



Revamped spaces welcome families to worship

by Marcia Hahn

Almost every week, a family or two from Zion Lutheran, Oelwein, can be found enjoying the Sunday worship service from the comfort of rocking chairs, while their young children play nearby. They're not watching the service online at home; instead, they're in Zion's new "pray space" located in an overflow area near the front of the sanctuary.

After hearing some dissatisfaction about parents taking their children out during the worship service, Pastor Josh Schunk suggested creating a designated space to help families feel more welcome to worship together in church.

"We want people to have a space to be with their kids in worship," Schunk says. "The old nursery was in the back and parents had to take their kids out. We want the family to stay together."

In addition to rocking chairs, the space features kid-size furniture, quiet toys, coloring books and other items donated by families for quiet activities. Parents with children five years old and younger are invited to use the space together.

"The families love it," Schunk says. "They enjoy being together in worship and it is easier for parents to manage their kids."

Peter and Kelly Lyon and their 20-month-old daughter, Evelyn, have been regularly using the pray space since it opened last fall.

Evelyn was learning to walk, and sitting in the pew for the whole service was not an option.

"Evelyn wanted to get up and go, so prior to having the space my wife and I took turns leaving the sanctuary to walk with her," Peter says. "Ever since we have had the play space we have been able to stay much closer to what is happening in worship."

Peter says they always start out in the pew before he or his wife takes Evelyn to the new pray space. The space is not in the direct line of people sitting in the pews, so they can walk with Evelyn there without being a distraction to others. A lot of other families join them after taking communion.

"By the end of the service, it is a lot more full than at the beginning," Peter says. "It's a very useful thing."

The family space is located close to the organist, who told Schunk that she loves hearing the little voices there while she plays.



Evelyn Lyon keeps busy in the new "pray space" during Sunday morning worship at Zion Lutheran, Oelwein.

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“Other people love it too,” Schunk says. “They enjoy seeing the kids and say it reminds them of their younger days bringing their own kids to church.”

Reaching out to welcome families has become an important part of Schunk’s ministry, especially since so many families have not returned to Zion after COVID restrictions. A year ago, Schunk started substitute teaching a couple days a week at the Oelwein schools as a way to earn some extra dollars, but he says it has also become a way for him to connect with kids in the community as a caring adult. Schunk says he hardly ever talks about himself, but when the kids learn through their friends that he is a pastor, some of them will share that they don’t know much about “Jesus stuff” and ask him questions.

“They are willing to ask because I am on their turf, not mine,” he says. “It is vitally important to connect with people out in the community. We take it very seriously that the church needs to see every person in the community as a member, and not just those on our rolls.”

WORSHIP SPACES THAT SAY WELCOME

One of the first things people see when they enter the sanctuary at Faith Lutheran, Shell Rock, is the new “family stay area” for families with young children to worship together. Four pews in the back of the sanctuary were removed and replaced with a small table and chairs, bean bags, bookshelf and a glider rocker for mom or dad.

“When you walk in as a guest or

visitor and see that space, it says this is a place that is affirming and comfortable with having young families and children in our worship space,” says Pastor Joel Becker. “It immediately says you’re welcome here.”

Becker began serving at Faith in May and soon after mentioned the idea for a family worship space to a couple council members as a way to encourage families with young children to stay for worship. “When you have children who are being children, the easiest thing is to take them out of worship, but we want them to stay and worship as a family,” Becker says.

Faith’s preschool and childcare center had closed due to staffing issues, so some of the center’s furniture, books and quiet toys became part of the new family space in the sanctuary. Families started using the space on a trial basis last fall, and it became permanent in February.

“It took some people time to get used to it, but even the people who didn’t like it at first understood the need for it,” Becker says. “Whenever we have had visitors or guests, we frequently hear comments about how much they like it.”

Before going into ministry, Becker had worked at a preschool and as an assistant youth and family minister, so relating to kids and families is a favorite part of his ministry.



Kids enjoy activities in the new “family stay area” at the back of the sanctuary at Faith Lutheran, Shell Rock.

Families comprise a big part of the Faith congregation, with some 10 to 15 children attending Sunday school each week.

“We’re doing well as far as bringing in families and helping them feel they are a necessary part of our worship,” Becker says. “We need them.”

Faith is working on a couple other projects to welcome people of all ages, including a new elevator to be installed this spring. In addition, Faith’s gymnasium was recently updated with a new slip-resistant floor, making it safer for youth activities, pickleball and other gatherings.

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Youth are not the future of the church

"Where have all the young families gone?"

This is a lament that I hear frequently. People recall the days when Sunday School was full, confirmation classes were large, and high school students were committed to Luther League. Today, even in congregations with active youth programming, declining numbers of youth and young adults feel like we are losing any chance at having a future as a church.

Unfortunately, this has resulted in people pointing fingers and casting blame. Pastors who aren't young or aren't "youth oriented" enough are criticized. Social changes like sports leagues, schools that schedule events on "church night" and overly scheduled families are also suspect. These may play a part in the decreases we see, but they don't tell the whole story.

Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

—Luke 18:16

The populations of most counties in the Northeastern Iowa Synod peaked in the late 1800s — that's right, 130 or more years ago. There has been a steady decline ever since. Only three of our counties have shown growth in the past 10 years. Birth rates across Iowa have declined 20 percent (similar to national statistics) since 2007. There are simply fewer children and young families where most of us live.

We actually do a pretty decent job welcoming youth and providing faith forming events. Sunday School, vacation



Bible school, Youth Groups, confirmation classes, camps, service trips, and youth gatherings proclaim the love of Jesus in word and deed. We can also be more creative in seeking ways for these young people to be engaged in the life of the church. Youth are not the future of the church, they are the church right now! Letting kids be kids in the worship space is exactly what Jesus meant when he invited them into his arms to bless them.

The only way for youth and young families to know the love of Jesus is for all of us to love them like Jesus does. Welcome them in. Forgive them for the ways they disturb worship. Make sure they get something out of the event before you do. Serve them before expecting them to serve, sign up, or volunteer. Recognize that they are part of the Body of Christ in their own messy, cute, annoying, endearing, confused, funny way — just like you and me.

It's possible that we won't be able to stop the demographic inversion that is happening, but we can continue to share the love of our crucified and risen Lord, Jesus with young and old alike. That's what it means to be the church in and for every age.

—Bishop Kevin Jones

On the count of three ...



Children of Grace Lutheran, Tripoli, have an important role in every worship service — they give the sending for people to "Go in peace and serve the Lord ... and have fun doing it." Pastor Tyler Hoey grew up giving that same sending with the other kids from his home church, American Lutheran, Jesup, so when he began serving Grace in August 2021, he invited the children to come up front to do the same. "This is an excellent way to give kids a purpose in worship," Hoey says. "The kids look forward to it, and some of the regulars like to shout it. A younger child even came forward with his grandfather."

Register for Day of Renewal

April 27, 2023

Redeemer Lutheran, Waverly

Online registration for the Day of Renewal is open until Friday, April 14. The event will take place Thursday, April 27, at Redeemer Lutheran, Waverly, with the theme "Building Up One Another." All actively serving rostered ministers of the Northeastern Iowa Synod and those training to become rostered ministers are invited to attend.

Kris Meyer, Ph.D., who serves as vice president of the Northeastern Iowa Synod, will lead discussions related to the series of brainstorming sessions that rostered ministers from this synod have been participating in over the past few months.

The event will begin at 10 a.m. and conclude at 3:30 p.m. There is no cost to attend. Lunch and refreshments will be provided. To learn more and to register online, visit www.neiasynod.org.

Farm Bill Listening Sessions

April 18, 2023

The U.S. Congress is working to draft a new, five-year Farm Bill in 2023. Ministry leaders, congregation members and others with valuable life experiences are invited to attend a virtual listening session to give faith-centered perspectives to help shape ELCA advocacy for the bill.

Some aspects of the farm bill are international food aid, rural development, land conservation and nutrition, including SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and assistance programs for low-income parents and children.

Three 90-minute listening sessions are scheduled in April. People can register for any session, but each session will feature discussion specific to the region of a particular time zone. The Central Time Zone session is set for 5 p.m. Tuesday, April 18. Register at <https://bit.ly/ELCAfarmbilllisteningEasternCentral>.

To learn more about the bill and advocacy efforts, visit <https://blogs.elca.org/advocacy>.



Register for WIYLDE

June 19-22, 2023

Camp Ewalu

Registration for WIYLDE — the Wholly Iowa Youth Leadership Discipling

Event — is open through Thursday, June 1. Youth who are currently in grades 8 - 12 are invited to participate June 19 - 22 at Camp Ewalu near Strawberry Point.

This year's theme will feature Peer Ministry Leadership Training from Lyle Griner, National Peer Ministry director. Youth will learn about how to live like the Good Samaritan to help others, and they will be equipped to be leaders in their congregations, peer groups, schools and communities.

The cost for WIYLDE is \$200 per participant; congregations are encouraged to cover \$100 of the registration fee. To learn more and to download registration forms, visit www.neiasynod.org/2023/02/wiylde. Questions can be directed to Pastor Kristen Rod, rod@neiasynod.org.



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Articles in this newsletter may be duplicated for use in synod congregations and organizations, with credit to the *Star* newsletter.

Please notify the synod office with name and address changes. The *Star* can be downloaded at www.neiasynod.org/blog/newsletter. To request a printed version, call the synod office.



www.neiasynod.org

Register by May 1 for the Synod Assembly early-bird rate

June 9-10, 2023

Luther College, Decorah

Online registration for the 2023 Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly is underway, with early-bird registration available through May 1. After that date, an additional \$25 fee will be added. No registrations will be accepted after May 15.

The two-day assembly will be at Luther College in Decorah June 9-10. Portions of the assembly will be available for viewing online; however, all voting will take place in person.

Friday is optional with worship at 7 p.m., followed by orientation and social time. Saturday's schedule begins at 9 a.m. and will include plenary sessions, ministry exhibits, lunch and worship. Keynote speakers will address the theme, "Growing Together in Faith, Hope and Love," based on 1 Corinthians 13:13.

A proposal for the synod assembly to take place every other year has been approved by the Synod Council and will be presented at the synod assembly. This new plan follows the synod constitution's requirement that a regular meeting of the synod assembly be held at least triennially, as determined by the synod council.

By meeting every other year, the synod assemblies can focus on governance, finance and elections in a more streamlined fashion. During the even-numbered years, the synod would host service and education events, which would be open for anyone in the synod to attend.

A video created by Bishop Kevin Jones explains more about the plan and can be viewed on the synod's [YouTube](#) page.

BRING LSI FAMILY KITS TO ASSEMBLY

Congregations are invited to bring personal care kits to the synod assembly to support families served through Lutheran Services in Iowa's Early Childhood Services program.

LSI Early Childhood Services supports parents of young children to limit the risk of abuse and neglect in the home. Families enrolled in Early Childhood programming often struggle to pay basic needs such as diapers and wipes, which are rarely available at food pantries. One way to alleviate that stress—or is through age-specific kits with necessities for daily living and items that encourage parent and child engagement.

LSI has provided a list of items and instructions to assemble infant kits, toddler kits and adult bathroom kits. Infant items include crib sheets, pacifiers, bottles, towels, onesies and baby lotion. Toddler items include pajamas, underwear, toothbrushes, toys and books. Items for the adult kits include shampoo, bath towel, wash cloths and deodorant.

LSI will have a trailer at Luther College to collect donated kits during the assembly. The complete list of items and instructions to assemble the kits can be downloaded on the synod website at www.neiasynod.org/2023/03/2023-synod-assembly. Questions can be directed to **Michael Knipp** at Knipp@lsiowa.org.

OFFERING & IN-KIND GIFTS

The assembly offering will be designated for the H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders to support scholarships for seminary students and the Bishop's Crisis Fund to assist local families in times of need. In addition, congregations are invited to donate personal care kits to support Lutheran Services in Iowa Early Childhood Services program. (See box.)

PRE-ASSEMBLY ZOOM MEETINGS

Voting members are encouraged to participate in two informational Zoom meetings to help prepare for the assembly and to ask questions in an informal setting. The first Zoom meeting will be at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 30, to review the budgets and compensation guidelines. Submitted resolutions

will be reviewed at the 6:30 p.m. Zoom meeting on Thursday, June 1.

All resolutions must be submitted to the secretary of the synod by May 1. Log-in information for the Zoom meetings will be sent to registered voting members. Videos of the sessions will be available for those unable to attend them live.

HOW TO REGISTER

Online registration is available on the synod website. Pdf registration forms and other resources can also be downloaded. People can register individually or someone from the congregation can register everyone at once. Call or email the synod office for assistance, 319-352-1414 or liddlek@neiasynod.org. For assembly updates and to register, visit www.neiasynod.org.

A Legacy of Generosity: H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders

The first years of being a deacon or pastor of a congregation are exciting times. Learning what kind of leader you are and want to be takes time and patience — from those leading and those being led! The first baptism, confirmation class, wedding and major holiday all take extra energy and time. All the new things of first call can be exciting and, at times, overwhelming.

Because of the generous donors of the Northeastern Iowa Synod, one thing seminary students from our synod do not have to worry about is how they are going to pay for their education. For seven years running, our candidates are free to fully engage their first calls without the burden of huge seminary debt thanks to the Northeastern Iowa Synod's H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders scholarships.

In 2022, 15 seminarians applied for and received scholarships from the H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders. These scholarships ensure that no one training to become a deacon or pastor

from our synod will have tuition-based debt from seminary.

If you would like to be part of supporting Northeastern Iowa seminary students, there are two ways to donate. Some people give to the endowment fund, which provides an annual return on investment draw that will support seminarian scholarships for decades to come. In 2022-2023, \$25,500 of endowment income was shared. For the 2023-2024 academic year, we have \$26,800 to distribute.

Other congregations and individual donors prefer to give to the H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders immediate-use scholarships. These gifts are used right away and are raised each year. For 2023-2024, we have approximately \$45,196 of immediate-use funds to give away.

In 2022, individuals and congregations gave more than \$46,200 in gifts!! Our fundraising goal for 2023 is \$50,000. I hope that as you consider how you are called to give in the next



Liz (Albertson) Bell

year, that you might consider a gift to the H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders. With your gifts, seminarians are freed to do the work of formation without concern for how they are going to pay for tuition. What a great gift to our future deacons and pastors! Gifts can be sent directly to the Northeastern Iowa Synod at 201 20th

St. SW in Waverly, IA 50677. Or you can give online, www.neiasynod.org/give or use the QR Code.



— *Pastor Liz*

Tips for Reducing Single-Use Plastics

by Donna Rasmussen, Member of the Care for Creation Network

What did you give up for Lent?

At First Lutheran in Decorah, members were asked to give up single use plastics during Lent. To help them do this, Carol Gilbertson, a member of the congregation's Creation Care Team, developed a helpful list of Green Tips for this effort. The list includes reminders to use reusable shopping bags and water bottles; alternatives to

takeout and to-go containers and single use plastics in the kitchen, bathroom and laundry; and even quitting smoking.

Each tip includes background information about how these actions affect the environment and practical ways to adopt the practices. Of course, the hope is that the practices will become habit and will continue after the Lenten season.



The Green Tips for reducing single use plastics are posted on the Synod's Care for Creation web page at www.neiasynod.org/care-for-creation. Thanks to Carol and the First Lutheran Care for Creation Team for allowing these to be shared with others.

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“The elevator says to people who come in that you are welcome to use any space in the church,” Becker says. “We are not just a church for our members, but are a church for the community. Anybody is welcome.”

KID FRIENDLY WORSHIP

Redeemer Lutheran, Waverly opened its indoor “pray ground” in 2019 to serve families during worship services on both Sunday morning and Wednesday evening. Located at the rear of the sanctuary near the balcony stairs, the pray ground is supplied with toys and other items for children to engage in quiet activities that relate to the worship service.

“Our primary goal is to make it comfortable for parents who want to have their kids with them in worship,” says Pastor Corey Smith. “In most cases, the parents can sit in pews across the aisle or in front of the pray ground space.”

The space includes books, a foam peg board, and coloring pages that tie in with the theme of the season. A makeshift road made of masking tape on the floor and foam cars and trucks were recently added to help children think about the path and journey of Lent. A table maze in the shape of a cross also involves kids in the message of Lent shared during the worship service.

“We try to identify activities the kids can do in that space that tie in with the message their parents are receiving as well,” Smith says.

Smith also engages children in

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Bible Resources for Children’s Ministry

by Pastor Kristen Corr Rod, Director for Evangelical Mission

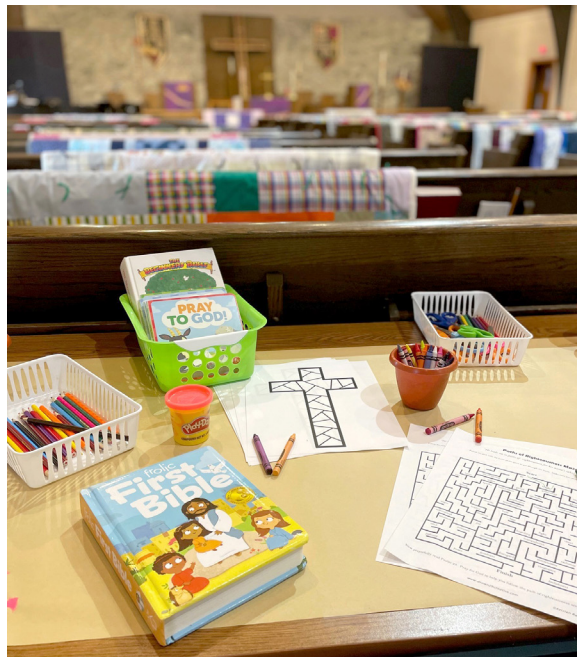
Lots of congregations in our synod are working hard to welcome children and help them grow in their faith in many and various ways.

The ELCA publishing house, Augsburg Fortress, has a wing called “Beaming Books,” which publishes books specifically geared toward children and youth. Many story Bibles are available, including the very popular *Spark Story Bible*, which I have seen many congregations utilize in educational ministry programs, as well as Bibles geared for different settings and ages. There is a *Frolic First Bible*, a board book designed to give toddlers a basic introduction to several Bible stories, and a *Frolic Preschool Bible*, which explains those stories at an age-appropriate level for preschoolers. And there’s a *Family Time Story Bible*, designed to be used by families doing devotions together.

There are also books that help kids understand the Bible at age-appropriate levels. There’s a board book called *Frolic Bible Babies*, which is an adorable book that tells about characters in the Bible when they are babies and ends with a message about how much God loves babies.

There are elementary/middle school level books like *The World Jesus Knew: A Curious Kid’s Guide to Life in the Old Testament*, which tells what life was like in those times, giving information that helps to increase understanding of the context surrounding Bible stories. And there’s also a great book called *Grit and Grace*, which tells the stories of many women in the Bible.

Any of these children’s Bibles and books would be great to utilize in Christian education programs and to have available in children’s areas in sanctuaries. Let’s encourage kids to be curious about the Bible!



A *Frolic First Bible*, prayer books, and Lenten activities are part of the children’s “pray ground” play area at the back of the sanctuary at Redeemer Lutheran, Waverly.

Apply for an ELCA Digital Ministry Grant

Applications are still being accepted for the ELCA Digital Ministry Grants. These grants will be awarded to congregations to promote electronic giving and digital ministry creativity. Each synod can nominate up to three congregations in their synod no later than April 15, 2023.

Interested congregations can present an idea of how they would use the extra funding to expand their ministry's reach. To share your ideas, contact Pastor Kristen Rod, Director of Evangelical Ministry, at rodsk@neiasynod.org by April 14, or call 319-352-1414.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY



Urban Servant Corps, an ELCA ministry partner located in Denver, Colo., offers one-year, full-time experiences for young adults to live in community in downtown Denver while serving as volunteers at nonprofit organizations that work with low-income and at-risk populations.

Food, housing, health insurance, a monthly stipend and an annual "growth and development" allotment are provided. Additionally, spiritual direction, alumni mentorship, and professional development opportunities are offered as part of this experience.

To learn more and apply, visit www.urbanservantcorps.org.

Rostered Ministers Gathering

July 17-20, 2023

Online registration for the Rostered Ministers Gathering is open through July 1. The gathering is set for July 17-20, 2023, at the Phoenix Convention Center in downtown Phoenix, Ariz. All rostered ministers are invited — active in call, on leave from call, awaiting call and retired.

Each day will begin with wor-

ship centered around the theme "Rekindle the gift within you," based on 2 Timothy 1:6. The schedule also includes Bible study, music, lunch, keynote speakers, continuing education workshops, small group discussions, a reception with Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, and a celebration banquet.

To learn more and to register online, visit www.elca.org/rmg.

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Sunday worship through the children's sermon and noisy offerings, in which the children carry buckets to collect donations to support mission partners in the community.

"We have people who save their change all week to give to the kids," Smith says. "The adults really look forward to it. We hope it helps the kids learn about the mission of the church."

Smith says it has been a struggle getting families to come to Sunday worship since COVID, especially with the services offered online and conflicting high school sports activities. A lot of families opt for Redeemer's Wednesday night activi-

ties, which include supper, a half-hour Vespers service, an education hour for kids, and a high school youth group. Some 50 to 60 people attend each week.

Smith tailors the Wednesday worship messages around Bible stories and parables to help the young people be engaged and involved in scripture on a level they can easily grasp.

"The model is that Jesus told stories," Smith says. "I work really hard to avoid abstractions and put the message in very concrete terms rather than metaphors or analogies. It's easier to talk to kids about serving others who are hungry than to

talk about being the bread of life."

Smith notes that the tendency over the years has been for families to drop their kids off for Sunday school and not come to the worship service. But if a family is going to do one or the other, he wants the whole family together at worship.

"We can no longer assume that our kids are going to attend both worship and Sunday school, so our goal is to have more teaching in the worship experience for kids," Smith says. "We hope we are making a difference, but we won't know for 20 years."

EVENTS

APRIL EVENTS

- 6 Transitional/Interim Ministry Colleague Group, 9:30-11:30 a.m., Zoom,
- 7 Office Closed, Good Friday
- 11 Office Closed, Staff Retreat
- 13 Tree of Life Conference Assembly, 10:30 a.m.-1 p.m., TBD
- 16-18 Rural Ministry Conference, Best Western Hotel & Conference Center, Dubuque
- 18 Youth Gathering Meeting, 10 a.m., Synod Office
- 18 Farm Bill Listening Session, 5 p.m., Zoom
- 20 Youth Ministry Network, 10 a.m., First, Northwood
- 24-25 First Call Theological Education Event, Ewalu
- 27 Day of Renewal, 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Redeemer, Waverly

MAY EVENTS

- 4 Transitional/Interim Ministry Colleague Group, 9:30-11:30 a.m., Zoom
- 6 Synodical Women's Organization, 9 a.m.-12 Noon, Synod Office
- 11 Executive Committee, 4 p.m.
- 12 Candidacy Committee Meeting, 8 a.m., Synod Office
- 18 Youth Ministry Network, 10 a.m., St. Peter, Dubuque
- 20 Synod Council Meeting, 9 a.m., Zoom
- 29 Office Closed, Memorial Day
- 30 Pre-Assembly Review of Budgets & Compensation Guidelines, 6:30 p.m., Zoom

JUNE EVENTS

- 1 Transitional/Interim Ministry Colleague Group, 9:30-11:30 a.m., Zoom
- 1 Pre-Assembly Review of Resolutions, 6:30 p.m., Zoom
- 9-10 Synod Assembly, Luther College, Decorah
- 12 Synod Office Closed
- 17 SWO Convention, Trinity, Belmond
- 19-22 WIYLDE (Wholly Iowa Leadership Discipling Event), Camp Ewalu, Strawberry Point

JULY EVENTS

- 4 Synod Office Closed, Independence Day
- 6 Transitional/Interim Ministry Colleague Group, 9:30-11:30 a.m., Zoom
- 15 Synod Council, 9:30 a.m.-12 Noon, Zoom
- 17-20 Rostered Ministers Gathering, Phoenix, Ariz.

CONGREGATIONS

INSTALLING

Rev. Erika Breddin, St. Ansgar, Waterloo, April 16
Rev. David Severtson, First, Decorah, pending
Rev. Reed Pedersen, St. Peter, Denver, pending

INTERVIEWING

Allison, St. James, Rev. Norman Bauer, contract interim
Cedar Falls, Fredsville, Rev. Lee Gable, interim
Decorah, Big Canoe & Highland, Rev. Waldemar Gies, contract interim
Decorah, Decorah, staff
Decorah, Glenwood & Canoe Ridge, Rev. Adam Starrett, interim
Dubuque, Holy Trinity, Rev. Jason Davis, contract pastor
Dubuque, St. John's, Rev. Ann Fritschel, interim
[Eldorado, St. Peter*](#)
Garnavillo, St. Peter & Clayton, Peace, Rev. Harold McMillin, contract interim
Greene, St. Peter
Hampton, St. Paul
La Porte City, American
[Leland, Our Savior & Garner, Faith \(Miller\)*](#)
Maynard, St. Paul, Rev. Stephen Samuelson, contract interim
Toeterville, St. Peter & Carpenter, Deer Creek
[Waterloo, Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd*](#)
[Waterloo, Our Savior's, Pastor Lisa Kruse, contract synodically authorized minister*](#)
Waterloo, Zion, Rev. Erika Breddin, contract pastor
Waverly, St. Paul's, Rev. Mark Anderson, interim

SELF-STUDY

Cresco, Immanuel
[Decorah, St. John's & Hauge*](#)
[Dows, First, Rev. Anita Nuetzman, interim*](#)
Elkader, Bethany & Strawberry Point, Emanuel, Rev. Katherine Longtin Johnson, interim
[Hawkeye, Trinity*](#)
[Janesville, Messiah*](#)
Jesup, American & La Porte City, Zion (Jubilee)
Lake Mills, Salem
Mason City, Trinity, staff, Rev. Dan Dahl, interim
Osage, Our Savior's
Rockwell, St. Peter
Sumner, St. John (Buck Creek) & Oran, St. Peter
[Thornton, St. Paul*](#)
Washburn, Redeemer
[Waterloo, Trinity*](#)

ROSTER CHANGES

Rev. Robert Gremmels, deceased
Rev. Keith Tomlinson, deceased

**Part-time Call*

PRAYER CALENDAR

APRIL 2023						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders Rev. Steven M. Jacobsen, Decorah 1
Bethany Life Communities, Inc., Story City 2	Rev. Allen L. Bidne, Waverly 3	Canoe Ridge, Decorah 4	Strawberry Point Lutheran Home, Strawberry Point 5	Janice D. Schumacher, Waterloo 6	Martha G. Deines, Cedar Falls 7	Rev. Amy Strydom, Cambridge, Minn. 8
Glenwood, Decorah 9	Big Canoe, Decorah 10	Rev. Daniel W. Gerriets, Mason City 11	Rev. Marion Pruitt-Jefferson, Decorah 12	Good Samaritan Society, Waukon 13	Rev. James Gardner, Waterloo 14	Highland, Decorah 15
Bartels Lutheran Retirement Community, Waverly 16	Middle East Peace Hauge, Decorah 17	Jane Hoppenworth, Charles City Rev. Grant J. Woodley, Clarion 18	Rev. Dr. Kristin Johnston Largent, Dubuque 19	Rev. Jerome G. Godson, Volga 20	Judy Wogsland Foreman, Ankeny 21	St. John's, Decorah 22
Rev. Jane S. Keel, Charles City 23	Good Samaritan Society, West Union 24	Rev. Ernest Elzey, Cedar Falls Rev. Henrik Engebretson, Decorah 25	Rev. Scott R. Duffus, Owatonna 26	Washington Prairie, Decorah 27	Burr Oak, Decorah 28	Decorah, Decorah 29
Rev. Matthew Agee, Dubuque Rev. Kristi V. H. Grieder, Waterloo 30						

OBITUARIES

The Rev. Robert C. Gremmels of Waverly, 94, died Feb. 28, 2023. He received his master's degree in journalism from The Ohio State University in 1954 and his divinity degree from the seminary of Capital University in 1957. He served three years as assistant editor of the Lutheran Standard, now incorporated into Living Lutheran, and was ordained on Sept. 20, 1959. He had a 34- year career at Wartburg College in various capacities, including teaching journalism and public relations until 1994 when he retired as associate professor and chair of the Communication Arts Department.

A funeral service took place March 6 at the Wartburg Chapel. He is survived by his second wife, the Rev. Beth Olson, and three children. A full obituary is available at www.kaisercorson.com.

The Rev. Keith Tomlinson of Waverly, 78, died March 10, 2023. He graduated from Wartburg Theological Seminary and was ordained on June 29, 1969. He served as pastor for Trinity Lutheran in Marion, Ohio, and in Iowa he served at Elim, Marshalltown; Zion, Rake; and Zion, Clear Lake. He then served 21 years as Chaplain at Bartels Lutheran Retirement Community, Waverly. After his retirement in 2009, he served as a supply preacher and interim pastor in the Kaukauna, Wis., area. He and his wife, Ginny, moved back to Waverly in 2019, where he continued as a supply preacher and volunteer.

A funeral service took place March 16 at Redeemer Lutheran, Waverly. He is survived by his wife, three sons, seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren. A full obituary is available at www.kaisercorson.com.



Good News

April
2023

As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society and the world.

From the President

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. Luke 1:45

As I and your board are working hard to plan a wonderful convention for you in June, be aware that the nominating committee will be seeking some new members for the board. It sounds like a daunting idea to be a board member but ask anyone who has served and you usually will find great feedback. You find out the workings of our organization and make new lifelong connections. The whole process really doesn't take much of your time. Pray on it and be ready to take a bold leap if you get a call or, even better, don't wait to be asked, just volunteer.

We have already arranged for some very interesting speakers. Soon you will be getting information on the In-kind gift recipients and a list of needed items. These are well deserving charities in Wright County that are a real asset to helping our community. So please open your hearts and show them that Women of the ELCA are caring, compassionate and generous.

May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face and the rains fall soft upon your fields. Until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hand.

Cindy Pogge, President

Discipleship Committee

Is God still creating women in God's image and calling them to discipleship today? The answer is yes! True, mainline denominations and their women's organizations are experiencing declines in membership. And that is even more reason to practice discipleship.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the

Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"

Matthew 28:18–20

Many women know they should be disciples, but they are unclear what to do, or if they're already doing it. Jesus' words are still the blueprint for discipleship today, yet many might say, "I'm not a teacher, and on most days I'm not sure I understand what God has commanded me." Each disciple must establish her own practice of carrying out Jesus' command. A doctor may be part of a practice with a team of doctors, but each physician brings her own gifts and skills to the group.

You can do that, too, as disciples. Here's how to start:

1. Claim your identity. Read Matthew 28:19–20.
2. Examine the instructions. Read Women of the ELCA's purpose statement. There you will find Matthew 28:19–20 in greater details.
3. Ask the Lutheran question: "What does this mean in my daily life?" Discipleship is daily practice.
4. Journal. This will help you to be intentional and assess how you are practicing.

*From Women of the ELCA website,
written by Valora K Starr
(valora.starr@elca.org)
Director for Discipleship*

Stewardship Committee

Maybe you saw it in the last issue of The Star, our bishop is going to participate in RAGBRAI this summer. It is the 50th anniversary bike ride across Iowa, and he pledges to ride at least 50 miles every day. In fact, all three bishops in Iowa are doing this together. Their intention is to raise \$50,000 and donate it to ELCA World Hunger. ELCA World Hunger works both domestically and globally with companion churches around the world, and other

Lutheran partners such as Lutheran World Federation and Church World Service. These organizations aim to address hunger at its root causes, working in the areas of healthcare, income generation, food security, clean water and education. At our January 28th board meeting, we chose to support the bishop and voted to donate one half of the offering from the June Convention to ELCA World Hunger. Keep this in mind when bringing your offerings to the convention. Stay tuned for the news of in-kind offering that day.

Submitted by Nancy Poppe

Justice Committee

“**Make Today Count**” is the message on a new magnet on my refrigerator. My heart is directing me to share thoughts of how and why we get involved, plus some great updates on the International Day For Girls. My friend, Marge who volunteers and has a passion co-leading the Cresco group was so excited to share some great news for the foundation that is helping break the cycle of poverty and assist girls and women to live with dignity. For someone who may not be aware of this cause, it was started back in 2008, by Celeste Mergens. While working in Kenya she learned that the girls manage their menstrual cycle by sitting on cardboard for days. The foundation has volunteers coming together assembling female hygiene kits. The exciting news is that Day For Girls International has now reached over 2.8 million women and girls supplying these hygiene kits and providing educational material to more than 144 countries. More good news, the foundation is reaching out right here in the US to prisons and shelters.

To make change it's important to listen, be courteous to what others are thinking and feeling, be open to a different point of view and keep calm to foster good communication. Most importantly, TRY!! Remember the words of our Lord, encouraging and loving us then we can do amazing work helping others in the world of so many hurts and unfairness. God is a God of Justice wishing us to serve him by serving others. “**Make Today Count**”

Submitted by Vickie Grube

Gathering Information

Information and forms for the June gathering have been posted on the WELCA webpage @ neiasynod.org and on our Facebook page! Each church has also received email or hard copies-check with your pastor or secretary!

CALENDAR

- Apr 15 C/E/H LWR Ingathering @ Redeemer, Waverly
- Apr 17 LWR Ingathering @ Southport Mall, Mason City
- Apr 22 Upper Iowa Gathering @ Big Canoe, Decorah
- Apr 23 Little Flock Gathering @ Elgin
- May 6 SWO Board Meeting, Waverly, 9 am-12 pm
Decorah LWR Ingathering, Olson's Explosives
- June 16 SWO Board Meeting @ gathering site @
Trinity, Belmond
- June 17 35th Annual NE IA WELCA Gathering @
Trinity, Belmond
- Sept 18 2023 Triennial Convention & Gathering
- Oct 14 C/E/H LWR Ingathering @ Redeemer, Waverly
- Oct 16 LWR Ingathering @ Southport Mall, Mason City

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April 1 for May issue)*

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Contact NEIA Women of the ELCA:

neiasynod.org/women-of-the-ELCA



NE IA Women of the ELCA- Check us out and give a like or post about your church's activities!

Living Faith @



Dear Faith Shapers,

Happy April and Happy Easter! “*Christ is Risen – Alleluia!*” Speaking of “Alleluia,” did your church bury the “Alleluia” during Lent? Some churches abstain from saying or singing ‘Alleluia’ during Lent. “Burying” the Alleluia or hiding it is a great visual for both children and adults - but to be clear, this is not a required liturgical practice! It’s simply another way to remind us of the solemnity of Lent, which always leads us to the joy of the resurrection as we once again proclaim: “*Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! ALLELUIA!*”

As a pastor, (and a grandma!) I love getting brightly colored artwork from children. I have included this coloring page that celebrates the Risen Christ! Have your children or Sunday School class color it or decorate it however they want to, and then have them give it to the pastor – they will love it!



CHRIST
IS RISEN!

ALLELUIA!

Did you know that the month of April is also “**National Humor Month?**” Larry Wilde, author and humorist, started National Humor Month in April 1976. He created this day as a way to bring public awareness of the therapeutic value of humor. (nationaltoday.com)



Some churches celebrate the Sunday following Easter with *Holy Hilarity/Holy Humor Sunday; God's Laughter Sunday; or Bright Sunday.* It is believed to have come from early church theologians (like Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa) who mused that God played a practical joke on the devil by raising Jesus from the dead.

The Sunday after Easter is often labeled “Low Sunday” because of low attendance. This might just be the “spark” we all need to keep the joy of Christ's resurrection going throughout the whole Easter season - *Laughter is the best medicine - and so good for the soul!*

Here is a great resource for celebrating *Holy Humor* either in Sunday worship, or with your family throughout April - and beyond: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/search?q=Holy+Humor+>



This information is prepared for you by the Northeastern Iowa Synod – Home Life Network for use by families and local congregations. Like our page on Facebook and our posted resources will appear in your newsfeed. Our page is [Home Life « NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD \(neiasynod.org\)](http://HomeLife.org)

