



## Celebrating Renewal: Johannes Bugenhagen, Parish Pastor of the Reformation

# New streamlined process helps candidates find their first calls

by Marcia Hahn

With help from their home synods, seminary students approved for ordination will have more input about where they will begin their first calls in ELCA ministry.

The new ELCA First-Call Process set to begin Jan 31, was approved by the ELCA Conference of Bishops as a more flexible and responsive system to meet the changing needs of candidates, congregations and the church at large. Long before being assigned to a region, seminary candidates will work with their home-synod bishops throughout the first-call process until they accept a first call.

"We are the shepherds of our candidates," says Pastor Steve Brackett, assistant to the Bishop. "The home synod knows its candidates well because we have worked with them throughout their candidacy and we can advocate for them with other synods."

Traditionally, candidates approved for ordination waited to learn what region and synod they would be assigned in seeking their first call. Those decisions were made by bishops and regional candidacy coordinators based on the candidate's geographical preferences and the needs of the church to fill first-call openings. As a result, Brackett says candidates have sometimes been assigned to synods they did

not request. Candidates wanting to stay in their home synod needed a valid reason to restrict, such as family commitments.

The new first-call process will allow candidates who want to remain in their home synods to do so more easily.

"The hope is that pastors stay at least three years in their first call, and ideally even longer," Brackett says. "The home synod will advocate for the candidates to help them begin their ministries in places where they want to be, and where they will more likely want to stay."

Brackett explains that the new first-call process works in three phases, beginning with conversations between the synod bishop and staff member with the candidate and spouse or partner, before the candidate is formally approved by the synod's candidacy committee.

"This lets us know early on what the candidates are looking for in their first calls and where they are willing to serve," Brackett says.

In Phase 2, bishops or assigned staff members within a region con-

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"Our hope is that we no longer have seminary graduates taking first calls in places they don't want to be."

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— Pastor Steve Brackett

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Steve Brackett

sult with one another to discuss the availability of calls and their candidates' preferences to determine where a candidate might interview. In Phase 3, approved candidates will be connected to a region and synod for their first-call process to proceed. Home-synod bishops will be responsible for the care of each of their candidates until the candidates are called and rostered in a synod.

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Bishop Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl says the new first-call process underscores the value and importance of relationships — between the synod bishop and staff with candidates and with potential first call congregations, between region bishops, and between regional coordinators and bishops from across the church.

“God calls us all to these relationships for the sake of the continued mission of the church in the world,” DeGroot-Nesdahl says. “I look forward to strengthening and deepening these relationships as we move into this new process,”

Brackett anticipates that this streamlined process may enable approved candidates to begin interviewing sooner, with the possibility of candidates being able to accept first calls prior to graduation. Candidates can express interest to serve anywhere in the church or to serve only in their home synod or region. He emphasizes, however, that the synod will encourage all candidates to look beyond remaining in this synod, especially if that is all the candidate has ever known.

## OPEN TO NEW OPPORTUNITIES

As a second career candidate, Amalia Vagts says that she always thought she would want to stay in the Decorah area where her spouse, David Lester, has been managing the local food coop.

“When I started seminary I imagined we would stay around here for our family and because we love Decorah and this part of the country, but I felt a shift part way

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“In our conversation with Bishop Andrea and Pastor Steve I felt like they were really listening to both David and me to hear our vision for ministry and our hope about where we could imagine ourselves.”

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— Amalia Vagts

through seminary that this could be a time of life to go somewhere else,” Vagts says. “We’re open to staying here if the right call is here, but we’re also open to going elsewhere in the country, depending on what fits.”

Vagts grew up in southeastern Minnesota, attended Luther College in the early 90s, then moved around the country for 10 years living in different cities, including San Francisco; Washington, D.C.; Madison, Wis. and Ann Arbor, Mich. She moved back to Decorah in 2006 and began online studies with Wartburg Theological Seminary in 2017. Set to graduate in May 2021, Vagts and Lester met with DeGroot-Nesdahl and Brackett in November to talk about their options through the new first-call process.

“In our conversation with Bishop Andrea and Pastor Steve I felt like they were really listening to both David and me to hear our vision for ministry and our hope about where we could imagine ourselves,” Vagts says. “They were really encouraging us to be true to that thought process and imagining, and it was really encouraging. It was a very life-affirming conversation.”



Amalia Vagts and David Lester

Brackett recognizes that some synods may have difficulty attracting first call pastors, especially since synods can no longer rely on candidates from other synods being assigned to them. He says that synods will need to take more responsibility for recruiting their own candidates by encouraging those who display gifts of leadership to consider ministry.

“This is a new effort between the synod staff and the candidate, and we’re learning as we go along,” Brackett says. “Our hope is that we no longer have seminary graduates taking first calls in places they don’t want to be. It will be the responsibility of the home synods to get to know their candidates, have conversations with them about where they envision themselves being called to service, and advocate for them, wherever they want to be considered.”

**To learn more about the ELCA First-Call Process, visit [www.elca.org/Resources/Assignment-Process](http://www.elca.org/Resources/Assignment-Process).**

# Mark's Gospel brings hope for the new year

Happy New Year! Advent begins the start of a new liturgical year, as you know. We move cyclically through the Gospels of Matthew (A); Mark (B); and Luke (C) over a three-year period in the readings most of us use for worship and preaching. (The Gospel of John gets added in to each year so we hear it over the whole cycle) This "New Year" we focus on Mark, the shortest of the Gospels. With only 16 chapters, a person could read through the whole book in just a couple of sessions (hint!).

Scholars believe Mark's writings were completed earlier than the other Gospels, and that Mark strove to bring the entire story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection together in one narrative that would help people know Christ, and believe in Him. Mark reportedly wrote this around 70 C.E., which is around the time that Jerusalem was destroyed. People back then, faced with that terrible disaster, asked similar questions to what many people ask today: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" "Why is there suffering in the world?" "Where is God and where is Jesus in all of this?"

It's tempting to think one book in the Bible, even if it is one of the Gospels, could answer those century-spanning questions, but Mark wasn't looking to give people answers to the "whys" of life as much as he seemed to want to introduce people to the "Who" of life: Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Mark is told with urgency and at a quick pace. When you read it, count the number of times he uses the word "immediately" and you will be surprised!

Mark was in a hurry to get a message out to people who longed for a word of hope, understanding, and comfort.

"... Mark wasn't looking to give people answers to the 'whys' of life as much as he seemed to want to introduce people to the 'Who' of life: Jesus Christ."



Mark offered the story of Jesus, God's only Son, as that Word-become-flesh so that his readers/listeners, just like us today, would come to know how Jesus suffered and died, and rose again, so that we would know the length and breadth of God's love for us in sending Jesus. So that we would focus on the Cross of Christ in our suffering and know we are never alone. So that we would look to Christ for hope when our world struggles in darkness. So that now, centuries later, as we continue to live through a pandemic, we would hear words of comfort and hope from this ancient Gospel.

As we draw near to the end of 2020 and anticipate better days ahead in 2021, we enter a new year on the liturgical calendar first, and hear from the Gospel of Mark that Jesus suffered and died so that we would know we are not alone in our lives and our struggles — and that Jesus rose again so that we might have New Life, no matter what year we are in.

May the hope of Mark's Gospel live in your heart in Advent, and Christmas, and all that is to come.

— Bishop Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl

## Resources for virtual congregational meetings

During this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, many congregation leaders are asking how they can use technology to hold necessary meetings and conduct the business of the congregation. Leaders should first consult their congregation's constitution. If the constitution does not explicitly forbid a remote meeting, Iowa law allows for remote voting for non-profit corporations.

Iowa nonprofit corporations are governed by the Revised Iowa Nonprofit Corporation Act ("Iowa Nonprofit Act"), which provides various means by which members and boards of directors are able to take action without holding an in-person meeting, including written ballots, proxies, telephone, email or virtual (such as zoom).

For more information, visit the

synod's Disaster Response Network web page at [www.neiasynod.org/disaster-response](http://www.neiasynod.org/disaster-response) to download these documents:

- *Remote Meetings FAQs for Congregations*
- *Virtual and Telephonic Meetings and Other Alternatives to In Person Meetings for Iowa Nonprofit Corporations.*



## Virtual Treasurers Meeting

Jan. 9, 2021

Congregation treasurers, pastors, financial committee members, and others are invited to attend the Congregation Treasurers Meeting set for Saturday, Jan. 9, 10 a.m. to 12 noon, via Zoom.

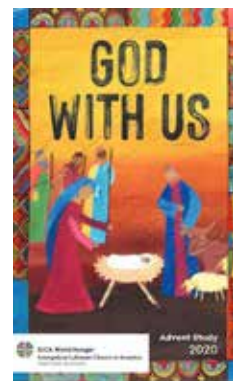
Presenters will be:

- Keith D. Oltrogge, CPA, Denver, on W-2s and related forms, church payrolls, and contributions.
- Pastor Steve Brackett, assistant to the Bishop, with information about the Northeastern Iowa Synod's *Proposed 2021 Minimum Compensation Guidelines*.
- Jennifer Prinz, regional representative with Portico Benefit Services, with information about available resources to effectively sponsor and understand the fullness of benefits and retirement through Portico Benefit Services.

There is no charge to attend. To register, send an email to Pastor Mark Anderson, assistant to the Bishop, at [andersonm@neiasynod.org](mailto:andersonm@neiasynod.org) or call the synod office at 319-352-1414.

## Advent Preaching Series

The Northeastern Iowa Synod staff will provide a video sermon for every Sunday in Advent for congregations to use as part of their worship services, mid-week devotions, Bible study resources or however they choose. The sermons are based on the ELCA World Hunger Advent Study, *God With Us*.



- **Advent 1 – Nov. 29, 2020**  
“Keep Awake” by Pastor Joelle Colville Hanson, Director for Evangelical Mission
- **Advent 2 – Dec. 6, 2020**  
“Prepare” by Interim Bishop Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl
- **Advent 3 – Dec. 13, 2020**  
“Comfort” by Pastor Steve Brackett, Assistant to the Bishop
- **Advent 4 – Dec. 20, 2020**  
“Presence” by Pastor Mark Anderson, Assistant to the Bishop
- **First Sunday of Christmas – Dec. 27, 2020**  
Interim Bishop Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl

Videos of the sermons will be posted each week on the Northeastern Iowa Synod YouTube Channel. For links to the videos, sermon transcripts and the *God With Us* Advent study materials, visit [www.neiasynod.org/event](http://www.neiasynod.org/event).

## LMM Bold Gathering

Dec. 12, 2020

Lutheran Men in Mission will host an online

“Stories from the Heart —

Bold Gathering” event Saturday, Dec. 12, 11 a.m. CST. The Bold Gathering is a day for men to come together to learn, to network and to be equipped to boldly live out their faith.

LMM has invited six members of the black, indigenous and people of color community to share from the heart their stories, experiences and insights with the hope that, through this experience, walls may be torn down and relationships may be fostered. Dr. Mallory Everett, counseling psychologist from New Jersey, has been announced as the first speaker.

There is no cost to attend this event, however donations are welcomed. People can watch it as individuals or as part of a small group in the church or home. To learn more and to register, visit [www.boldgathering.com](http://www.boldgathering.com).



### NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD

Interim Bishop Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl – [degroot-nesdahla@neiasynod.org](mailto:degroot-nesdahla@neiasynod.org)

Assistants to the Bishop

Rev. Mark A. Anderson – [andersonm@neiasynod.org](mailto:andersonm@neiasynod.org)

Rev. Stephen Brackett – [bracketts@neiasynod.org](mailto:bracketts@neiasynod.org)

ELCA Director for Evangelical Mission

Rev. Dr. Joelle Colville-Hanson – [colville-hansonj@neiasynod.org](mailto:colville-hansonj@neiasynod.org)

Star Editor

Marcia Hahn – [hahnm@neiasynod.org](mailto:hahnm@neiasynod.org)

The *Star* is published by the Northeastern Iowa Synod, 201 20th Street SW, PO Box 804, Waverly, IA 50677-0804; [www.neiasynod.org](http://www.neiasynod.org), phone 319-352-1414, FAX 319-352-1416.

Send news for the February 2021 issue to Marcia Hahn by Jan. 6. We welcome story ideas related to the theme, “Celebrating Renewal: Johannes Bugenhagen, Parish Pastor of the Reformation.”

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. To receive an electronic version of the *Star*, rather than paper, send your request to [hahnm@neiasynod.org](mailto:hahnm@neiasynod.org).



[www.neiasynod.org](http://www.neiasynod.org)

## Embrace the gift of a smaller Christmas

"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." — Isaiah 9:6

I don't think this will be much of a Christmas. At least not for me because many of the things I love best about Christmas — big family gatherings, feasts of meatballs and lefse, Christmas hymns, shopping for gifts — will all be greatly curtailed. I am afraid it might just be a Christmas via

Zoom for us.

It is so disappointing that traditions we have had for generations will not be practiced this year. On the other hand, a smaller and simpler celebration may be a gift. This year, liberated from all the expectations, maybe I can concentrate more on Christ and less on cooking.

Maybe with a COVID Christmas I can make more gifts to those in need and less on those who don't need one more thing. Perhaps my soul will find rest in a smaller Christmas and I

can spend more time praying about what is in the cradle and less time hoping for what's under the tree. I think I'll call it "stewardship of attention."

Merry Christmas.

— *Pastor Mark A. Anderson*  
*Assistant to the Bishop*



### INSPIRED GIVING

## An IRA distribution gift can save on taxes

A qualified charitable distribution from your IRA (Individual Retirement Account) allows you to support the ELCA, your congregation and/or the ministries you specify — and save on your taxes.

If you are 70½ or older, you may instruct your retirement plan administrator to make a direct transfer of up to \$100,000 to the ELCA or any of its ministries.

**MINIMUM GIFT AMOUNT: NONE**

Advantages:

- Distribution will count toward your Required Minimum Distribution.
- Funds are not included in your adjusted gross income, minimizing your tax liability. (Please note: No income-tax deduction is allowed for the transfer.)

Ready to take the next step?  
Contact Pastor Mark Anderson 319-352-1414.

## Grant money for Little Free Pantries



The Northeastern Iowa Synod was awarded a grant of \$7,500 from the ELCA's COVID-19 Fund to help families experiencing unemployment, poverty or other hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The funds were distributed to the 17 congregations that host "Little Free Pantries" to help keep the pantries supplied.

It was suggested that the grant funds be used to purchase personal hygiene products to be placed in the pantries, since those types of items are more expensive and less often donated than canned goods. For example, a recent study suggests that nearly one in five American girls have either left school early or missed school entirely because they did not have access to period products.

## HOW TO GIVE TO SYNOD MINISTRIES

Gifts to the Northeastern Iowa Synod Annual Fund or Fund for Leaders support ministry together, in ways that could not be done alone.

**MAIL CHECKS** payable to the Northeastern Iowa Synod, with the memo indicating which fund you would like your gift to support, to:

Northeastern Iowa Synod, 201 20th St. SW, PO Box 804, Waverly, IA 50677-0804.

**DONATE ONLINE** at [www.neiasynod.org/ministries/generosity](http://www.neiasynod.org/ministries/generosity) or use the QR Code.



# Challenge gift provides scholarships for the Accelerated Ministry Program

O. Jay and Pat Tomson of Mason City have provided a \$200,000 challenge gift commitment to support students enrolled in the growing Accelerated Ministry Program at Wartburg College and Wartburg Theological Seminary.

The Accelerated Ministry Program (AMP), a partnership between the Lutheran-affiliated college and seminary, streamlines the preparation for pastoral ministry for first-career ministerial students. It is funded by a nearly \$500,000 grant from the Kern Family Foundation and more than \$500,000 in scholarship gifts to date, including \$375,000 from the Tomsons and more than \$125,000 from other alumni and friends who have responded to the Tomson's challenge.

Students in the AMP start with three years of undergraduate education at Wartburg College, then spend the final three years serving in a congregation while completing their master's studies through Wartburg Seminary. The program enables students to become Lutheran ministers in six years, instead of eight.

Since the program was initiated in 2018, the Tomsons have made lead challenge gifts each year. This challenge grant is available to students who plan to enroll in the Accelerated Ministry Program at Wartburg College in 2021. Students who receive this scholarship also will receive a scholarship from the Kern Foundation, along with other financial aid from the college with the goal of minimizing debt throughout the entire program.

To learn more, visit [www.wartburg.edu/ministry](http://www.wartburg.edu/ministry).

## Young adults can apply for YAGM Program

Applications for the ELCA's Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program are now open through Jan. 15, 2021. Young adults age 21 to 29 are invited to apply for this yearlong mission journey abroad.

Young adults serve alongside Lutheran companion church bodies and organizations in one of 10 country programs around the world. For the 2021-2022 service year, country programs are projected to be: Argentina and Uruguay, Australia, Central Europe, Jerusalem/West Bank, Madagascar, Mexico, Nepal, Rwanda, Senegal, and the United Kingdom. Areas of service include health and human rights, congregational ministry, education, environmental justice, and professional support and communications.

All applicants will receive a response by the middle of March 2021. Specific country assignments are made at the mandatory Discernment-Interview-Placement (DIP) event on March 18-21, 2021. Due to continued uncertainties presented by COVID-19, country programs for the 2021-2022 service year are subject to change.

To learn more, visit [www.elca.org/yagm](http://www.elca.org/yagm).

## OBITUARY

**Pastor Harriet Danielson** died Nov. 15, 2020, at the age of 93. She was ordained on Oct. 23, 1988. She served as pastor at North Beaver Creek, Ettrick, Wis.; visitation pastor at First, Decorah; interim campus pastor at Luther College, Decorah; interim pastor at Zion, Appleton; Elias, Gresham; Peace, Tilleda; and Prince of Peace, Caloma, Wisconsin; and various interims and supply in Northeastern Iowa and South-eastern Minnesota. She retired on Nov. 1, 1997.

Visitation took place Nov. 28 at the Fjelstul Funeral Home, Decorah, followed by a private family burial service at Lincoln Lutheran Cemetery, rural Ridgeway.

She is survived by three children. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Mari Anne Danielson, PO Box 4593, Rio Rico, AZ 85643. For the complete obituary, visit: [www.fjelstul.com/obituary/harriet-danielson](http://www.fjelstul.com/obituary/harriet-danielson).

## CHRISTMAS CONCERTS

This year's Christmas concerts by Luther College and Wartburg College will be available online free of charge.

**"Christmas at Luther 2020: For Everyone Born"** will premiere at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 4. Learn more and register at [www.luther.edu/headlines/?story\\_id=923759](http://www.luther.edu/headlines/?story_id=923759).

**"Christmas with Wartburg 2020 — Hope Awakens; Love's New Dawn,"** will premiere Wednesday, Dec. 23, at 7 p.m. Visit [www.wartburg.edu/christmas](http://www.wartburg.edu/christmas).



## DECEMBER EVENTS

- 3 Interim Ministry Colleague Group, Zoom Meeting, 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 3 Youth Ministry Network, Zoom Meeting, 10 a.m.
- 3-4 Candidacy Committee, Zoom Meeting
- 12 Executive Committee, Zoom Meeting, 9-11 a.m.
- 24-31 Office Closed, Christmas

## JANUARY 2021 EVENTS

- 1 Office Closed, New Year's Day
- 6 Active Rostered Ministers, Zoom Meeting, 12 noon
- 7 Interim Ministry Colleague Group, Zoom Meeting, 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 7 Youth Ministry Network, Zoom Meeting, 10 a.m.
- 9 Synodical Women's Organization Cluster, Zoom Meeting, 8 a.m.-12 noon
- 9 Congregation Treasurers, Zoom Meeting, 10 a.m.-12 noon
- 12 Church Council Presidents, Zoom Meeting, 6:30 p.m.
- 14 Congregation Administrative Assistants, Zoom Meeting, 10 a.m.
- 16 Synod Council, Zoom Meeting, 9 a.m.-12 noon
- 18 Office Closed, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

## FEBRUARY 2021 EVENTS

- 4 Interim Ministry Colleague Group, Zoom Meeting, 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 4 Youth Ministry Network, Zoom Meeting, 10 a.m.
- 23 Lutheran Day on the Hill, Virtual Event
- 26 Candidacy Committee, Shalom Spiritual Center, Dubuque, 1-4 p.m.
- 26-28 Candidacy Retreat, Shalom Spiritual Center, Dubuque

## MARCH 2021 EVENTS

- 4 Interim Ministry Colleague Group, Zoom Meeting, 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 4 Youth Ministry Network, Zoom Meeting, 10 a.m.
- 9 Executive Committee Meeting, Location TBD, 9 a.m.
- 20 Synod Council Meeting, Location TBD, 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m.

## GO PAPERLESS

To receive an electronic version of the *Star* newsletter instead of a paper version, send an email to [hahnmm@neiasynod.org](mailto:hahnmm@neiasynod.org) with the subject: Online Only.

## INSTALLING

Rev. Kristen Briner Wipperman, St. Matthew and Luther Manor, Dubuque, Nov. 15  
Rev. Katie Pals, Trinity, Belmond, April 25, 2021

## INTERVIEWING

Cresco, Immanuel, Rev. Charis Combs-Lay, contract  
Decorah, Burr Oak and Hesper  
Dubuque, St. Peter (staff)  
Elma, St. Paul (Maple Leaf)  
Independence, Immanuel (staff)  
Mitchell, Faith; Nora Springs, St. Luke; Osage, Rock Creek and St. John (Cross Roads Lutheran Parish), (staff)  
Nashua, St. John, Rev. Norman Bauer, contract interim  
Tripoli, Grace, Rev. Dennis Niezwaag, contract interim  
Tripoli, St. John (Crane Creek)

## SELF-STUDY

Calmar, Calmar and Decorah, Springfield  
Charles City, Messiah  
Chester, United  
Clear Lake, Galilean, Rev. Melinda McCluskey, interim  
Decorah, First  
Dysart, Zion  
Frederika, St. John, Rev. Megan Graves, interim  
Grundy Center, American  
Hawkeye, Trinity  
Iowa Falls, Bethany  
Jewell, Bethesda, Rev. Adam Starrett, interim  
La Porte City, Zion (Jubilee)  
Mason City, St. Paul, Rev. Matthew Muters, contract  
Ridgeway, Peace, Orleans and Madison (Ridgeway Parish), Rev. Jim Scaife, contract interim  
Ryan, Peace and Dundee, St. John (Unity of the Cross Lutheran Parish)  
Story City, St. Petri, Rev. Scot McCluskey, interim  
Sumner, St. Peter (Richfield) and Waucoma, St. John (Stapleton)  
Waterloo, Our Savior's  
Waterloo, St. Ansgar  
Waterloo, Zion  
Waverly, LSI/Beloit (chaplain)  
West Union, Zion

## ROSTER CHANGES

Rev. Dr. Lynn Banderob, on leave from call  
Rev. Anne Edison-Albright, transferred to East Central Synod of Wisconsin  
Rev. Karla Wildberger, transfer to Pacifica Synod

# PRAYER CALENDAR

## DECEMBER 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders Rev. Dennis D. Niezwaag, Charles City 1	Zion, Waterloo 2	Rev. Amy Eisenmann, Cedar Falls Rev. Cindy S. Krause, Osage Jean M. Swiggum, Cedar Falls 3	Zion St. John, Sheffield St. John, Waukon 4	Redeemer, Waverly 5
St. Paul's, Waverly 6	St. Paul, Wellsburg 7	Zion, West Union 8	Rev. Lynn J. Noel, Postville 9	Rev. Tracy K. Hinkel, Sumner 10	Rev. Paul N. Amlin, Asbury Rev. Dr. Kristin J. Wendland, Waverly 11	Rev. Gregory L. DeBoer, Independence 12
Linda S. Hamilton, Synod Staff 13	Rev. Dr. Elaine G. Siemens, Rochester 14	Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, ELCA Presiding Bishop 15	Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, ELCA Secretary 16	Middle East Peace Region 5 Bishops 17	Kathy Liddle, Synod Staff 18	Rev. Donovan L. Hommen, Oro Valley 19
Marcia Hahn, Synod Staff 20	Michelle Van Riper, Synod Bookkeeper 21	Rev. James L. Cherry, Waverly 22	Rev. Keith Sievers, Savage 23	Joan Dalen, Mason City Rev. Joan E. Haug, Dubuque 24	Rev. Paul H. Schaedig, Waverly Rev. Michael R. Stadie, Niles Rev. M. DeWayne Teig, Dubuque 25	Lori Fedyk, ELCA Treasurer 26
Bill Horne, ELCA Vice President 27	Margaret Browne, Waterloo Rev. Calvin C. Fick, Allison 28	ELCA Churchwide Staff 29	Rev. Lisa A. Dietrich, Cedar Falls Karen L. Fretheim, Decorah 30	Rev. Joshua J. Martyn, Dubuque Rev. David A. Werges, Osage 31		

## JANUARY 2021

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders St. James, Allison 1	Ewalu Camp & Retreat Center, Strawberry Point 2
Immanuel (Crane Creek), Lawler 3	Rev. Kathleen J. Graves, Mason City Rev. Robert C. Gremmels, Waverly Linda Groe, Waukon 4	Ingham/Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camp, Milford 5	Rev. Michael L. Sherer, Waverly 6	Carol A. Koeneman, Tucson, Ariz. Rev. Ruth Ann Shriver, Cedar Falls 7	Rev. Gary C. Heidt-Johnson, Waterloo 8	Bishop Andrea F. DeGroot-Nesdahl, Waverly 9
Rev. Eugene Ketterling, Waverly 10	Zion, Alta Vista 11	Lutheran Lakeside Camp Assoc., Spirit Lake 12	St. John, Arlington 13	Riverside Bible Camp, Story City 14	Rev. Dr. Arthur C. Bergren, Waverly 15	Lord of Life, Asbury 16
Middle East Peace Camp Shalom, Davenport 17	Rev. Adam T. Starrett, West Union 18	Rev. Kurt A. Hansen, Dubuque 19	St. Olaf, Belmond 20	Rev. Luther H. Thoresen, Grundy Center 21	Rev. Lois D. Knutson, Little Canada, Minn. 22	Jane Chilson, Rochester, Minn. 23
ISU Lutheran Campus Ministry, Ames 24	Rev. Nancy J. Larson, Waverly 25	Trinity, Belmond 26	U of I Lutheran Campus Ministry, Iowa City 27	Calmar, Calmar 28	UNI Lutheran Campus Ministry, Cedar Falls 29	Springfield, Decorah 30
Christian Crusaders, Cedar Falls 31						





WOMEN OF THE ELCA GATHERING  
AUGUST 5-8, 2021 | PHOENIX  
WELCATG.ORG

# Good News

December 2020  
Volume 33  
Number 12

*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**

What are the Blessings/Gifts in your life? I count the Women of the ELCA as a huge blessing. I can't imagine my life without it. If you are reading this, then you at least realize there is something more than what happens at your church. There are groupings of churches (clusters) that join together to get our LWR items to the warehouse. There is a gathering of women in our synod that meets annually (SWO Gathering) to elect a board to organize and support women's ministries in the synod. There is a gathering every three years to elect a national board that organizes the ministries of the Women of the ELCA (Triennial Convention). These are all volunteers, just like you. There is a small group of women, employed by the Women of the ELCA that work at the Lutheran Center in Chicago who create resources for us to use in our ministries.

The Women of the ELCA website has resources for you to use. There are two Advent resources: A Different Kind of Journey and Advent: A Season for all Generations. There is also The Colors of Christmas which focus' on preparing for Christmas.

I recently read this blog: <https://www.womenoftheelca.org/blog/post/how-can-we-keep-women-of-the-elca-from-becoming-a-parking-lot>. Not only was I intrigued with the blog, but there was a response from someone who had made changes at her local congregation that had a huge impact on how that group is doing.

Go here to see how the pandemic is affecting Women of the ELCA.

<https://www.womenoftheelca.org/blog/news/what-does-the-pandemic-mean-for-women-of-the-elca>

Looking to the future and what that means for us? I don't know what the future looks like, but I know it is up to us to ensure the important things continue. I made my contribution by joining the Faithful Friends of the Women of the ELCA and every month I am reminded of what is important to me about this organization.

<https://www.womenoftheelca.org/faithfulfriends>

Blessings  
Anna Jetson, NE IA SWO President

## **Stewardship Committee**

Women of the ELCA encourages and equips women to consider their responsibility and capacity for stewardship. We create educational resources about giving and managing money, including a monthly stewardship devotion, Bible studies and program materials for individuals and small groups.

One of the many ways to give is Thankofferings. Thankofferings are a long-standing tradition among Lutheran women. They are a monetary symbol of the many blessings we receive each and every day. Thankofferings were established by our founders in 1988. They are used to support the ongoing ministries of the churchwide organization. Our founders would be amazed to see how these ministries have grown! We have an interactive website, online and printed materials, justice and advocacy work, training and development of women leaders, and grants and scholarships, to name a few. After collecting our individual gifts, we can bring them together as a circle or a congregation through a Thankoffering service and then pass these special gifts on to our churchwide organization. And the best part is, you can give any time of the year, not just Thanksgiving!

Go online at <https://community.elca.org/welca> to give by credit card or mail your checks to:

Women of the ELCA  
ELCA Gift Processing Center  
PO Box 1809  
Merrifield, VA. 22116-8009

*Submitted by Lea Norlinger*

## **\*\*\*\*\*Just a friendly reminder\*\*\*\*\***

We appreciate your support and prayers to help your Synodical Women's Organization meet our commitments to LWR, Wartburg Seminary Theological Students, LSI, Riverside and EWALU Bible Camps. Thank you to all who have sent in your regular offering. If you have not sent them in, please send checks, payable to WELCA, to SWO Treasurer, Bev Sheridan. We also want to thank the units that have sent in convention offerings!

*NE IA SWO Executive Committee*

## **Justice Committee**

Have you ever tried something new? Maybe you invited someone new to join your "group"? Sometimes, it's smooth sailing, other times adding someone new to the group puts the dynamics off kilter a bit, then the group gets into a new groove. Sometimes, it just doesn't seem to find that sweet spot, until the group changes again.

Have you ever had your feelings hurt, so bad, that you question everything you do? I like to learn and understand. I have experienced worship with different denominations, and cultures. But I know myself to be Lutheran, ELCA Lutheran to be exact. I may not agree with everyone who is Lutheran. Faith is not something to be used as a weapon to hurt or injure another. God calls me to be kind and love my neighbor. God calls me to care for those who cannot care for themselves. It doesn't matter if we look the same, think the same or even live the same.

Now, I don't always follow the rules. But I try very hard not to be intentionally hurtful to others. Sometimes, I think I am doing the right thing, and I am shocked by the outcome. I try to learn from my mistakes.. How do I go forward? How do I protect the ones I love? And still ripple the complacency to realize, even though, on the surface, we might look similar, our world is not the same. We cannot continue to cluster ourselves based on our heritage. We must be willing to welcome the stranger, even if they are vastly different and in desperate need of belonging. We can't be so rigid in our beliefs that someone else's opinion or viewpoint must be invalidated. Remember we are all created in God's image, Genesis 1:27. Jesus was born Jewish and was raised by a carpenter. God has chosen to love us all, sinners and saints. We need to choose to love one another, lift up those we can, and learn from all our experiences.

*, Submitted by Anna Jetson.*

## **Discipleship Committee**

In Micah 6:8 the question is asked: "And what does the LORD require of you?" We find these words of Jesus in Mark 9:41 "I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward." How can we be disciples during this time of distancing and for some, isolation? Some of the words of a song that we have sung during Advent may have an answer for us.

### **"Christ, Be Our Light"**

Longing for peace, our world is troubled  
Longing for hope, many despair.  
Your word alone has power to save us.  
Make us your living voice.

Ref: Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for food, many are hungry.  
Longing for water, many still thirst.  
Make us your bread, broken for others,  
Shared until all are fed. *(Refrain)*

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.  
Longing for warmth, many are cold.  
Make us your building, sheltering others,  
Walls made of living stone. *(Refrain)*

Many the gifts, many the people,  
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.  
Let us be servants one to another,  
Signs of your kingdom com. *(Refrain)*

Think about all our women's groups do: items sent to LWR and local agencies, mask making, food drives, and many others. By sharing these gifts, we become Jesus' disciples in this world.

*Submitted by Alice Greimann*

## **CALENDAR**

Jan 9 SWO Board Meeting, 9-3, Zoom  
Mar 13 SWO Board Meeting, 9-12, Zoom  
May 1 SWO Board Meeting, 9-12, Wartburg Coll.  
Jun 18 SWO Board Meeting, 7-9, Wartburg Coll.  
Jun 19 SWO Gathering @ Wartburg College  
Aug 2-5 Triennial Convention, Phoenix  
Aug 5-8 Triennial Gathering, Phoenix

## **NE IA Women of the ELCA Executive Board**

### **Anna Jetson, President**

952-240-9569 [amjetson@yahoo.com](mailto:amjetson@yahoo.com)

### **Alice Greimann, Vice President**

641-456-2973, [algreimann@wbfreq.com](mailto:algreimann@wbfreq.com)

### **JoAnn Brunsvold, Secretary**

641-512-4236 [jobvold76@yahoo.com](mailto:jobvold76@yahoo.com) or [sjbruns@wctatel.net](mailto:sjbruns@wctatel.net)

### **Beverly Sheridan, Treasurer**

563-382-9025 [sherida701@gmail.com](mailto:sherida701@gmail.com)

701 Serenity Drive, Decorah, IA 52101

*Checks payable to Women of the ELCA*

### **Good News**, Editor Diane Wills

641-425-8628 [wills.dianes@gmail.com](mailto:wills.dianes@gmail.com)

1399 Beeds Lake Drive, Hampton IA 50441

*Articles are due the 1st of the month for the next month's newsletter (e.g. April 1 for May issue)*

### **Contact Women of the ELCA:**

<http://www.womenoftheelca.org/>

773.380.2730 or 800.638.3522, ext. 2730

### **Contact NEIA Women of the ELCA:**

[neiasynod.org/women-of-the-ELCA](http://neiasynod.org/women-of-the-ELCA)

# Living Faith @

Dear Faith-Shapers,

We find ourselves in the midst of Advent. As Deacon Lisa wrote about last month, we are waiting ... waiting for Christmas plans to be decided, waiting for a vaccine, waiting for the number of infected people to go down, waiting for more people to wear a mask to help lower the spread of the disease. There are many factors to take into consideration when planning for Christmas services - the number of people who can attend and are in-person services possible with reservations and distancing, what does a virtual Christmas program look like and how can it be done ... so many questions and variables. But no matter what gets decided, we need to remember that God is always present. Jesus birth is able to be celebrated — Christmas will happen even if we don't worship inside the church building.

\*\*\*\*\*

This is a picture of a pin that I wear during Advent and Christmas. My mom gave it to me many years ago while I was in college. It is a great reminder of why we celebrate Christmas.

~ Sue Cira, Student Pastor, TEEM



## The Twelve Days of Christmas

The actual twelve days of Christmas are the ones following Christmas — Christmas day through the eve of Epiphany on January 5th. Epiphany is celebrated on January 6th. In the calendar of the church year, the 12 days of Christmas are the season of Christmas.

Here are some ways to celebrate the Christmas season:

- \*Use placemats for drawing paper — let the kids decorate them with Christmas pictures.
- \*Continue to light your advent wreath. Light all four candles and the white Christ candle in the center. This is especially meaningful during devotion time.
- \*Write the names of Jesus on ornaments. Here are just a few from Scripture:  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Immanuel, Holy One of God, Christ the Lord, Lamb of God, Messiah, King of Israel, Bread of Life, Good Shepherd, The Way the Truth and the Life, Rod of Jesse, Lord of Lord, King of Kings, and Morning Star

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 [Northeastern Iowa Synod Home Life Network ELCA](#)





## Random Acts of Kindness Ideas

Take time as a family to set up 12 Random Acts of Kindness during the Christmas season — Do an activity each day that is kind for someone else.

Here are some examples:

- \*Make a card for someone in your neighborhood and deliver it
- \*Do a chore without being asked or one that is not your normal chore
  - \*Share something with a friend
- \*Give compliments to every member of your family
  - \*Tell or read a story to someone
  - \*Hold the door for someone
- \*Fill a bag full of clothes to donate
- \*Fill a bag full of books to donate to a library
  - \*Help make dinner
- \*Tell your parents (or children) about a happy memory you have with them



\*\*\*\*\*

**The Advent Wreath** is the widely recognized symbol of Advent. The wreath is made of a circle of evergreen branches laid flat to symbolize eternal life. Four candles stand in the circle and each one represents one of the four Sundays of Advent. In the center of the circle is a fifth candle (traditionally white), the Christ Candle, which is lit on Christmas Day. The circle of the wreath reminds Christians of God & God's eternity and endless mercy, which has no beginning or end. Advent worship is a journey of waiting, anticipation, and preparation.

The four traditional advent themes, takes place as Lighting the Advent Wreath -

God's people - **Hope**

Old Testament Prophets - **Love**

John the Baptist - **Joy**

Mary the mother of Jesus - **Peace**

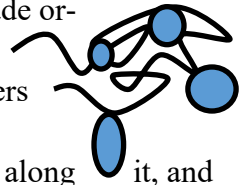
These candles symbolize the light of God coming into the world through the birth of Jesus, God's Son, Our Lord & Savior.



**Christmas time crafts** with the children or grandchildren can be great fun. Each child can use their skills according to their age or help some that are younger. Even adults but have found that coloring is quite relaxing during this pandemic -



which means a there's a whole bunch of coloring going on!! Homemade ornaments or decorations that can be used at home or given to others are a fun craft to make.



Draw a squiggly line with ovals along it, and color them in with multi-colors. (similar to a string of lights)

Put a series of circles in order to make a shape like a cane - color in the circles with alternating red & white - trim around it and hang it up.



This can be used on a tree or in a window.

One other fun project we've done recently with our grands ... and this grandma doesn't do paint. I traced around their foot and drew a hat on top and stick arms. The toes are the base of the snowman and the heel is the head. They colored the hat and used color crayons to make a scarf around neck (arch area). Dark color dots for eyes and mouth with orange triangle for the nose. CUTE!!