

Northeastern Iowa Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

## Check Your Algorithm

By Bishop Kevin Jones



*Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?*

**1 Corinthians 1:20**

Almost 20 years ago I started a Facebook account. At the time it was populated mostly by college and high school students. I started using it to keep up with some of the youth in my congregation but mostly for nieces and nephews that lived in distant towns and states. In those days my feed was predominantly filled by those with whom I was friends.

Then came Twitter (now X), then Instagram, Snapchat, and Tik Tok among others. Each new platform created opportunities to connect and to be seen and heard. I was encouraged to be present on social media as a pastor. Congregations were encouraged to have accounts so that information about worship, programs, and service opportunities appeared in the feeds that passed in front of people's eyes.

With so many people on these "free" social media accounts, companies looked for ways to monetize their audience. They turned to selling data gleaned from their users and to advertising. Algorithms were created that tracked our screen engagement habits and we started being fed a repetition of the things that we lingered over. When we pause to read more, watch more, or click on a link to learn more, the algorithm notices and feeds us more of the same. And in the effort to secure viewers' attention, television news and other online platforms have resorted to the same.

This takes advantage of what is known as confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is the natural human tendency to give more credence to information that supports already held beliefs, and less credence to information that goes against those beliefs. (For a great explanation of confirmation bias see *You are Not so Smart* by David McRaney.)

As a result, you and I are seeing different versions of the news curated specifically for us. We hear different interpretations of events based, not so much on truth, but on what will keep us tuned in and engaged with our screens for the sake of advertising dollars. It helps to convince us that "I am right" and those who believe otherwise are wrong.

## Check Your Algorithm Continued...

What is fed to us can differ significantly and yet we assume that others see the exact same thing as we do and continue to hold on to opposing viewpoints. What results is worthless online debate or disengagement with one another because we are afraid of the way someone will respond to us.

Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth is filled with reminders that we don't have the full story. It is a reminder that, as a church and as people, we are still maturing towards the fullness of God. Paul calls the church of Corinth away from disengagement and debate, and into genuine relationships built on the foundation laid by the proclamation of Christ crucified. Paul points us away from the things that divide us and points us to the One who unites us.

Being aware of the powers, principalities, and algorithms of this world and the ways we can unwittingly be held in bondage, perhaps we can show some grace to ourselves and to those who see the world differently. And let us cling to the promise that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God through Christ Jesus. Nothing. Not even death itself.

## ELCA Town Halls: "Introducing the Church Property Resource Hub"

### New! Church Property Resource Hub.

The Church Property Resource Hub is a project of the ELCA. After receiving requests from both synod and local church leaders, the Church Property Resource Hub was designed to help navigate challenges and opportunities that buildings and land represent for churches.

To learn more about how the Church Property Resource Hub can help your congregation leaders or people connected to the management of church property, join one of three webinars below. You can also register for the webinars and learn more by going to <https://www.elca.org/church-property-resource-hub>.

[Learn More](#)

### Town Hall Meeting Schedule:

Tuesday, March 17, 1 p.m. CST

[Register](#)

Thursday, March 19, 4 p.m. CST

[Register](#)

Tuesday, March 24, 1 p.m. CST

[Register](#)



# Stewardship in Lent: Turning Our Hearts Toward the Neighbor

By Rev. Jennifer Thomas

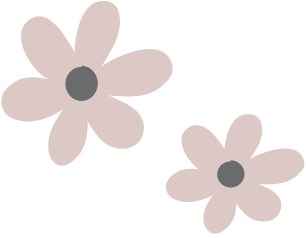
The season of Lent has long been a time when Christians return to the essentials—prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. From the earliest centuries of the church, Lent was shaped as a season of preparation: for catechumens entering the waters of baptism, and for the whole community renewing its life in Christ. This forty-day journey is not meant as an exercise in self-denial for its own sake but as a reorientation of the heart—turning us again toward God and toward the people God loves.

Martin Luther understood that faith naturally bears fruit in generous action. He wrote, **“We are all beggars; this is true,”** reminding us that everything we have is gift—received from a God who gives abundantly and without hesitation. Because we live from God’s generosity, we are set free to practice generosity ourselves.

Lent invites us into this freedom. When we give to ministries such as **ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran World Relief, Heifer Project International**, and other efforts that extend beyond our own congregations, we participate in God’s work of repairing the world. Our offerings become seeds—feeding families, strengthening communities, equipping leaders, and embodying Christ’s love in places we may never see with our own eyes.

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# Spring Day of Renewal



Join Us for the Spring Day of Renewal  
Hosted by the Northeastern Iowa Synod  
All Rostered Leaders are Invited  
Theme: Bearing Witness in Acts and Today

*“They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity... and had everything in common.” — Acts 2:46–47*

**Date:** Thursday, April 16

**Location:** Redeemer Lutheran Church, Waverly, IA

**Presenter:** Dr. Troy Troftgruben — New Testament scholar, pastor, and teacher  
([troytroftgruben.com](http://troytroftgruben.com))

## What’s New This Year: Mission Table Workshops

Throughout the day, participants will be invited to join **Mission Table Workshops**—guided conversations designed to help congregations notice what God is up to in their communities and discern next faithful steps. Gather around the table with leaders from across the synod to explore mission opportunities, share stories, and identify practical actions that support God’s work in your context. These sessions will be offered during both workshop times.

## About Dr. Troy Troftgruben’s Work

Dr. Troftgruben is known for his ability to connect Scripture with the life of the church today. His book ***Rooted and Renewing: Imagining the Church’s Future*** (with coauthors from the ELCA’s Theological Roundtable) invites congregations to remain deeply grounded in the gospel while being open to the Spirit’s creative movement. The book explores themes such as:

- **Being rooted** in the core practices of Christian community—worship, discipleship, hospitality, and justice.
- **Being renewed** through experimentation, listening, and discerning how God is calling the church to adapt.
- **Imagining the future** not through anxiety, but through trust in God’s ongoing work of resurrection.
- **Cultivating resilient leadership** that accompanies congregations through change with hope and curiosity.

Troftgruben’s insights help the church read the book of Acts not as a blueprint but as an invitation: to bear witness with courage, generosity, and joy in our own time.

# Spring Day of Renewal Schedule

Come for a day of worship, learning, and renewal as we explore what it means to bear witness in Acts and in our world today.

## Schedule

- **9:00 a.m.** – Coffee & Fellowship
- **10:00 a.m.** – Worship
- **10:45 a.m.** – Workshop Options:
  - **Mission Table Workshop**
  - Additional options to be announced
- **11:30 a.m.** – Lunch
- **1:00 p.m.** – Plenary Session with Dr. Troftgruben
- **1:45 p.m.** – Workshop Options:
  - **Mission Table Workshop**
  - Additional options to be announced
- **2:30 p.m.** – Prayer & Anointing
- **3:00 p.m.** – Conclusion

[Register Now](#)

# Community Conversation Trainings

## Come a Stranger, Leave a Neighbor: Community Conversation Trainings

Local communities across Northeast Iowa are inviting neighbors to gather, connect, and strengthen our shared civic life. A series of community conversation trainings—led by AMOS organizer **Courtney Dufford** and supported by the leadership of **Bishop Kevin Jones** along with local **Methodist** and **Catholic** partners—aims to equip everyday people to talk with one another across differences and build stronger, more resilient communities.

**AMOS (A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy)** brings more than 30 years of experience helping central Iowa communities make real, local change—expanding mental health care access, improving affordable housing, advocating for infrastructure, and more. Now, that experience is being shared with communities throughout our region.

Trainings, hosted in **Waverly, Waterloo, Dubuque, Cresco, and additional communities**, include:

- Guided story sharing
- Growing our shared community voice
- Connecting local needs with strengths and assets
- Community brainstorming
- Practicing the skills of civil dialogue

The series will **culminate in a regional training in West Union on March 7.**

Come curious. Leave connected. Together we can deepen relationships, listen well, and imagine what's possible for our communities—across congregations, across traditions, across neighborhoods. Contact Pastor Jen Thomas, A2B (see the calendar of events)



# February 2026 Portico Updates



## Portico Updates from Jennifer L. Prinz, M.P.A. – Regional Representative, Region 5

### Mental Health Support During Disruptive Times

When chaos and worry seem overwhelming, you don't have to face it alone. Portico members with ELCA-Primary health benefits, your [EAP](#) can help you navigate anxiety, uncertainty, and emotional strain tied to current events. Want a quick visual reminder? Print [this Spring Health resource](#) for practical ways to stay grounded and supported.

### Notify Portico of Any Compensation Changes

To administer benefits accurately, Portico needs to know each member's current compensation amount. If your congregation's annual meeting included a salary or benefit adjustment, be sure your EmployerLink user notifies Portico within 60 days of the effective date of that change. Late notifications of compensation changes can impact your sponsored members' retirement account contributions as well as disability and life insurance benefits. This year, note that EmployerLink users will be asked to verify FICA (for lay employees) or SECA (for most clergy) status as part of the SECURE 2.0 Roth catch-up provision.

### Online Retirement Readiness Series

Winter weather got you homebound? Take a break from your Netflix queue to bolster your financial knowledge. Portico has worked with Fidelity to offer a virtual Retirement Readiness workshop series designed to help individuals think confidently about their financial future. Topics include Social Security, retirement savings strategies, health care costs in retirement, and protecting personal information online. Find videos on the [Retirement Readiness series page](#) on myPortico.

### Get Ready for Tax Season

Since congregations and clergy have unique reporting requirements, Portico offers complimentary access to two important resources:

1. The Clergy Tax Return Preparation Guide by Richard R. Hammar focuses on tax-related topics most **relevant to ministers**.
2. Federal Reporting Requirements for Churches **helps congregations** understand their federal tax-reporting requirements.

Both tax guides are available on [myPortico](#) and the Tax Filing Information tab on [EmployerLink](#).

# Grants & Scholarships



## 2026 Abdelkader Global Citizenship Prize

Submit by February 28, 2026

### Scholarship Awards

#### High School:

- First – \$1000
- Second – \$750
- Third \$500

### Scholarship Awards

#### College:

- First – \$1500
- Second – \$1000
- Third \$750

### Overview

Students will research Emir Abdelkader's leadership style. After doing so they will identify how his approach can help them with challenges within their communities. A Hypothetical letter will be written to a local educator, official, or other leader recommending actions to strengthen civic life. A video will also be created to explain the ideas in their letter. Additional details can be found by going to [adbelkaderproject.org](http://adbelkaderproject.org) or scanning the QR code below.



### Eligibility:

All Students enrolled at high schools, grade 9-12, or colleges in the United States, including exchange students, may compete.

## Northeastern Iowa Synod Outreach Fund

The Northeastern Iowa Synod Outreach Fund exists to empower and support innovative ministry initiatives. These initiatives should extend beyond existing organizational boundaries, engage new populations, foster deeper connections between congregations and their broader context, and equip people to live out their faith.

### Application Timeline

- There are three application cycles each year.
  - **Spring 2026** – Application Due March 1, 2026
  - **Summer 2026** – Application Due July 1, 2026
  - **Fall 2026** – Application Due Nov. 1, 2026
- Up to \$25,000 will be awarded during each cycle.
- Completed applications should be emailed to [grants@NEIASynod.org](mailto:grants@NEIASynod.org). Applications submitted after the due date will be considered in the next cycle.

### Types of Funding Available

- Project Support
- Matching Funds
- Events / Conferences
- Travel (eligible and ineligible expenses listed in attached application)
- Capital / Equipment Expenses (for innovative projects)

### Learn More & Apply:

<https://neiasynod.org/download-category/cultivating-vitality/>

# Prayers

Please join in praying for the following leaders and ministries of the Northeastern Iowa Synod and ELCA:

## January 1–10, 2026

- H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders
- Marilyn Thalacker
- Rev. Todd Burrichter
- Walt Beck
- Linda Groe
- Rev. Kathy Graves
- Rev. Michael Sherer
- Rev. Ruth Ann Shriver
- Rev. Gary Heidt-Johnson
- Orleans Lutheran Church, Ridgeway
- Rev. Jeanette Perrault

## January 11–17, 2026

- Peace Lutheran Church, Ridgeway
- Zion Lutheran Church, Rockford
- St. Peter Lutheran Church, Rockwell
- Rev. ChyAnne Slick
- St. Paul Lutheran Church (Thornton), Rockwell
- Bergen Lutheran Church, Rolland
- Middle East Peace
- St. Peter Lutheran Church (Toeterville), St. Ansgar

## January 18–24, 2026

- Rev. Adam Starrett
- Rev. Kurt Hansen
- Rev. Luther Thoresen
- Verona Zelle
- Rev. Lois Knutson
- Jane Chilson
- Deer Creek Lutheran Church, St. Ansgar

## January 25–31, 2026

- Rev. Nancy Larson
- Zion Lutheran Church, Sheffield
- Faith Lutheran Church, Shell Rock
- St. Paul Lutheran Church, Sherrill
- Our Saviors Lutheran Church, Stanhope
- St. Petri Lutheran Church Story City
- Rev. Sarah Nye

## February 1–7, 2026

- H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders
- Linda McMillin
- Pat Nelson
- Rev. Bryan Robertson
- Rev. Scot McCluskey
- Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, MN
- Rev. Kristen Larsen-Schmidt
- Rev. Patricia Shaw

## February 8–14, 2026

- Millie Dieter
- Rev. Diane Koschmeder
- Rev. Kristen Rod
- Rev. Steve Brackett
- Rev. Burton Everist
- Marion Krentz
- Rev. Jane Harris
- Rev. Linda Marlett

## February 15–21, 2026

- Jean Rieniets
- Barb Fricke
- Middle East Peace
- Rev. Peter Kowitz
- Rev. Al Schulz
- Rev. Margaret Yackel-Juleen
- Rev. Bob Ericson
- Alison Pettit
- Rev. David Coffin

## February 22–28, 2026

- Aase Haugen Senior Services, Decorah
- Bartels Lutheran Retirement Community
- Rev. Darrel Gerriets
- Louise Anderson
- Rev. Dr. Steve Ullestad
- Rev. Kevin Jones



# Congregations

## Interviewing

- **Arlington**, St. John; **Elkader**, Hope (Littleport); **Strawberry Point**, St. Sebald; **Volga**, St. Paul (One in Faith Lutheran Parish)
- **Asbury**, Lord of Life, Rev. Karla Wildberger, interim
- **Cedar Falls**, Bethlehem
- **Cedar Falls**, St. John's
- **Clarion**, First & Congregational UCC
- **Dows**, First (part-time call)
- **Dysart**, Zion
- **Eldorado**, St. Peter (part-time call)
- **Janesville**, Messiah (part-time call)
- **Jesup**, American, Rev. Patricia Mohr-Kelly, interim
- **Jewell**, Bethesda, Rev. Jonathon Dolan, interim
- **Joice**, Bethany; **Lake Mills**, Winnebago; **Northwood**, Silver Lake; **Albert Lea, Minn.**, Lunder (One in Christ Lutheran Parish)
- **La Porte City**, Zion (Jubilee) (part-time)
- **Lake Mills**, Salem
- **Leland**, Our Savior & **Garner**, Faith (Miller) (part-time call)
- **New Hampton**, Trinity, Rev. Sue Cira, contract
- **Ossian**, Ossian (part-time call)
- **Thornton**, St. Paul (part-time call)
- **Toeterville**, St. Peter & **Carpenter**, Deer Creek
- **Waterloo**, Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd (part-time call)
- **Waterloo**, Our Savior's, Lisa Ames-Kruse, SAM, contract (part-time call)

## Self-Study

- **Allison**, St. James
- **Decorah**, Glenwood & Canoe Ridge
- **Decorah**, St. John's & Hauge (part-time call)
- **Dubuque**, St. John's
- **Garnavillo**, St. Paul & **McGregor**, First
- **Hawkeye**, Trinity (part-time call)
- **Oelwein**, Zion
- **Washburn**, Redeemer (part-time call)
- **Waterloo**, St. Ansgar (part-time call)
- **Waterloo**, Trinity (part-time call)
- **Waterloo**, Zion (part-time call)
- **Waukon**, St. John, Rev. Mark Oehlert, interim

## Roster Changes

- **Rev. William Peters**, retired
- **Rev. Gary Hatcher**, retired
- **Rev. Anita Nuetzman**, transferred to Southeastern Minnesota
- **Rev. Stacey Nalean-Carlson**, transferred from Southeastern Minnesota
- **Rev. Richard Stern**, transferred from Indiana-Kentucky



Northeastern Iowa Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



# Youth Ministry Events & Webinars



**Ewalu – True North High School Youth Program**  
**Saturday, March 14, 2026**  
**Wartburg College, Waverly, IA**

Camp Ewalu has launched a brand-new program for high school youth, called True North. True North is part service camp and part adventure camp with a reality game show-inspired format. It is a unique, immersive experience for 9th- to 12th-grade youth to come together and build resilience in a faith-centered camp environment while serving and playing in the beautiful driftless region of NE Iowa. The True North Spring Event is Saturday, March 14 at Wartburg College.

To learn more visit: [ewalu.org/TrueNorth/](https://ewalu.org/TrueNorth/)

**ELCA Region 5 Youth Ministry Cohort**  
**8-week Cohort through TENX10**  
**February 5–March 26**

Elisabeth Pynn Himmelman (she/her), Associate Pastor for Engagement at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Naperville, IL., and Alison Pettit (she/her), Administrative Assistant at the Northeastern Iowa Synod in Waverly, IA., are leading an 8-week cohort through TENX10. This is a relational ministry kickstart that will meet on Thursdays from 12:00–1:00pm.

To learn more visit: [sites.google.com/view/elca-region-5-youth-ministry/home](https://sites.google.com/view/elca-region-5-youth-ministry/home)

## The 2027 ELCA Youth Gathering Imagine More

Are you thinking about attending the Gathering in 2027 in Minneapolis, Minnesota from June 28 – July 2? Webinars are a great way to learn more and kick off the planning process. Click [here](#) to register for the first webinar on Monday, February 16<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. CST. Click [here](#) to view all the key dates. You can also view all information at <https://www.elca.org/gathering>

Be on the lookout!

**February 16 Webinar:** Why the Gathering  
**Spring 2026:** Handbook launch on the Academy  
**Summer 2026:** Getting Ready Materials launch  
**June 17:** Volunteer applications open (Gathering Volunteer Corps and local)  
**August 19:** Gathering Volunteer Corps application closes  
**October 1:** Financial assistance opens  
**October 14:** Gathering Volunteer Corps applicants notified  
**October 16:** Financial assistance closes  
**October 20:** Financial assistance notification  
**October 21:** Priority registration opens



# Events

## Local Organizing Training

February 7, 2026 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 9.m.  
Jubilee UMC – Waterloo

## Global Church Together Network

February 12, 2026  
Zoom 1:30 p.m.

## Local Organizing Training

February 22, 2026 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  
Trinity UMC – Waverly

## Lutheran Day on the Hill

February 26, 2026 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.  
Des Moines, Iowa

## Congregation Presidents' Zoom

March 12, 2026 @ 6:30 p.m.

## Transitional / Interim Ministry Meeting

March 5, 2026  
Zoom @ 9:30 a.m.

## Local Organizing Training: Regional Gathering

March 7, 2026 @ 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  
West Union, Iowa

## Global Church Together Network

March 12, 2026  
Zoom 1:30 p.m.

## Racial Justice Advocacy Network

March 12, 2026  
Zoom 3:00

## Synod Council Meeting

March 21, 2026  
Synod Office

## Global Church Together Network

April 9, 2026  
Zoom 1:30 p.m.

## Racial Justice Advocacy Network

April 9, 2026  
Zoom 3:00 p.m.

## First Call Theological Education Retreat – All Iowa Synods in Des Moines

May 3–5

## Fall Theological Conference – NEIA Synod

October 4–6  
St. John's, Cedar Falls and Hampton Inn.

Full list of events at:

<https://neiasynod.org/events/>

# SAVE THE DATE

## JUNE 6, 2026

### NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD

## Creative, Collaborative, Congregation (C3) Conference



ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH  
WAVERLY, IOWA

January 2026

Together Everyone



Achieves More

*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.*

### President's Sparks

Hello to all the Women of the Church and others who make things happen. So many exciting things are happening. I look forward to seeing you

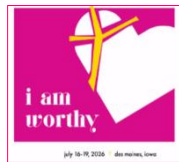
▪ **M&M Retreat is coming! Feb 20-21 @ the EWALU Stone Center** just north of Strawberry Point. It is always a good time.

▪ **Our annual Gathering/ convention is June 20 @ Our Saviour's Lutheran in Mason City.** Look for information coming to you.

▪ **We need new Board members.** The board plans our events during the year. All board members are finishing their terms and only 3 can be re-elected. We will need 6 new members to serve for 2 years. The board meets four times a year. If you know anyone who would like to help, please contact Alice Greimann.

▪ Don't forget about the **Churchwide Triennial Gathering July 16-19 in Des Moines.** Register now @ <https://welcatg.org> There is a one-day option for attending. Early Bird pricing ends Jan. 5th. Girls under 18 can attend.

▪ Lutheran World Relief announces A New **Congregational Engagement team colleague Rev. Brian Scott, who will now be serving congregations in your region.** You can contact him at [bscott@lwr.org](mailto:bscott@lwr.org)



*Sparkling with Jesus,  
Christine Schmitt*

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



### 2026 Triennial Gathering

The theme for the 2026 Triennial Gathering is "I Am Worthy," based on Psalm 139:14: "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." This statement serves as a reminder of God's promise to be with us, even in times of devastation and division. By repeating the phrase "I am worthy," we can recognize the Holy Spirit's ongoing work in our lives. This practice of self-affirmation opens up opportunities for healing and restoration within ourselves, our church, society, and the world. When we declare, "I am worthy," we align ourselves with God's promises. There is great power in our resolve. Register @ [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](https://www.elca.org/evangelical-lutheran-church-in-america)



**M & RETREAT**

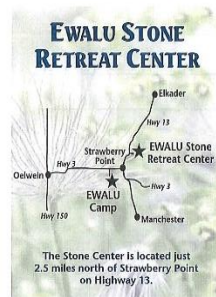
**Mary and Martha fun for all**  
Friday, Feb 20, and Sat., Feb. 21, 2026

*Celebrating and learning and doing.*

**YOU and your friends are invited to a retreat to celebrate all the Marys and Marthas! This is a Celebration of YOU!**

Who is welcome? Any woman who belongs to the ELCA and their friends.  
A Woman, a Christian, a helper, a doer, a listener, a learner.

Activities: Bible board games, mixer game, puzzle, **bring your own** crafting projects (everything is welcome including: quilting, bandage rolling, knitting & crochet, etc.)



**Friday, Feb. 20th**

Arrive any time after 4 p.m.

Join us for a soup supper, hymn sing, games, puzzle, and crafting time.

The overnight stay and meals for the two days are \$45. Beds, bedding, and towels included (You may have to share a room.)

What to bring: comfortable clothes, craft projects are optional, and yourself with a joyful heart.

**Saturday, Feb. 21st**

Come for the day.

Breakfast and coffee at 8 a.m.; noon meal, Bible study, hymn sing, crafting time and lots of fellowship

Afternoon speakers: Family Resource center, Guttenburg

Welcome is at 9 a.m., Day ends at 3 p.m.

Day only rate for meals and building usage is \$20

Registration deadline: **Monday, Feb. 16th**

Location: EWALU Stone Center, 35124 Hwy 13, Strawberry Point, IA  
which is 2.5 miles north of Strawberry Point. Handicap accessible facility.

hosted by Your Northeastern Iowa Synodical Women's Organization Board

Questions? Contact: Christine Schmitt, [candschmitt@gmail.com](mailto:candschmitt@gmail.com) or call 641-397-2572 or call 641-220-5361



## Stewardship Committee

*“Lord, let me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight. Surely everyone stands as a mere breath.” Psalm 39: 4-5*



Time is a weird thing. Sometimes it flies by, and we don't know where it went. Other times, it drags on and it feels like a few minutes last a whole hour. But most of the time, we just kind of take time for granted. It's just... there. Ticking away.

The Psalmist writing these Bible verses does not want us to take time for granted. Their prayer asks God to remind them that their time on earth is short, especially in comparison to God's perception of time. The implication in their words is that they want to remember that their life is “fleeting” so that they can make the most of their time.

On Ash Wednesday, the start of the church season of Lent, we are invited to remember that our time on earth is not infinite. It is a churchly reminder that we are going to die someday. And we are encouraged to return to God in the time that we have left. We all know that we are going to die at some point—but because we often avoid thinking or talking about death, we function as if we have all the time in the world. We “kill” time doing things that don't matter. We say “yes” to time commitments that we don't want to do. We fritter away hours scrolling through social media or get sucked into binge-watching mindless TV shows. When hours go by, we can wish we had used the time differently, but by then it's too late. Those are hours we will never get back.

Instead, being intentional with our time means balancing work, play, rest, and God time (prayer, devotions, worship, etc.). It's about being aware of how we are using our time, and using our time deliberately, just as the Psalmist reminds us.

*by the Rev. Dr. Becca Ehrlich*

## CALENDAR

Jan 5- Early bird Triennial registration ends

Feb 20-1 M & M Retreat @ EWALU Stone Center

Mar 7- SWO Board Meeting @ 9 am

Apr 11-Upper Iowa River Cluster D Spring  
Gathering @ St. Peter Lutheran Church,  
Eldorado, Ia. Coffee time @ 8:30 am  
In-Gathering @ Nazareth, Cedar Falls  
May 2-SWO Board Meeting @ 9 am  
In-Gathering @ Olson's Explosives, Decorah

Jun 19-SWO Board Meeting, Mason City

Jun 20- Annual SWO Gathering, Our Saviour's,  
Mason City

June 21: Triennial registration deadline

Jul 13-15- Triennial Convention by Zoom

Jul 16-19-Triennial Gathering, Des Moines

Oct. 10 **LWR ingathering** Nazareth Lutheran in  
Cedar Falls

Nov 7- In-Gathering @ Olson's Explosives, Decorah

## NEIA Women of the ELCA Executive Board

### Christine Schmitt, President

641-220-5361, [candschmitt@gmail.com](mailto:candschmitt@gmail.com)

### Alice Greimann, Vice President

641-456-2973, [alice.greimann71@gmail.com](mailto:alice.greimann71@gmail.com)

### Chris VanDeventer, Secretary

515-320-2877, [cdvandeven@gmail.com](mailto:cdvandeven@gmail.com)

### Nancy Poppe, Treasurer

641-257-8199, [popcan1952@gmail.com](mailto:popcan1952@gmail.com)

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*Checks payable to NE IA SWO, include Form A*

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Published by NE IA Women of the ELCA