



Opportunities to Serve Beyond the Synod

by Marcia Hahn

From mission work to accompaniment and advocacy, the ELCA and its partner ministries offer numerous opportunities for people to share their time and skills doing God's work beyond the synod. In addition, rostered ministers and lay members – including some from the Northeastern Iowa Synod – serve on committees, task forces, and the ELCA church council to help turn policies into action.

REPUDIATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY TASK FORCE

One of the highlights of the 2022 Churchwide Assembly in August was how the assembly honored and celebrated Indigenous people through presentations, education and worship. These public recognitions were part of a promise made in 2016 when the Churchwide Assembly adopted the "Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery," a 15th century document that justified racism, colonialism and enslavement of Indigenous peoples.

Pastor Mike Wilker of First Lutheran, Decorah, serves on the ELCA task force commissioned by Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton to

determine what steps the ELCA can take to further its repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery. Wilker joined the task force in 2020 when he was pastor for the Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Washington, D.C. The congregation had done some work with Native Americans in the congregation and community, and had hosted presentations by leaders of the ELCA American Indian and Alaskan Native Ministry. Wilker was invited to join the task force through a friend whose mother served on the task force, which is made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders from across the church.

"The goal of the task force is to implement the Churchwide Assembly resolution," Wilker says. "We're trying to help white people and

others recognize how the Lutheran church perpetuated and benefitted from settler colonialism and how Native Lutherans responded and resisted."

Teams within the task force are working on various aspects, such as Luther's Small Catechism and Indigenous theology, land acknowledgements, and relationships between congregations and Native American communities around them. Wilker and Deacon Colleen Bernu, a member of the Fond Du Lac Band of Lake Superior



Mike Wilker

>> Continued on page 2



Children with their lunch pails at the Bethany Indian Mission, Wittenberg, Wis., circa 1953. (ELCA Archives image)

IN THIS ISSUE

- 1 Opportunities to Serve Beyond the Synod
- 3 Ministry on Behalf of the Synod
- 5 Substance Abuse Network
- 6 Generosity
- 7 Ministry Trip to Ukraine
- 11 Congregations
- 12 Prayer Calendar

Chippewa community, cochair a team that is collecting the history and stories of Native American and Alaskan ministries and their contact with the Lutheran church.

Since coming to Decorah a year ago, Wilker has learned that Luther College and First Lutheran were instrumental in setting up and supporting a Lutheran boarding school in Wittenberg, Wis. According to the U.S. Department of Interior, from 1819 through the 1970s, the United States implemented policies establishing and supporting boarding schools across the nation to remove Native American, Alaskan and Hawaiian children from their families, communities, languages, religions and cultural beliefs so they could learn to be Americans. The U.S. government, at times, contracted with religious institutions and organizations to operate some of the boarding schools.

“One of the most prominent Lutheran boarding schools was Bethany Indian Mission in Wittenberg, Wis., which was founded by alumni of Luther College and pastors of First Lutheran, Decorah,” Wilker says.

First Lutheran recently hosted a presentation by Dr. Anna Peterson, professor of Norwegian history at Luther College, about the Bethany Indian Mission and her research regarding the connections between Lutheran Norwegians, Luther College and the Wisconsin tribal nations. One reason the Norwegian Lutheran Church, an ELCA predecessor, started the Bethany Mission was to pay back some of the harm that had been done by taking Native American land.



Children going to chapel at the Bethany Indian Mission, Wittenberg, Wis., circa 1953. (ELCA Archives image)

“We’re trying to help local congregations know these stories and be guided by sharing the truth and seeking healing,” Wilker says. “At some point there may be ways we can repair any of the harm we’ve done.”

The task force started to share some of these stories at the Churchwide Assembly. A room designated for Indigenous ministries gave people an opportunity to view displays and hear individuals telling their stories. Wilker says future plans may include a publication and a web-based place to share stories. Some synods have already begun their own initiatives to learn about Native American ministries today and in the past.

Wilker, who grew up in Owatonna, Minn., has been involved in multi-cultural ministry for years. He has served in Spanish and Latino ministries in New York and California and currently serves on this synod’s Racial Justice Network. He says that being involved in multi-cultural ministry has helped him in every

one of his congregational ministries.

“I learned how to communicate the gospel in different ways and how to accompany everyone in the congregation, no matter what culture or family background they have,” Wilker says. “Doing this kind of work helps me be a better pastor, a better leader of Bible studies and a better giver of pastoral ministry.”

Wilker meets with the task force every three months through Zoom and he expects that to continue for some time. For anyone interested in getting involved in a churchwide task force or new initiative, Wilker suggests they let Bishop Kevin Jones know, since the ELCA often asks synod bishops for recommendations.

“It’s really important to be rooted in the local place where we are called to ministry, build relationships in the congregation and community, and build out from there to realize

>> Continued on page 8

Ministry on Behalf of the Synod

When we think about ordained ministry, many people think about the ministry done within the congregation. Worship, preaching, confirmation, council meetings, funerals and weddings are just some of the activities that pastors and deacons are busy with in the congregation. Conference and ministerial gatherings, community service Boards, and prayers at civic events frequently require that we are engaged in ministry on behalf of the congregation.

I have found the same to be true for ministry at the synod office. As the Bishop, I find myself doing a lot of ministry on behalf of the synod in addition to that which I do in the synod. Here's a bit of what I find myself engaged in outside of the Northeastern Iowa Synod:

I meet regularly with the two other ELCA Bishops in Iowa, online and in person. That expands to the ELCA Region 5 (Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin and Upper Michigan) Bishops (bi-weekly zoom meetings) and to the whole Conference of Bishops (semi-annual meetings and bi-monthly Zooms). In these gatherings we support one another and talk about ways to do ministry better together.

Representing the synod ecumenically, I participate in quarterly zoom meetings and an annual retreat with other denominational leaders in Iowa. Last year I was privileged to participate in Episcopal Bishop Monnet's consecration.

I also work on behalf of the synod as a board member for Lutheran Services in Iowa (LSI) advocating for mental health and family wellness programs with elected state law makers. I also sit on the Board of Regents for Wartburg College and represented

the synod in the inauguration of President Neiduski. (Bishop Malpica of the LaCrosse Area Synod sits on the Luther College Board.)

Strengthening relationships with ELCA seminaries is vital as we work together to raise ordained leaders. In addition to working with Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque in a variety of ways, I will be traveling to Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in February to meet with students and faculty.

This representation of our synod even reaches internationally. In early 2023 I will be traveling with several other ELCA bishops to the Holy Land. While there we will participate in an ordination for the first female pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land. I also join several others in northeastern Iowa tending our relationships with our

companion synods in Namibia and Hungary. The Namibia Companion Synod Network meets quarterly by Zoom

because travel there is not advised. A group from Wartburg Seminary will be travelling to Hungary in May 2023, with a possible synod trip in 2024.

To be honest, it's a lot more travel and participation in events and meetings than I ever dreamed I would be involved in, but I am honored to do it on behalf of the people of Northeastern Iowa.

—Bishop Kevin Jones



Join 'Team ELCA Bishops' on RAGBRAI

The three Iowa ELCA Bishops plan to ride 50-plus miles a day in the 50th RAGBRAI (Register's Annual Great Bike Ride Across Iowa), and ELCA cycling enthusiasts are invited to join them.

Bishop Kevin Jones of the Northeastern Iowa Synod, Bishop Amy Current of the Southeastern Iowa Synod, and Bishop Lorna Halaas of the Western Iowa Synod will ride across Iowa to lift up 50-plus ways that Lutherans in Iowa fight against hunger, with a goal to raise \$50,000 for ELCA World Hunger.

RAGBRAI is set for July 22-29, 2023. People wanting to join the bishops for a day or for the entire week should register for RAGBRAI with "Team ELCA Bishops." To join the team, learn more about how to support the bishops' ride, or to receive more information, fill out the interest form at <https://bit.ly/bishopRAGBRAI>.



Virtual Treasurers Meeting

Jan. 14, 2023

Congregational treasurers, pastors, financial committee members, and others are invited to attend the Congregation Treasurers Meeting set for Saturday, Jan. 14, 9 to 11:30 a.m., via Zoom.

Presenters will be:

- **Keith D. Oltrogge**, CPA, Denver, on W-2s, church payrolls and contributions.
- **The Rev. Steve Brackett**, assistant to the Bishop, with information about the Northeastern Iowa Synod's 2023 Minimum Compensation Guidelines.
- **Jennifer Prinz**, regional representative with Portico Benefit Services, with information about resources to sponsor and understand benefits and retirement through Portico Benefit Services.
- **The Rev. Richard Wehrs**, regional manager with the ELCA Mission Investment Fund, with an overview of resources to help further a congregation's mission and ministry.

There is no charge to attend. Information about how to join the meeting through Zoom or by telephone will be emailed to treasurers in December. Others interested in attending may call the synod office at 319-352-1414 or email Jan Glaspie at glaspiej@neiasynod.org.

Video sermons available for Christmas and New Year's

The synod will offer two video sermons over the holidays for congregations to use as they wish. Pastor Kristen Corr Rod, director for Evangelical Mission, will preach in a video for use on Christmas Eve or Christmas. Bishop Kevin Jones will preach on a video that will be available to use for New Year's Day worship services.

The videos will be posted at <https://neiasynod.org/download-category/worship-resources> in the Sermon Video Library and on the synod's YouTube channel. For more information, contact Pastor Rod at rod@neiasynod.org.

New ELCA Branding

The ELCA has refreshed its logo and branding with updated colors, fonts and layout intended to offer more flexibility for digital and print communications. Congregations and other ministries that use the ELCA logo on their website or documents can begin using the new logo as their time allows.



The logo and branding marks can be found at www.elca.org/resources/elca-branding. Questions or requests regarding ELCA brand mark usage can be directed to communications@elca.org.

Rostered Ministers Gathering

Early registration for the Rostered Ministers Gathering is now open through March 31. The Gathering is set for July 17-20 in Phoenix with 90 workshops, guest speakers, exhibits, and a banquet.

The early registration rate for the Gathering is \$245. After March 31, the rate will be \$295. A limited number of scholarships are available to help cover the registration fee. To learn more and to register, visit www.elca.org/rmg.

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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

Join the synod's new Substance Abuse Network

by Pastor Tom Martin, Substance Abuse Network Facilitator

At our Synod Assembly in June, only four resolutions were presented and approved. I felt honored to be the one bringing to the floor of the assembly resolution number four. At the microphone, I started by sharing that 45 years ago I began my recovery from addiction to alcohol. It had been a struggle like no other in my 25 years of living. I was fortunate to have resources and compassionate people along the way who could lead me from darkness to the light of recovery. Some would say I was blessed by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Others thought it foolish to put any faith in me, given my past. And yet, my church, my pastor, my family, my new friends in recovery stood by me.

It is with that sense of gratitude that I would want the very same grace and mercy for the churches of the Northeastern Iowa Synod and for its shepherds and their flocks. So I am humbled that our synod approved the establishment of a network dedicated to those caught up in the grasp of addiction, to those family members often caught in the cross-fire, and to congregations who feel helpless but are not hopeless.

The Substance Abuse Network will encourage and promote ways that synod staff, rostered ministers and congregations can bring hope and healing to those affected by substance abuse. It will advise how our leaders and congregations can collaborate and form effective partnerships with organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Al-Anon, the Center of Addiction and Faith, and Fellowship of Recovering Lutheran Clergy, as well as state and local authorities. The purpose is not to condemn but to promote health,

healing and hope. In this way it can be a resource and a blessing for the entire synod.

This new network can provide education for both lay people and clergy alike. Drug addiction, alcoholism, codependency, and behavioral addictions are among the most prevalent, complex, and destructive illnesses in human society. They are found in every segment of society, regardless of race, religion, or economic class. It has long been recognized that addiction contains a spiritual dimension that must be integrated into treatment more than oth-



Tom Martin

er disorders. Alcoholics Anonymous calls this faith connection a power greater than ourselves. We cannot do recovery on our own understanding or strength. Here is where the community of faith has a marvelous role to play, given the stigma, denial, and secrecy that comes with addiction. Thanks be to God that this illness is a treatable medical condition and spirituality makes a difference!

We are looking for lay and clergy members to make up our newest network, perhaps six to eight people. In January we will be scheduling a network kick off meeting. If you are interested in being a part of this adventure, I would love to hear from you: please contact Pastor Tom Martin, cell phone 563-419-3173, email tommartin@comm1net.net.

Candidates for Ministry —

Where are they now?

Menzi Nkambule entered the Northeastern Iowa Synod Candidacy process in August 2018. Nkambule grew up in Eswatini and came to the United States in 2014 to attend Luther College, Decorah, where he majored in business administration. While at Luther, Nkambule attended Good Shepherd Lutheran, Decorah, where he was baptized into the Lutheran faith.



Menzi Nkambule

Following graduation in 2018, Nkambule enrolled in Luther Seminary at St. Paul, Minn. He completed his internship at Salem Evangelical Lutheran, St. Paul, and graduated from seminary in May 2022 with his Master of Divinity degree.

Nkambule accepted a call to St. Matthew's Lutheran, Jersey City, N.J., and was ordained and installed at St. Matthew's on Sept. 18. He lives in Jersey City and is engaged to be married in 2023.

Matching Actions with Words

Which telling of Christmas do you like best? There is more than one way to weave together the story of Jesus' birth. Each of the four gospels go about it in a very different way. Mark skips it, Matthew brings in the ancestors and emphasizes the fulfillment of the scriptures, Luke begins with songs declaring how the whole world is about to change, and John goes all the way back to the beginning of creation and the cosmic impact of Jesus' birth.

This year, are you longing for the deep re-formation of how we act as people in our culture, society, and world found in Luke? Maybe you are seeking the deep roots of belonging to a larger story and family found in Matthew? Perhaps, this year, you are eager to get to the action and skip the pondering anew like Mark? Or, like me, do you find yourself being invited to pause and consider the cosmos, to let some of the fullness of mystery wash over you as you consider God's Word made into Flesh?

One way to think about the Word of God is to define Word as "core values." What matters most to God, what best defines who God is at the center of God's being, and what guides the way God imagines, processes information, decides and acts — these are what makes up God's core values, God's Word.

Jesus is God's Word, God's core values, made into tangible, living and breathing, flesh. That's why in the Gospel of John especially we hear Jesus say that if you know Jesus, you know God; if you see Jesus, you have seen God. Jesus is the perfect reflection of who and how God is at the very depth of God's being. Jesus demonstrates God's core values in all Jesus is and does and says.

As we consider God's Word made flesh, I invite you to pause to wonder about your core values as a people, a congregation, as individuals or communities. What are the principles and values that most closely describe who and how you are at the center of your being? What are the Words or phrases that come to mind? If your congregation has a mission statement, that's a good place to find some of those value words.

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us." — John 1:14a



Liz (Albertson) Bell

Now, take time to ask yourself how your recent decisions, your signature ministry projects or programs and your worship life demonstrate those core values? We all have core values — so how are we living them? We are most alive and healthy when our actions, decisions, time spent, and energy are lined up with our core values. It is often in those times when we spend ourselves and resources on things that do not line up that we are drained, frustrated, and divided.

Stewardship, especially of a congregation or organization, means taking the time to examine how we "spend" our energy, creativity, money, people, and focus. Good stewardship means doing the work of lining up our actions with our values. It is how we act and make decisions, as well as what we end up doing (or not doing).

Good stewardship of our individual lives and households is not that different. It means taking the time to notice where our energy and resources are used and doing what it takes to make sure that they are tied to our values. That our actions match our words.

During the months of December and January we go from Advent (preparing for Jesus) to Christmas (celebrating Jesus' birth) to Epiphany (reflecting God's love into the world). As you and I join thousands in this ancient pattern and journey, may you be blessed as you take the time to align your actions with your values, and may you rest in the Good News that Jesus is where God's values and action meet. And in Jesus we see that where God's values and action meet there is love: loud, resounding, resilient and relentless love for you, for me and for this whole wild world.

— Pastor Liz

Roland pastor joins ministry trip to Ukraine

by Marcia Hahn

Pastor John Sheahan says he has felt a tug from God twice in his life — when he felt the call to ministry and when he felt the need to help Ukrainians under attack from Russia.

“As that week in February went on when Ukraine was attacked, my wife and I said we have got to do something,” says Sheahan, who serves Bergen Lutheran, Roland.

Sheahan originally thought about sponsoring a family, but an encounter with retired sheriff’s deputy Tim Felton of Decorah at a DARE training session set things in motion for Sheahan to travel to Ukraine as part of a chaplain training team.

“I truly think it was a God thing that this trip happened,” Sheahan says.

Sheahan joined Felton, Chaplain Greg Young, and Ukrainian translator Alex Gerasimov from Atlanta, Ga., in August to travel to Ukraine for nine days to train government officials, war crime investigators, military police, psychologists, chaplains and others about how to deal with moral trauma and soul wounding. Sheahan explains that people may feel guilty because they had to kill someone or they witnessed someone get killed, or they may feel shameful because of something done to them at gunpoint.

“The best thing to do is to talk about it,” says Sheahan, who received moral trauma training prior to the trip. “Get the story out so it goes to the side of the brain that can handle it, so you don’t get post-traumatic stress disorder.”

One training session was for 200 cadets at Dnipro University; another was to a group of police officers, fire

fighters and chaplains for a retreat. Sheahan shared about kintsugi, the Japanese art of putting broken pottery pieces back together with gold and lacquer. The pottery is more valuable after it’s repaired than it was before.

“We encouraged people to stay in the moment and go from right now forward. Try not to dwell on the past, but look at things they can move forward in, such as going for a walk and doing things in nature that give you joy.”

Sheahan and his companions brought along supplies and gifts, including ballistic vests, helmets, digital Bibles, first aid items, toys and teddy bears for a refugee center. Decorah Lutheran Church collected donated items and cash donations to support the trip. Sheahan also brought small wooden crosses to encourage refugees to keep their faith.

Danger was never far away during Sheahan’s time in Ukraine with random missile strikes happening. The group travelled a lot at night through numerous military checkpoints in a van marked “patrol chaplain.” Sheahan says they learned later that Russians have a \$400 bounty on chaplains. “They don’t want people to have hope. We went through a lot of the country with a bull’s-eye on us.”

Sheahan says that everywhere he went, he saw resilient, proud people who are inspired by God to defend their country.

“Their faith was so incredible. They believe God is protecting them and is with them no matter what happens.



John Sheahan and Ukrainian guide Eugene Poliashenko

If anyone had a reason to abandon their faith, it would be them. Instead, their faith was even stronger. Our guide, Eugene, was even singing hymns as he was driving us.”

When he boarded the plane in Warsaw to return home, Sheahan says he felt a tinge of guilt leaving new friends and acquaintances behind. He has stayed in touch with his travel companions and recently travelled to Atlanta to visit Alex and Eugene, who made the decision to move with his family to the United States. They are currently staying with Alex, who was already making plans to return to Ukraine with a doctor along.

Sheahan says this trip has given him a greater appreciation for his life in Iowa and the work of God that is going on everywhere.

“You hope you can go there to inspire, but I came away inspired,” he said. “The Ukrainians are tenacious, God-fearing people, and their religion was huge.”

Sheahan is available to speak to congregations and groups about his trip to Ukraine and ways people can donate to support Ukrainian citizens.

we are part of a beautiful network,” Wilker says. “I’m really glad to be part of this synod and the people caring for their ministry.”

Wilker is available to speak to congregations and conferences about the work of the task force and the Racial Justice Network.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND CHURCH COUNCIL

Over the past seven years, Pastor Dan Gerrietts of Trinity Lutheran, Mason City, has had a hand in helping the ELCA



Dan Gerrietts

set goals for its future and decide how to implement them. Gerrietts’ involvement began in 2015 when Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton invited him to serve on the ELCA Future Directions Table to engage the ELCA in conversation to develop goals and priority areas for the whole church.

The Future Directions team of 15 members from across the ELCA initiated listening sessions with facilitators at synod assemblies and congregations to gather information about where God might be calling the ELCA to use its gifts. Gerrietts helped lead a discussion session at the 2016 Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly to give people an opportunity to express their hopes and aspirations for the church and the challenges facing this church and the communities it serves.

“We were getting literally thousands

of folks to be part of these conversations about where we were headed as a church,” Gerrietts says. “We sought out young and diverse people and pulled all that feedback together to create a strategic direction for the ELCA Church Council.”

That yearlong process of conversation, listening and prayerful discernment resulted in the development of *ELCA Future Directions 2025*, which identifies five goals and priorities for the whole church approved by the ELCA Church Council.

Gerrietts’ service with the Future Directions Table ended in 2018, but in 2020 Bishop Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl asked if he would complete the ELCA Church Council term that opened when Pastor Chad Huebner of First Lutheran, Decorah, left the synod.

“One of the reasons I said yes to serving on the council is that I got to see how the staff and council would work on the Future Directions goals,” Gerrietts says. “Some of the things happening in the church right now are enacting some of those goals, such as the call to reconstitute the structure of the church and the initiative to engage a million new young diverse people in the next 10 years.”

The Church Council is the ELCA’s board of directors and serves as the legislative authority of the church



Dan Gerrietts shares his vantage point at an ELCA Church Council meeting.

between churchwide assemblies. The voting members of the Church Council are the four officers, the chair of the Conference of Bishops, and 32 to 45 individuals elected by the Churchwide Assembly.

“They do governance work, act on resolutions and work with the churchwide staff to carry out those resolutions,” Gerrietts says. “They function like a congregational council but at the churchwide level.”

Gerrietts’ term on the council ended in August when new members were elected at the Churchwide Assembly. He says that working with people from around the country reminded him that the church is diverse and unique in all of its places.

“It is a privilege to be part of a denomination that works this way,” Gerrietts says. “Both of my experiences being part of a churchwide group remind me how gifted our church is both in our staff and in our leadership across the country. You get to meet some of the most remarkable people from all over.”

Consider becoming a 'Certified Cool Congregation'

by Donna Rasmussen, Member of the Care for Creation Network

Cool Congregations was developed at Iowa Interfaith Power and Light (IPL) and is now at a national level. This program works with faith communities to reduce carbon emissions from their facilities and engages their members in reducing their carbon footprint at home.

Becoming a Certified Cool Congregation is a wonderful way for faith communities to save money on energy bills, respond to climate change, and have more money to spend on their missions. A Certified Cool Congregation is a congregation or place of worship of any faith that cuts its carbon footprint by at least 10%. Four levels of recognition are available for 10%, 20%, 30%, and 40% carbon footprint reduction. Congregations can achieve higher and higher levels of certification with each passing year. Data are gathered to find the carbon base line, then that can be compared to future situations. There is a no fee to apply for certification.

St. John Lutheran, Cedar Falls, was recognized for their work engaging congregants and communities in 2012. Following is their description of the activities they implemented (reprinted from the IIPPL website). For more information about their efforts at St. John, contact Linda Holm at lbholm@cfu.net.

Our Cool Congregations Green Team at St. John Lutheran has had several opportunities to inform our congregation members of ways to "go green." We have put informational displays in our church atrium this past year based on a seasonal calendar. In October, we had a Halloween-themed display about be-



coming a "vampire slayer" by eliminating Vampire Power.

In January we celebrated our second year of certification by GCVI (Green Cedar Valley Initiative) for being proactive about our church building's care for creation. We installed foam gaskets behind all switch plates and outlet covers in the building. We also implemented a computer-controlled zonal space conditioning system, which allows us to heat/cool various parts of the building based on their occupancy during various times of the day/week.

In March we set up a St. Patty's Day themed display about conserving water (one of the main components of green beer!!) and in May we had an Earth Day / Green Spring Cleaning display. Our entry for the IPL Contest is about our efforts to encourage Green Spring Cleaning. We dressed up a mannequin in a sweatshirt, jeans and apron to simulate cleaning clothes, and placed the "Headless House

Cleaner" in a prominent place in the church atrium. We arranged cleaning items such as rubber gloves, sponge, mop & bucket, refillable spray bottle and reusable cleaning cloths on or near the mannequin. There were "recipes" for common household cleaners such as window cleaner, oven cleaner, and furniture polish on a poster.

Safe, eco-friendly and inexpensive cleaning ingredients such as lemon juice, baking soda, vinegar, dish soap and newspapers were displayed along with these recipes. And knowing that part of Green Cleaning is to reduce, reuse and recycle, we also provided a list of local organizations that would take items that otherwise would be headed for the landfill (for example, items such as used towels are desired by the Humane Society, children's art programs can use magazines, pie pans and yogurt cups – even freezer-burned meat has a use when donated to our local wildlife rehabilitation agency).

We try to encourage our congregation to make choices that Care for God's Creation, but we also emphasize the economics of living a green lifestyle. For congregation members that are unemployed or on fixed incomes, it's good to know that "going green" can mean not only sound environmental choices, but these choices can also keep some "green" in their pockets, too.

To learn more, visit <https://iowaip.org/resources/#cool>.

Time to Start Thinking about Vacation Bible School

by Pastor Kristen Corr Rod, Director for Evangelical Mission

The temperatures outside are getting colder, and you know what that means — it's time to start daydreaming about summer and planning for Vacation Bible School! Maybe that's not what you thought I was going to say, but winter is a good time to start looking over VBS curriculums and thinking about what you might want your VBS to look like.

AUGSBURG FORTRESS/SPARKHOUSE

A wide variety of VBS curriculums are available for purchase through Augsburg Fortress/Sparkhouse (the publishing house of the ELCA).

ReNew: The Green VBS focuses on caring for God's creation and is a traditional five-day format that focuses on the Parable of the Sower. The curriculum includes all leader guides, as well as audio files for the songs, and is available via download only. Congregations that subscribe to Sparkhouse Digital already have access to the entire curriculum!

Another curriculum available from Sparkhouse is **Operation Restoration**. This five-day curriculum is a favorite of Sparkhouse Curriculum Developer Dawn Rundman, and utilizes the work of Pastor Dan Erlander. Says Rundman, "We looked to his work and to scripture and to the world we are living in today that deeply needs mending. Then we created a VBS that invites everyone — whether kid, youth leader, adult volunteer, center leader, or director — into a richer understanding of God's loving actions to mend the world and the ways that we can also be menders."

Sparkhouse also provides some curriculum for VBS in a non-traditional format. For congregations interested

in trying intergenerational VBS, Sparkhouse offers **Journey Together** and **Good Stewards Together**. These curriculums each offer 12 lessons that are designed for all ages (including adults!) and can be done as 12 separate events or combined into a more traditional VBS format. Congregations that subscribe to Sparkhouse Digital already have access to both of these curriculums. **Creative Arts Camp** is a five-day VBS program designed to be led by area artists, and it encourages participants to use their creativity in art, music and dance in a worship service.

ELCA WORLD HUNGER

ELCA World Hunger offers several free VBS curriculums that connect Bible stories with stories about the work that ELCA World Hunger is doing around the world. These programs include easy-to-print graphics files, and some include videos and music files, while others provide lists of song ideas, encouraging congregations to use songs from their context.

ILLUSTRATED MINISTRY

Illustrated Ministry is an ecumenical publishing house that offers a VBS curriculum called Compassion Camp, which is focused on how we can serve God by serving our neighbors. This curriculum includes beautiful coloring pages designed for people of all ages, as well as downloadable audio files.

COKEBURY

Cokesbury is the publishing house of the United Methodist Church, which is a full communion partner of the ELCA. The starter kits for their VBS

curriculums include song files and a website that can be used for VBS registration. Music CDs, decorations, puppets, and costumes are also available for purchase. (I have used Cokesbury curriculum many times with an ecumenical VBS and have always been pleased with it.)

There are lots of different options for VBS curriculum — some are free but require a bit more legwork with making decorations. Some provide music written for that curriculum, while others encourage congregations to use their own music. Some provide registration websites, but for those that don't, I have found that registration websites can be made using Google Forms. All of the publishers I have listed above provide curriculums that are used by many ELCA congregations, as well as ecumenical VBS programs. And you can often find Facebook groups or Pinterest boards related to the curriculums where people share ideas and advice.

If you have any questions or are looking for VBS advice, let me know! I love Vacation Bible School. You can email me at rodk@neiasynod.org. Happy daydreaming about summer!



DECEMBER EVENTS

- 1 Transitional/Interim Ministry Colleague Group, Zoom, 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 2 Candidacy Committee, Synod Office, 8:30 a.m.
- 15 Youth Ministry Network, St. Paul's, Waverly, 10 a.m.
- 23-30 Office Closed, Christmas Break

JANUARY 2023 EVENTS

- 2 Office Closed, New Year's
- 5 Transitional/Interim Ministry Colleague Group, Zoom, 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 5 Executive Committee Meeting, Zoom, 4 p.m.
- 9 Care for Creation Network Meeting, Zoom, 5 p.m.
- 14 Synod Council Meeting, Zoom, 9 a.m.
- 14 Congregation Treasurer's Meeting, Zoom, 9-11:30 a.m.
- 16 Office Closed, Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- 19 Youth Ministry Network, Trinity, Mason City, 10 a.m.
- 19 Racial Justice Network Meeting, Zoom, 2:30 p.m.
- 28 Synodical Women's Organization Cluster Meeting, Synod Office w/virtual option, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

FEBRUARY 2023 EVENTS

- 2 Transitional/Interim Ministry Colleague Group, Zoom, 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 4 Synodical Women's Organization Cluster Meeting (snow date), Synod Office w/virtual option, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.
- 10-11 Candidacy Retreat, Shalom Spirituality Center, Dubuque
- 16 Youth Ministry Network, St. Paul's, Postville, 10 a.m.

MARCH 2023 EVENTS

- 2 Interim Ministry Colleague Group, Zoom Meeting, 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 10 Candidacy Committee Approvals, 8 a.m., Synod Office
- 11 Synodical Women's Organization, Synod Office w/virtual option, 9 a.m.-12 Noon
- 16 Youth Ministry Network, Decorah, Decorah, 10 a.m.
- 18 Synod Council Meeting, Synod Office, 9 a.m.-12 Noon

APRIL 2023 EVENTS

- 6 Interim Ministry Colleague Group, Zoom, 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 7 Office Closed, Good Friday
- 20 Youth Ministry Network, First, Northwood, 10 a.m.

INSTALLING

Rev. Erika Breddin, Waterloo, St. Ansgar, 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, First, staff
 Decorah, Glenwood & Canoe Ridge, Rev. Adam Starrett, interim
 Denver, St. Peter, Rev. David Powers, interim
 Dubuque, St. John's
 Dubuque, St. Matthew, Rev. Karla Wildberger, interim*
 Eldorado, St. Peter*
 Elma, St. Paul (Maple Leaf)
 Garnavillo, St. Peter & Clayton, Peace, Rev. Harold McMillin, contract interim
 Greene, St. Peter
 Hampton, St. Paul
 Mason City, Our Saviour's & St. Paul
 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

Cedar Falls, Nazareth
 Cresco, Immanuel
 Decorah, St. John's & Hauge*
 Dubuque, Holy Trinity
 Elkader, Bethany & Strawberry Point, Emanuel, Rev. Katherine Longtin Johnson, interim
 Hawkeye, Trinity*
 Janesville, Messiah*
 Jesup, American & La Porte City, Zion (Jubilee)
 La Porte City, American
 Leland, Our Savior & Garner, Faith (Miller)*
 Maynard, St. Paul
 Sumner, St. John (Buck Creek) & Oran, St. Peter
 Washburn, Redeemer
 Waterloo, Trinity*

ROSTER CHANGES

Rev. Charis Combs-Lay, on leave from call

*Part-time Call

PRAYER CALENDAR

DECEMBER 2022

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders Rev. Dennis D. Niezwaag, Charles City 1	Trinity, Waterloo 2	Jean M. Swiggum, Cedar Falls Rev. Amy Eisenmann, Cedar Falls Rev. Cindy S. Krause, Osage 3
Zion, Waterloo 4	St. John (Stapleton), Waucoma 5	St. John, Waukon 6	Redeemer, Waverly 7	St. Paul's Church & School, Waverly 8	Rev. Lynn J. Noel, Postville 9	Rev. Tracy K. Hinkel, Sumner 10
Rev. Dr. Kristin J. Wendland, Waverly Rev. Paul N. Amlin, Asbury 11	Rev. Gregory L. DeBoer, Independence 12	St. Paul, Wellsburg 13	Rev. Dr. Elaine G. Siemsen, Rochester, Minn. 14	Zion, West Union 15	Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, Chicago, Ill. 16	Middle East Peace ELCA Churchwide Staff 17
Synod Council 18	Bishop Lorna Halaas & Staff of the Western Iowa Synod 19	Bishop Amy Current & Staff of the Southeastern Iowa Synod 20	Rev. Nathan H. Wicks, Ridgeway 21	Rev. James L. Cherry, Waverly 22	Rev. Keith Sievers, Savage, Minn. 23	Joan Dalen, Mason City Rev. Joan E. Haug, Dubuque 24
Rev. M. DeWayne Teig, Dubuque Rev. Paul H. Schaedig, Waverly 25	Companion Synod-Hungary 26	Companion Synod-Namibia 27	Margaret Browne, Waterloo Rev. Calvin C. Fick, Allison 28	Rev. Maureen Howard, Iowa Falls 29	Carolyn B. Oppedahl, Dubuque 30	Rev. David A. Werges, Decorah 31

JANUARY 2023

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders EWALU Camp & Retreat Center, Strawberry 1	Rev. Todd A. Burrichter, Nashua 2	St. James, Allison 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. Scherer, Waverly 6	Carol A. Koeneman, Tucson, Ariz. Rev. Ruth Ann Shriver, Cedar Falls 7
Rev. Gary C. Heidt-Johnson, Waterloo 8	Immanuel (Crane Creek), Lawler 9	Rev. Eugene Ketterling, Waverly 10	Lutheran Lakeside Camp Assoc., Spirit Lake 11	Zion, Alta Vista 12	Riverside Bible Camp, Story City 13	St. John, Arlington 14
Camp Shalom, Davenport 15	Lord of Life, Asbury 16	Middle East Peace ISU Lutheran Campus Ministry, Ames 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	U of I Lutheran Campus Ministry, Iowa City 24	Rev. Nancy J. Larson, Waverly 25	Trinity, Belmond 26	UNI Lutheran Campus Ministry, Cedar Falls 27	Calmar, Calmar 28
Zion, Castalia 29	Springfield, Decorah 30	Rev. Dr. Sarah A. Nye, Osage 31				



Good News

December/
January
2022-23

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

As I sit here this morning, I am wondering how many of you have had a chance to do a Thankoffering service. At our church one Sunday in November the women oversee the service and the offering, unless otherwise designated, goes to the WELCA churchwide organization. This service can happen any time of the year and is a great time to let people understand our importance in the church, society and the world. The service is on our web site, just print it, gather your women and you have a Thankoffering service.

As your board gathers this month to continue the planning of our next convention on June 17, 2023, so make sure to mark your calendars and help us make this one a huge success! In the coming weeks, information will be dispersed when we host our cluster presidents in January. Be thinking about the offices that will be becoming vacant, are you up to taking your **BOLD** step. Pray about your gifts of service and think about joining us as the leaders on your synod board. Don't forget to ask your younger women, tell them it is a great way to make a difference, and face it, some of us oldies are pretty fun to be around. Believe me when I say this was a very **bold** leap of faith for me.

As we enter this most holy season, let us be thankful for our lives, let us pray for others in need and know that the one coming, died for our sins, so we could be born anew. May you all enjoy a blessed Christmas season and may the love of Christ shine in your hearts.

*God's Blessing to you all,
Cindy Pogge*

Discipleship Committee

I hear the word of our Lord through Sunday readings at church. I love being a deacon and reading scripture to fellow church members. It makes me feel closer to our Lord. I then tell everyone I know if you can be a deacon at church to try it. It could help strengthen your faith like it has mine. You just begin to want to do more for fellow church members. Your heart opens to want to learn more.

Submitted by Linda Seely

Stewardship Committee

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 4:10-11

Peter, you say it so plainly – use your gifts to serve others, God will provide the strength needed to accomplish your service, so that in all things God may be praised.

Find ways to discern your gifts and don't be afraid to step up when your service is needed. Trust in the strength that our God will provide to accomplish service to each other whether it be individually, in your congregation or in work of the synod women. Plans are being made for the Synodical Gathering in June. You can help by attending, saying yes to the various jobs that need doing and bringing in-kind and monetary gifts. This pep talk applies to everyone reading it – those new to WELCA and those who are currently serving in local congregations and the Synod Women's Board!

**To Him be the glory and the power
for ever and ever. AMEN!**

Submitted by Nancy Poppe

Introducing Donna Busch

I live in Jewell, IA. I grew up on a farm in Hamilton County, IA and still love the smell of fresh turned dirt in the spring and enjoy the hustle and bustle of the farmers as they bring in their crops. Through my working career I have generally held office and administrative positions. Currently, I work part-time in the church office at Bethesda Lutheran in Jewell where I have been “at it” for 12 years. I just experienced great sadness in my life; my husband of 47 years, who was in poor health for many years, passed away on October 27. I know that Bill is in a far better place and now is pain free, confusion free, and enjoying his time with all the saints who have also met their reward. I am learning to make my way through grief by putting one foot in front of the other and carrying on. Reminding myself each day that --- God is good, All the time. --- keeps me on track.

Welcome to the NE IA SWO Board!

Justice Committee

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:34-35

As I write this, I have just arrived home from a mission trip to the Dominican Republic with Joni and Friends, Wheels for the World. I had the privilege of delivering and adapting wheelchairs for disabled adults and children. As a team, we gave away 183 wheelchairs. The Gospel was shared with each recipient and their families and 100 people received Jesus into their hearts. I saw the above verses lived out in person. Our in-country partners showered us with love and support. We in turn were able to show love to those who came to us for help. The families that brought their loved ones to us for wheelchairs displayed such love and devotion to their disabled family members. It was amazing to see and to feel. And none of us could have shown this love if we hadn't first been loved by our Father in heaven. These trips always inspire me to come back home and continue to seek ways to show God's love and justice. *We love because He first loved us.* 1 John 4:19

Submitted by Karen Weltzin

Little Flock Gathering

33 ladies, representing 11 churches in our flock attended St. John's in Guttenberg on a BEAUTIFUL SUNNY Saturday! Lynda Akers and the ladies of St. John's welcomed us and served up morning refreshments and a soup/salad luncheon. Pastor Mike did an AMAZING job delivering devotions in the spirit of "Squeeze the Day."

His message:

Make it Extraordinary!

Squeeze all you can out of a Day!

Find a way to make a Difference!

Find Joy-Let Joy find You!

Tracy from the Resource Center shared with us the services they offer to the community of Guttenberg/Clayton county. No referral needed, they work with Shepherd of the Hills (St. Olaf) to offer guidance, fuel assistance, SHIPP counseling, shelter, food, and find an advocate to help them. They encountered 3,800 people last year and helped 2,112 households with items from the pantry. [Family Resource Center Services - Guttenberg Hospital](#)



Our Spring Gathering will be April 23, 2023 at Elgin Lutheran Church

CALENDAR

- Jan 28 SWO/Cluster Leadership Meeting, Waverly, 9 am-3 pm
- Mar 11 SWO Board Meeting, Waverly, 9 am-12 pm
- Apr 15 C/E/H LWR Ingathering @ Redeemer, Waverly
- Apr 17 LWR Ingathering @ Southport Mall, Mason City
- Apr 23 Little Flock Gathering @ Elgin
- May 6 SWO Board Meeting, Waverly, 9 am-12 pm
- June 16 SWO Board Meeting @ gathering site (TBD)
- June 17 35th Annual NE IA WELCA Gathering @ TBD
- 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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Articles are due by 1st of the preceding month e.g. 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 @



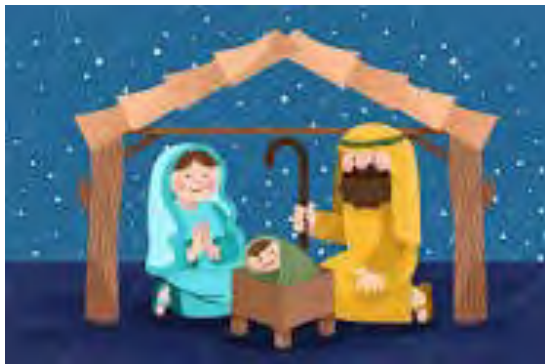
I find myself staring out the window - watching the snow fall and the wind blow outside and thinking about all the gatherings and events that will be happening soon around the world in recognition of the holiday happenings. Pearl Harbor Day of Remembrance on December 7th, the celebration of Kwanzaa, the Festival of Hanukkah, and Christmas are all special holiday observances. I always find it amazing how many other special days occur in a month if you google "holidays and observances" for the month.

It is time to plan the food for the family as we come together to eat, play games, and enjoy our time together ... a whole house full of noise!

**We members of the Home Life Network want to wish you all a very Merry Christmas!!
Our wish that you can take time to appreciate the Reason for the Season - Jesus Christ!**

December brings us Advent leading into Christmas.

Last month's newsletter included information about the Advent season of waiting and preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ. The candles invite us to have Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy as we light a candle each week with the white candle being lit on Christmas Eve.



Christmas falls on a Sunday this year which means Christmas Eve is Saturday night. We worship to welcome the light of the Christ child. Isaiah declares that the light of the long-promised king will illumine the world and bring endless peace and justice. The grace of God through Jesus Christ brings salvation to all people. The angels declare that Jesus' birth is good and joyful news for everyone, including the lowly shepherds.

January - the beginning of the calendar year - brings us the naming of Jesus. Jesus is given the name announced by the angel before his conception. Bearing Christ's name, we pray that with Christ as our example, we share the love of Christ with all people. Love has come - a light in the darkness!! Alleluia!!

Epiphany

The feast of Epiphany concludes the Christmas season with a celebration of God's glory revealed in the person of Jesus Christ whose glory is proclaimed for all nations and people. Like the light that guided the magi to Jesus, the light of Christ reveals who we are: children of God who are claimed and washed in the water of baptism. We are sent to beacons of the light of Christ, sharing the good news of God's love to all people.



Baptism

In the waters of the Jordan, Jesus is revealed as the beloved Son of God. Jesus fulfills all righteousness and becomes the servant of God who will bring forth justice and be a light to the nations. In the waters of baptism we too are washed by the Word, anointed by the Spirit, and named God's beloved children.



As we continue on our way through the month of January, we know Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world & the one anointed by the Spirit. Jesus begins his public ministry by calling the disciples. In Jesus the kingdom of God has come near - and we have seen a great light!!

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](#)



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