



## Saskatchewan Synod Insert for 2021 Congregational Annual Reports

### Year-end letter from Bishop Sid Haugen

Dear partners in the Gospel,

This year, based on a number of questions that we often receive at synod office, I would like to take a moment to say a few words about the role of the synod and the role of congregations.

Congregations or faith communities are the core of our church. At the congregational level, the Word is preached, the sacraments are shared, and service to the world is carried out. At the congregational level 'the rubber hits the road' for our church.

What is a synod? The word synod comes from the from the Greek words *sun* (with) and *hodos* (road). A synod is those who are literally 'with each other on the road.' By 'Saskatchewan Synod' we mean all the congregations and related ministries that walk together in Saskatchewan (and NW Manitoba). Congregations are remarkably independent bodies, but congregations gather themselves into synods to accomplish things an individual congregation could not. More than simply taking further care of itself, a congregation belongs to a synod to take care of other congregations who from time to time need the support offered by the wider synod.

Constitutionally, Synod council is the governing body of the synod of congregations and the bishop serves as the synod's lead pastor and chief executive officer. This synod leadership is set up to do a number of things; among them, to provide support to the synod's congregations and ministries, to inspire vision, to keep in mind the work of the church beyond the boundaries of the congregation (and beyond the boundaries of the synod), and to provide direction to its congregations and ministries.

How does the synod of congregations resource that synod leadership? Financial giving to ensure leadership for our synod is determined independently by each congregation. Each congregation contributes to the synod balancing their own resources with a strong sense of call to provide support for the synod: for congregations in need, for our national church, for our seminary. And so, as followers of Jesus, we bear each other's burdens.

### Report on 2021

This report briefly addresses two items:

1. the benevolence received by synod leadership in 2021 from the synod of congregations
2. how synod leadership has worked with that benevolence.

#### **Benevolence received from synod congregations in 2021**

Rather than speak directly to this, I'm inserting here a paragraph provided by our finance manager: *Congregational support remained at 2020 levels, 100% of budget but 80% of pre-COVID support. Reduced income was somewhat offset with reduction of travel and travel costs by both synod council and committees, and bishop and assistants. Sask Synod also benefitted from federal grant programs which subsidized salaries and rent to offset income shortfalls. Overall, the general fund is in the black for 2021 but staffing levels are tight. The 2022 budget anticipates a partial return to pre-pandemic congregational benevolence levels while preparing to face a deficit should benevolence remain lower than in the past. Thank you for your ongoing participation through benevolence in the work of our church synod-wide.*

## How Synod leadership has worked with the benevolence received from synod congregations in 2021

Synod council has directed the benevolence from congregations as follows:

Synod council continued to “pay it forward” by contributing as ‘first fruits’ (‘off the top’) 35% of congregational benevolence to support key partners in ministry: 20% to the ministry of our National Church; 15% to Lutheran Theological Seminary, our seminary in Saskatoon.

Synod council approved a budget for the work of the bishop’s office. The bishop’s office employs a total of 2 Full time equivalents to support the administrative and pastoral work of the bishop in supporting our synod of 102 congregations, 3 synod ministries, and 125 rostered ministers (about half of which are retired).

- The Administrative Team at our Saskatoon office consists of a .75-time office manager, a .5-time executive assistant, and a .2-time finance manager. The administrative team at the office in Saskatoon continues to develop communication channels to our synod council and committees, congregations, ministries and rostered ministers as well as assisting them in administrative and financial matters. The synod website, Share point sites, synod leadership email distribution lists, SaskSynod News, and video conferencing are key tools for their work.
- The Pastoral Team supports congregations, ministries and rostered ministers ‘on the road’, with a .25-time Assistant to the Bishop for the northern region of the synod, and a .25-time Assistant to the Bishop for the southern region of the synod. The pastoral team continues to connect with congregations seeking leadership: some looking to call a pastor, others seeking ways of being church when the parish could no longer afford or secure a full-time pastor. The pastoral team handles specific requests for support from members of the roster, as well as seeking to stay in contact with the roster--although the pandemic has made this work more challenging.

Two key accomplishments of the bishop’s office as a whole in 2021: providing a virtual synod convention in June and providing a hybrid in-person and virtual Fall Leadership Conference for the rostered ministers this fall. It is a small but mighty team! One other key accomplishment of the bishop’s office this year was the development of virtual Town Halls. The Town Halls gathered both rostered and lay leadership creating a grassroots gathering of ‘synod leadership’. The Town Halls enabled us to face together the various challenges for congregations during the ever-changing pandemic and to develop shared synod guidelines for publishing on the synod website.

## Closing words

So here we are. We have lived through a full 12-month year with all the challenges of the pandemic. What does the future look like? None of us can say with certainty. But God is good. So, I invite you, again, as people of faith, to enter 2022 placing the work of our synod and ourselves in God’s hands in this familiar prayer:

*You have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,  
by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown.  
Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go,  
but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Peace,

Bishop Sid

(To stay in contact with the Synod, visit the Synod website at [www.sasksynod.ca](http://www.sasksynod.ca) and sign up for Synod News.)