South Dakota Synod have a rich heritage rooted in the Bible, the ecumenical creeds and the sources of the Lutheran reforming movement of the 16th century. Immigrants from Europe who moved to this land over 130 years ago founded the majority of our congregations. Over the years diverse people of faith who felt called by God to reach out with the gospel in new congregations and recent immigrants from Africa and Latin America have started new worshipping communities.

Today we are 219 congregations, six congregations under development and two synodically authorized

worshipping communities. In all, we are 110,647 members walking together in God's mission with the belief that we are freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor. With our hands, we do God's work of restoring and reconciling communities in Jesus' name throughout the world. On an average Sunday in the congregations of the South Dakota Synod, 34,814 people attend worship.

In 2007 we were 251 congregations with two congregations under development and two synodically authorized worshipping communities, totaling 122,803 people. Since 2007, there are 5,523 fewer persons worshipping in the synod 2200 of whom were members of the 33 congregations who disaffiliated with the ELCA following the 2009 churchwide assembly.

The total amount given by members to their congregations increased by 4% over the last five years. The amount of mission support given by congregations to the synod and the churchwide organization declined from \$2.1 million in 2007 to \$1.6 million in 2011.

Positive trends include:

- **the amount of money given to congregations and local benevolences up (4%).**
- **the number of new congregations under development (6)**
- **the number of congregations engaged in an intentional renewal process (22)**
- **the number of adults received into membership by affirmation of faith (618 in 2011)**

The congregations of the South Dakota Synod share a deep partnership in God's mission through our common work in 13 great organizations/ministries: Lutheran Social Services, Lutherans Outdoors in south Dakota, Lutheran Campus Ministry, Heartland Ephphatha Services, ELCA colleges, Lutheran Seminary, Flandreau Indian School, The Association of Christian Churches, Chapel in the Hills, The Evangelical Good Samaritan Society, Region 3, Lutheran Youth Organization, and Lutheran Planned Giving.

of our mission field:

We understand our mission field to be the people and places God is calling us to serve. Therefore, mission field is not necessarily defined by a geographical location (e.g. the state of South Dakota). Along with the territory of the South Dakota Synod our mission field includes our companion synods, other global mission work of the church, and any other person/s to whom God is calling us as individuals and churches of the South Dakota Synod to serve. Our mission field is a rapidly changing and increasingly diverse place.

--Communities are changing. Farms are expanding and incorporating; urban areas are growing. Technology is an important tool connecting urban and rural culture.

--Age. SD is the oldest state (average age of people) in the nation. Our ministry in this mission field will need to address the specific needs and recognize the gifts of the older people in our population.

--Increasing diversity in ethnicity and culture. Four multi-cultural ministries are currently under development; ethnic minority populations are increasing; companion synods and other global ministries can be accessed either personally or via technology. The people of the South Dakota synod believe community relationships are important. Sense of community when paired with diversity is certainly an asset. Given the rapidly changing demographics, cross-cultural training and relationship building skills will continue to build bridges and relationships across cultures.

--There are nine Native American reservations within the South Dakota Synod. The reservations are typically some of the poorest places in the nation with growing populations of children and young adults. Fostering Native American relationships will continue to be a focus of our mission work.

--Economy. South Dakota has had steady economic growth but the economic situation for some in our mission field is increasingly difficult. While incomes have increased for many, poverty has also increased. Ministry will continue to address these needs.

--The population as a whole is becoming increasingly unchurched. Fifty-five percent of ELCA congregations in the South Dakota Synod are in decline. Ministry must address the needs of those who are leaving the church or not being served through the typical church congregation. Rostered leadership in the synod has become increasingly younger. This is an asset for the South Dakota Synod. The good news of Jesus Christ is always the same, how we communicate the good news changes.

The Future

Nurtured in Word and Sacrament, God sends us to become a joyful sign of God's abundant blessing as we:

proclaim the good news of Jesus to every hungry soul. To successfully carry out this commission the people and churches of the South Dakota synod will:

-commit to developing mission interpreters and train people to tell the Christian story. This may take the form of mentoring relationships between individuals as well as churches. We recognize that story is a powerful thing; therefore, we will commit to listening to the stories of those around us and sharing our story of faith with them, through our relationships.

-commit to hospitality.

-commit to identifying and creating contextual faith practices that can be encouraged and promoted among people of the synod.

-commit to increased communication between faith communities of the South Dakota Synod so that resources for training are shared and deployed most effectively. This could include the use of technology, sharing travel (i.e. carpooling), meeting in central locations, etc.

share compassion with all who suffer. To successfully carry out this commission the people and the churches of the South Dakota synod will:

-commit to building relationships with people in our community and standing with them and all those who are suffering wherever we find them. We will do this through our individual relationships (i.e. discipleship), creating spaces where people can come together to share stories and be a presence for others, and lifting one another up in prayer.

-commit to a prayer network where churches intentionally pray for specific congregations and needs as well as other issues within the mission field.

-commit to sharing our best practices so that we can support one another relationally, financially, and spiritually so that congregations can collaborate more effectively.

feed all whose bodies lack nourishment. To successfully carry out this commission the people and the churches of the South Dakota synod will:

-commit to fostering relationships between partners already engaged in this task, whether church or secular based.

-commit to lifting up the above relationships so that ideas and ministries across conferences and the wider church can be refined and resources can be mobilized to their most effective use.

Core Values: Prayer, Human Dignity, Gratitude, The Neighbor, Grace

We commit ourselves to:

- Pray without Ceasing
- Respect the sacred dignity of every human being,
- Cultivate a deep sense of gratitude to God, the giver of all good things.
- Seek out and befriend the neighbor
- Remain humble in the conviction that our calling comes purely by the grace of God.

Enabling Assets:

The churches of the South Dakota Synod are blessed with many assets. We will endeavor to leverage these assets to effectively carry out the vision and ministry of the South Dakota Synod, which include:

-the enhanced ability to communicate as a result of technology. Congregations increasingly use technology in their ministry. Our synod can build upon this asset by training people to use new technology and by sharing ideas of how to use it better

-the willingness and ability to share creativity and innovation. The ministry of the churches of the South Dakota synod could build upon this by creating a space for that sharing.

-an energized, gifted, and engaged laity. There is a willingness to enter into mission and practice faith in concrete and specific ways.

-a rejuvenated rostered leadership. Over 50 new rostered leaders have entered the ministry in the last five years.

-engagement with youth. This asset is exemplified by our high participation in the National Youth Gathering and our excellent outdoor ministries.

-the sources of our tradition such as: scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

-the Synod Endowment Fund. We have a strong and growing fund providing resources for leadership and mission.

-the number of first call pastors.

Strategic Plan Summary Statement

The purpose of this strategic plan is to facilitate the collaboration among churches of the South Dakota Synod as they attempt to live into our common vision, “That All May be Fed.” When congregations act together for the sake of God’s mission they embody what it means to walk together as “synod.” This plan has identified specific actions and encouraged specific directions toward furthering our work in “proclaiming the Good News,” “Sharing Compassion,” and “feeding the hungry.” The plan has also identified a few key assets that enable the advancement of our mission, with the expectation that there will be shared energy toward building upon these assets.

It seems important to state what this plan is *not*. The plan is not a detailed step-by-step guide into the future. It does not pretend to encompass all of what our work together should be, nor does it pretend to have identified all of our assets. We hope that this will be seen as another step forward and that it will be utilized to inspire imagination and guide our shared mission: “That All may be Fed.”

Special Thanks to the South Dakota Synod Strategic Task Force Members:

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