

# President's report

*"Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him, tell of all his wonderful acts. . . . He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations" (1 Chronicles 16:8,9,15).*

**I**t was a day of celebration in Israel. After decades without a permanent home, God enabled the people of Israel to prepare a place in Jerusalem where the Ark of the Covenant would be placed, never to be moved again. As the spiritual head of the people of God, King David led them in a song of thanksgiving to God for this, for the many other blessings that had brought them to this point in history, for promises made and promises kept. And never far from their thoughts was the greatest promise of all—that a descendant of this King David would save his people not from Canaanites or Philistines or Moabites, but from the power and penalty of sin itself. Their song was a song of joy, a prayer of thanks, and, not least, a proclamation to the world of the promises and power of the God of Israel.

Can our synod be any less grateful and joyful than those Israelites?

We are moved to praise God for all the blessings he has showered on our synod purely because of his grace and mercy. The list is a long one. By his grace, he has preserved the truth of his Word among us, in spite of a world that declares that there is no such thing as truth. He has blessed us with faithful witnesses and reformers who have gone before us, testifying to that truth and defending it at the risk of arrest and death. He has preserved for us the confessions of those faithful servants, confessions on which we still stand firmly because they are the true exposition of the Scriptures.

We are moved to praise God because he has enabled us to avoid the twin ditches of legalism and license, as we live in the joy and freedom of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but always careful to exercise that freedom with care and loving regard for others. In every worship service, our focus is not on our emotions and feelings, not on our weak and faulty service to God, but on the faithful proclamation of Christ crucified and risen.

We join in a song of thanks to God for supplying us with faithful pastors and teachers—servants willing to answer God's call with the response, "Here am I; send me!" And he has blessed us with wonderful schools in which those workers are trained and equipped to serve. Working in congregations and schools with those called workers are faithful lay members of our synod. In congregations large and small they gather regularly for worship. They bring their offerings of thanks to be used for the mission God has given to his church. They serve their Lord in the calling of their daily lives, confessing their faith to those around them. They pray for and support the called workers to serve them with the Word.

And how can we not give thanks when we hear the stories of the power of the gospel bringing people to faith in cities across North America and in exotic and distant countries around the world? When we see how the sword of the Spirit penetrates the apathy and materialism of our own land and shatters the political and cultural barriers in others?

Our synod certainly is not a perfect one. No one would dare to claim that. We are a synod of saints, but a synod of saints who are also still sinners. The danger of falling into false doctrine or practice is never far from us, and Satan sometimes succeeds in his efforts to lead astray. Lifelong Christians face a continuing battle against apathy; taking the grace of God and the truth of his Word for granted is most dangerous to those who have known it the longest. We struggle against the sins of materialism and selfishness, which threaten to keep precious resources in our own hands rather than putting them to work in carrying out our mission. All too often we think judgmentally, speak unlovingly, and listen half-heartedly. Our zeal falters, and our commitment wavers. The title "chief of sinners" belonged not just to Paul but to each of us.

Knowing all of these dangers and weaknesses among us is no reason to sink into despair or to fear the future. The power and grace of God overcomes all of these weaknesses. His mercy, new every morning, refreshes us with the assurance of forgiveness, strengthens our wavering faith, and fuels the zeal to serve him faithfully as individuals, as congregations, and as a synod.

Will God continue to bless us with the truth of the gospel? Or will it move on like a passing rain shower as Luther said it so often does? Will we continue to gather faithfully in worship, to teach our children, to plant new missions, to love one another as we also show love for the lost? Only God knows the answers to those questions. We pray that God will continue to bless us as he has in the past. We pray that where repentance is needed, his Spirit works that repentance in us. We pray that where courage and commitment are required, his grace and power work that in us. We pray that where faithfulness against all temptations is vital, he grants us that faithfulness through the saving power of his Word. And as we pray for those things, we do as David and the Israelites did. We thank him for his blessings—none of which we deserve—and all of which find perfect fulfillment in Christ.

This *Report to the Twelve Districts* will provide you with an overview of the work that we are doing together as a synod, the challenges we face, and the opportunities God is placing before us. It's my prayer that this information will lead you to thank God for the blessings described and to ask for God's continuing blessing of our beloved synod.

Serving with you in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark Schroeder".

President Mark Schroeder