



*“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you...”*

*Romans 1:8*

Dear friends in Christ,

As I prepare to be installed as your bishop this weekend, I have been spending some time reading through the synod constitution and bylaws to familiarize myself with exactly what I have been called to do in your midst. I am struck this morning by this:

*“As the synod’s pastor, the bishop shall: Have primary responsibility for the ministry for providing pastoral care and leadership for this synod, its congregations, its ministers of Word and Sacrament, and its ministers of Word and Service.”*

October is pastor appreciation month. I want to start my call with you by expressing my appreciation for you. Ministry in 2020, during a pandemic, is extraordinary. It is heartbreaking. It is stressful. In my own 28 years of ministry I have never experienced the intense pressures and professional challenges that this year has brought. The three funerals I conducted at the start of the pandemic were excruciating for me as a pastor. Not being able to gather as the community of the faithful in our sanctuaries to sing and to cling to one another as we have long done leaves grief hanging. The 10 baptisms I celebrated in September were joyful; yet my pastor heart longed to hold those babies and show them off to their new siblings in Christ by walking them around a crowded sanctuary. The decisions about returning to buildings and how and when to do this are not easy and many among you are facing various pressures and concerns.

On the flip side, ministry in 2020 has brought many amazing and good surprises for us. We have found our way into technology. Some of us even like it. Many of us know that we are reaching new people with the love of Jesus and that is exciting! We are experimenting with new ways to be the church that expresses the love that God has for all of us because of the challenges that this year has brought upon us. This has been joyful.

So, pastors and rostered leaders, let me begin by saying thank you. Thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you for answering the call to ministry. Thank you for being right where you are in these days. Thank you for living out your calling in the strange paradox of these days. God is walking with you and the people of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin. I am eager to get to know you. I am available to you.

May our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ bless you this day,

Joy Mortensen-Wiebe  
Bishop

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