



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

# Electronic giving can boost a congregation's bottom line

by Marcia Hahn

Like online worship services, electronic giving is emerging as a lifeline to help congregations thrive during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. In fact, many people believe that it is only a matter of time until most of the donations to congregations come through credit/debit cards, bank transfers or some other form of online giving.

"The offering plate is a one-trick pony that can only receive cash or checks from people physically present," says Pastor Mark Anderson, assistant to the Bishop. "Congregations, like local businesses, are more likely to remain vital when they have an online presence and the ability to accept money electronically."

More people are getting comfortable giving to their congregations using online tools. Last year ELCA households contributed more than \$400 million via electronic giving. To assist congregations with this fast-growing way of giving, the ELCA has agreements with two preferred vendors — Vanco and Tithe.ly — to offer congregations e-giving products and services at reduced rates with no monthly base fees.

Paul Edison-Swift, business systems analyst for the ELCA, helped secure the ELCA agreements. "The breakthrough for me was eliminating the monthly fees," Edison-Swift says.

"Why should a small congregation spend \$20 a month if only two people use the service?"

Both Vanco and Tithe.ly offer convenient ways for people to give to their congregations, including mobile apps, text messaging, credit/debit cards, card readers, kiosks in the narthex, and online bank transfers through the congregation's website. Congregations that sign up receive discounted rates for transaction processing fees, along with ongoing customer support,



Lori Haag, financial secretary for Nazareth Lutheran, Cedar Falls, shows how members can use the credit card reader at Nazareth's welcome center to donate online, order flowers for special services, and purchase other church-related items. Nazareth uses Vanco eGiving software to accept online gifts, which now total nearly half of all monthly giving to the church.

communications, and promotions to roll out the service and engage congregation members. Transaction fees, which vary according to the size of the donation, cost around \$2.75 for a \$100 gift and can be paid by the donor. In addition, congregations can purchase expanded services, such as website creation and church management from Tithe.ly for \$49 per month.

"We are worshipping in parking lots and doing remote worship, so these services bring an essential lifeline to keep people engaged," Edison-Swift



Paul Edison-Swift

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says. "There is really no barrier to trying it out. If after starting electronic giving the congregation decides it's not for them, there is no obligation to keep it."

## ONLINE TOOLS CAN GROW GIVING

Faith Lutheran, Shell Rock, has been offering electronic giving for several years through Vanco. According to Brian Dix, who serves as treasurer for Faith, electronic gifts now make up 25 percent of the total amount the congregation receives. Deposits increased from 20 deposits per month to 28 to 29 deposits per month in the last two years.

Dix says that having the Vanco service already in place helped increase congregational giving during the three months earlier this year when worship services were shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our congregation recognized that we still had to take care of regular expenses, so financially we are hanging in there," Dix says. "I am glad we had electronic giving in place as long as we have because it has been easier for the congregation to keep using it during this time frame. I know some other churches have struggled from a giving standpoint because they didn't have a system such as Vanco in place."

Dix, who is not an accountant, says that the Vanco system is user friendly for both the giver and for the treasurer to track gifts.



Brian Dix

People can log in to Vanco on the Faith Lutheran website to make a one-time or recurring deposit, which is transferred from their bank account. They can designate if they want the gift to go into the general fund, building fund, evangelism/outreach, flowers or preschool.

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*"Electronic giving is a viable method that has paid dividends for us."*  
— Brian Dix

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For those who miss putting something in the offering, Faith Lutheran has laminated cards in the pews with the message, "My giving was done electronically" that people can drop in the plate.

Dix says the congregation averages about \$65 a month in processing fees, based on the volume taken in each month.

"Regardless if Sunday services are held in person or not, expenses for utilities, insurance and salaries still remain," Dix says. "Electronic giving is a viable method that has paid dividends for us."

## E-GIVING IS EASY TO START

As program director for ELCA Stewardship, Keith Mundy tracks giving trends in ELCA congregations. Over the last few years, giving by check and cash in the offering plate has rapidly declined while electronic giving to congregations has grown substantially.

In February 2020, 500 ELCA congregations were using Tithe.ly for electronic giving, and this fall that number grew to 953. Vanco serves

more than 40 percent of ELCA congregations, including 55 congregations — or more than one-third — from the Northeastern Iowa Synod. In 2019, some 1,500 donors used Vanco to give \$4.1 million to those 55 congregations, and this year the number of donors has increased to 1,902.



Keith Mundy

Most of the Vanco transactions in the synod are made through the donate button on a congregation's website or by phone to set up transfers from a bank account using an automated clearing house (ACH). Mundy suggests that congregations make sure their give button is easy to find on their website and invite people to use it.

"One way to grow giving is to make it easy to give and to use social media to remind members of giving options," he says.

Across the ELCA, more than 70 percent of e-giving is done using mobile phones and credit cards, but Mundy notes that less than half of the Northeastern Iowa Synod congregations using Vanco offer electronic giving choices beyond bank transfers. Considering that 80 to 90 percent of congregation members have cell phones, Mundy sees e-giving through credit cards and phone apps as an opportunity for congregations to improve their cash flow and grow online giving. Donations made through bank transfers to congregations in the

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## No Better Time to be Christ to One Another

As we move into November 2020, our spirits dip and our anxiety is heightened by the daily reports of statistics related to the spread of the coronavirus. As I hear from and listen to many of you regarding the decisions you must make about your holiday services and schedule in the coming months, I know these are continuing to be days/weeks of tension and stress. I applaud all of you for your perseverance and courage in the face of this pandemic.

At your synod office, we continue to abide by all protocols and are doing virtual or electronic meetings and conversations all the time. In light of rising numbers in Iowa and the onset of winter weather prohibiting outdoor gatherings in the coming months, I am recommending that synod staff not go to in-person events on behalf of the synod, though we will continue to participate virtually/electronically.

We do not wish to become part of the problem by unwittingly spreading the virus from place to place, nor do we want to contract the virus and thus negatively impact others on our staff, or in our families. When the numbers come down substantially or when weather again permits us to gather more safely in person outdoors, I will reconsider this recommendation.

For those congregations who have gone back to in-person worship: I want to compliment your thoughtfulness when you follow all the protocols we are aware of for preventing the spread of COVID. Thank you for your vigilance in keeping the proven protocols in place and thank you to all who comply with them for the sake of their neighbor. I trust you will also think carefully as to when or whether it is best to discontinue in-person services as your local situation may worsen.

For those congregations who are continuing to worship through virtual (online/electronic) means: I want to compliment your discipline in staying quarantined until our numbers improve. Many of our churches have become on-line worship sites, accessing technology skills you didn't know you had until a pandemic came along. Thank you for your diligence for the sake of your neighbor.

All of you have found ways to continue giving to the church's mission and ministry, as well, in a time when financial resources are even more important. Thank you for that continued generosity.

To all of you as we move into colder weather, and toward the holidays we hold so dear: As we often and appropriately hear in Christmas preaching, Jesus comes in spite

of all our special preparations — not because of them. God sends God's Son to us wherever we are — gathered in small, distanced groups in a sanctuary, or in vehicles in a parking lot, or huddled around our computers.



Holding a Christmas service virtually or in a parking lot will be memorable in ways different than how you have typically celebrated worship. To simply state the obvious: You can do something different in your congregation's celebrations this year; Christmas will still come.

In 2020 especially, we are all challenged to think of the deeper meaning the Christmas season holds apart from some of the traditions we all enjoy, and to keep that meaning central to our celebration of Christmas. When we do that, we trust that God will find us and visit our hearts with God's message of love at Christmas, and all our lives through. This is most certainly true, as Lutherans like to say.

Finally, Martin Luther called us "Little Christs" to one another, underscoring how our words and actions represent Jesus in our interactions with others. Make every effort to let Christ be seen and heard in all your relationships, pandemic or not. Frustrations and demands thrown at one another when disagreements arise do not bear witness to Christ in the way we have always understood Him, coming in peace with forgiveness and hope. Listening with love and patience, seeking common ground, and valuing each other despite our disagreements are ways we bear witness to the Good Shepherd, the Prince of Peace, and the Crucified and Risen Savior.

Being Christ to one another is also good to remember as we move through the election process in November. Please remember to vote on Nov. 3, if you haven't already. Your vote certainly matters and is an important part of our role as citizens of our country.

Our voices and actions also matter as we live into the outcomes. Speak charitably and thoughtfully, as one always should, and strive to bring Christ with you in every conversation and encounter.

Peace be with you,

—Bishop Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl



# All Saints Worship Service is Available Online

Thank you to the congregations that chose to use the Northeastern Iowa Synod's recorded worship service to celebrate All Saints Sunday on Nov. 1.

Special thanks also goes Pastor Joelle Colville-Hanson for producing the video and to the numerous people from around the synod who contributed music, readings or other assistance with the service.

A video of the full worship service is available to view or use on another Sunday, as well as a video of just the sermon given by Bishop Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl.

Both videos can be found on the synod's YouTube Channel. Links to the videos, the bulletin and the transcript of the Bishop's sermon can be found at [www.neiasynod.org/event](http://www.neiasynod.org/event).

## COVID CARE KITS



The synod office mailed COVID care kits to rostered ministers, youth leaders and candidates of the Northeastern Iowa Synod to support their efforts to stay safe and healthy during the pandemic and to let them know they are appreciated. Masks were also sent to synod council members and donor friends of the synod. The kits and masks were funded with health and wellness dollars earned from Portico Benefit Services and with the synod's general fund.

## BSA Bankruptcy Information

The Boy Scouts of America filed for bankruptcy earlier this year, primarily due to numerous sexual abuse lawsuits. There are many questions about what this may mean for congregations that are (or were) chartering organizations for Boy Scout troops. Congregations that chartered Boy Scout troops should consider whether to file a proof of claim in the bankruptcy to protect their interests.

The ELCA has prepared a resource on the BSA bankruptcy — *Boy Scouts of America Bankruptcy Informational Document* — which is available on the ELCA resource page under the sexual misconduct tab, [www.elca.org/Resources/Legal#Sexual](http://www.elca.org/Resources/Legal#Sexual).

## Portico Annual Enrollment

**Nov. 4-18, 2020**

The enrollment period for ELCA Primary Health Insurance is open from Nov. 4-18, 2020. All plan members will need to visit myPortico during this time period to make choices about their health benefits, tax-advantaged accounts, life insurance, and pretax retirement account contributions.

## NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD

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Send news for the December 2020 issue to Marcia Hahn by Nov. 10. We welcome story ideas related to the 2020 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)

# Introducing 'Safe Gatherings' Training to Protect Children

by Rev. Steve Brackett, Assistant to the Bishop

For many years, the “Safeguarding God’s Children” boundaries training program served the congregations and other ministries of our synod well by providing in-person group training to help rostered ministers (pastors and deacons), staff, and volunteers learn behaviors and policies that would help keep children safe in their context; recognize warning signs of abuse in children; and recognize warning signs in potential perpetrators of abuse.

But there were limitations to this program. First, it was very difficult to ensure that everyone who needed training received training. If some could not attend on the day training was scheduled or were not able to participate in all three hours of training, it was burdensome to find another future training nearby that they could attend. Second, there was no process for automatically repeating training within a few years and no way to immediately train new staff and volunteers. Third, the core training materials are not updated. The Safeguarding God’s Children videos and training materials are now 17 years old. Retraining using this system involves using the exact same training materials. Finally, the pandemic has made it impossible to hold Safeguarding God’s Children trainings for ministry sites who want to retrain staff and volunteers, or who have new staff or volunteers to train.

For these reasons, the S.A.F.E. Ministry Team (Synodical Advocates Focused on Education,

Prevention and Healing of Sexual Abuse) and the staff of the Northeastern Iowa Synod have approved entering into an agreement with “Safe Gatherings.” The Safe Gatherings system is comprehensive — integrating abuse prevention and boundary awareness training with background checks and reference checks for all staff and volunteers who work directly with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. When employees and



volunteers are trained to identify potential abusers, recognize the signs of abuse and know how to handle reporting, they are better equipped to work together to help prevent abuse from happening.

The Northeastern Iowa Synod has established an enterprise account with Safe Gatherings, as have nine other ELCA synods. Because we have an enterprise account, all of our synod congregations and other ministries are eligible to participate in this program.

There are several advantages to the Safe Gatherings program. First, staff and volunteers can participate in the training according to their own schedules and timelines. The training is self-directed, so there is no need to complete the training in one sitting. This eliminates the problem in the past of figuring out how to train someone who missed a scheduled group training. And

new staff can be trained immediately, rather than having to wait for a scheduled group training. Second, Safe Gatherings

manages the process of sending out reminders when it is time to repeat the training. We are asking participants to repeat their training every three years. Third, the Safe Gatherings materials are updated regularly to keep them fresh and relevant. Finally, the online format allows all ministries within the synod to easily train all staff and volunteers — even during the pandemic!

Two disadvantages of the new program are that there are no opportunities for group discussion during training, and there is a fee for each individual to cover the application, reference checks, background check, and the online abuse prevention training. Regarding the first disadvantage, we know that over the past 15 years our evaluations for Safeguarding God’s Children training always complimented the opportunities for group questions and discussions. But there is nothing to prevent you from scheduling a group meeting of staff and volunteers once all have completed the training in order to discuss what they learned and to ask questions. Regarding the second disadvantage, the fees may be a little hard to swallow at first, but I think that in the end everyone will agree that the comprehen-



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## Show thankfulness through grace to others

“Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.”  
— Col 3:14-15

“And be thankful.” This is one of the shortest sentences in all of Saint Paul’s writings, but it summarizes one of Paul’s most consistent themes — be thankful.

As the annual celebration of Thanksgiving approaches, it may be more difficult to find things to be thankful for this year. But if we have

a roof over our head, food to eat, and people who care about us, we have more than many people do. More than that, we are also embraced by God’s grace through Jesus Christ. So, despite the present days’ sorrows, we can show thankfulness.

I think the best way to show thanks is to share. If you have food, share some with those in need. If you have income, share some with those in need. If you know God’s grace, share some grace with others.

We all deeply appreciate those who have given to the food banks, food shelves, and Little Free Food Pantries.

We are grateful to those who continue to give to the ministries of their congregations and the larger church. But let’s also be grateful to those who, in these times of division, stress, and grief, show grace to be forgiving, share kind words and do acts of mercy. Sharing grace is also a kind of stewardship.

— Pastor Mark A. Anderson  
Assistant to the Bishop



### INSPIRED GIVING

## Harvested crops can make generous gifts

You can use the produce you grow to feed the poor, fund your congregation and so much more!

If you are a producer of a marketable commodity, you can make a gift with your unsold inventory. Whether the commodity gift is corn, beans or cattle, the synod is prepared to partner with you, the producer, to make the gift happen.

Upon receiving intent of this gift, the ELCA Foundation will establish an account at the appropriate elevator or processor and work to receive and sell the inventory. We’ll distribute the gift according to your wishes, benefiting the ELCA ministries or congregation(s) of your choice.

#### MINIMUM GIFT AMOUNT: \$10,000

Any fees associated with the sale of the commodity will be deducted from the proceeds.

With a gift of grain or marketable commodity, you can:

- Use stored commodities or unsold inventory to

make a current gift, maximizing the benefit to ministry while reducing taxable income

- Deduct overall production expenses, even if grain is used to make a gift.
- Make an outright gift, or add to (or establish) a donor advised fund or named endowment fund

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





# Accelerated Ministry Program helps fill the need for pastors

by Stephanie Boeding, Wartburg College Marketing & Communications

As the ELCA faces a shortage of clergy due to the retirement of Baby Boomer-era pastors, a partnership between two ELCA institutions in northeast Iowa is helping attract young adults to ministry and bridge the gap. Wartburg College in Waverly and Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque have come together to develop the Wartburg Accelerated Ministry Program, which reduces the time and cost to become an ordained ELCA pastor.

“Currently, the ELCA is producing about a thousand fewer pastors per year than it actually needs,” said the Rev. Dr. Brian Beckstrom, dean of spiritual life at Wartburg College and director of the accelerated program. “In order to meet those needs, we felt called by the Spirit to enter into more innovative ways of preparing students for ministry. We particularly wanted to focus on young people, who oftentimes have a call to ministry but don’t have the nudges that get them to the next spot in terms of discerning that call.”

The traditional path to ordained ministry takes eight years, with four years earning a bachelor’s degree followed by four years at seminary earning a master’s degree. But the Wartburg Accelerated Ministry Program allows students to finish in six years, with three years for each degree. While the program significantly reduces the cost and time needed to become a pastor, it does so without compromising the quality of the preparation. Coursework has been streamlined to reduce redundancies, and some courses count for both seminary

and college credit.

Students in the program see significant financial benefits from saving two years of tuition costs, plus they receive additional financial aid in the program from scholarships, including grant support from the Kern Family Foundation and generous challenge gifts from O. Jay and Pat Tomson of Mason City. Now in its third year, the program has 15 students participating at Wartburg College, including two who are applying for candidacy in the Northeastern Iowa Synod. Most students hear about the program from their pastors, youth leaders and members of their congregation.

“The Accelerated Ministry Program has encouraged me to explore all avenues in my faith in a place that welcomes vulnerability and failure,” said Wartburg College first-year student Jonah Macejkovic of Brainerd, Minn. “The program has created an atmosphere to accelerate my faith to new levels I have never believed were achievable.”

During their time at Wartburg College, students in the program can study a variety of subjects in addition to religion and can partici-



Students in the Accelerated Ministry Program like Robert Casey, above, have opportunities to assist with worship at Wartburg Chapel.



pate in the college’s strong tradition of music, athletics, and service. Discernment of their calling is also a hallmark of the accelerated program; faculty and staff work with students to understand the Holy Spirit’s leading.

“We make sure to surround students with a cohort of others who are also discerning a call to ministry,” said Beckstrom. “We provide lots of resources, both one-on-one and in groups, so students

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synod average \$115 per gift while electronic gifts made with credit cards average \$152, which is 32 percent higher.

"It's easier to go shopping and spend more money with a credit card, and that is similar with giving," Mundy says. "We find that people like using credit cards for giving because they can earn reward points for every dollar put on their credit card. Those points can add up quickly."

According to Mundy, in 2026 banks will no longer accept checks due to regulation changes made after the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001 when the financial system stopped for two weeks. Mundy recommends that congregations begin learning about online giving by visiting the preferred vendor page on the ELCA website where they can read about the Tithe.ly and Vanco services and find phone numbers to speak to representatives in person.

In addition, interested congrega-

tions can participate in live ELCA webinars featuring both vendors. Some 95 congregations participated in a recent Tithe.ly webinar offered in October, and most of the participants were there to learn about electronic giving for the first time.

Both Tithe.ly and Vanco offer customer support and tools to help congregations promote electronic giving, troubleshoot any problems, manage transactions, and more.

"The bottom line is that congregations should compare all the features and pricing for both Vanco and Tithe.ly in order to determine the best match," Edison-Swift says. "The good thing is that congregations can't go wrong with either option."

**To learn more about the ELCA preferred vendors for online giving, visit <https://elca.org/preferredvendors>.**

**Find links to webinar videos about online giving at [www.neiasynod.org/ministries/generosity](http://www.neiasynod.org/ministries/generosity).**

really get an opportunity to listen to what God is doing in their lives."

The three years at Wartburg Theological Seminary include an 18-month internship component required for ordination in the ELCA. Students use the Collaborative Learning Model, an innovative approach to delivering theological education, while being taught by seminary faculty, trained supervisors, and mentors in a local congregation.

"When students transition to a paid internship in a congregation, they are mentored, paid for their work, and also develop the skills necessary to become a pastor," said Beckstrom.

Both Wartburg institutions were founded in the 1800s when Wilhelm Lohe in Germany sent Georg Grossmann to America to establish educational institutions for German immigrants. In the 21st century, it was a natural fit for

## OBITUARY

**Pastor Jim Carstensen** died Oct. 22, 2020, at the age of 75. He was ordained on Oct. 8, 1972. He served as pastor at the Center for American Lutheran Ministries in Saginaw, Mich.; Martin Luther Lutheran in Mobile, Ala.; Immanuel, Waukee, Iowa and the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Waterloo, Iowa, until his retirement on Sept. 1, 2010.

The funeral service took place Oct. 29 at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Waverly and was livestreamed on the Redeemer Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/redluthwaverly.org](https://www.facebook.com/redluthwaverly.org).

He is survived by his sister and a nephew. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Gretchen Smelcer, PO Box 807, Raymond MS 39154-0807.

The complete obituary is available at [www.kaisercorson.com/obituaries/James-Jay-Carstensen?obId=18725501#/obituaryInfo](https://www.kaisercorson.com/obituaries/James-Jay-Carstensen?obId=18725501#/obituaryInfo).

the college and seminary to come together to train the next generation of ministry leaders. "We are already praying for these students who are on their way to us," said Beckstrom.

If you know a high school student with the gifts for ministry, please refer their name to the Wartburg Accelerated Ministry Program with the referral form at [www.wartburg.edu/ministry](http://www.wartburg.edu/ministry), and program staff will get in touch with them.



## NOVEMBER EVENTS

- 5 **Zoom Meeting**, Interim Ministry Colleague Group, 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 5 **Zoom Meeting**, Youth Ministry Network, 10 a.m.
- 12 **Zoom Meeting**, New to Synod, 9:30-11:15 a.m.
- 26-27 **Office Closed**, Thanksgiving

## DECEMBER EVENTS

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

## JANUARY 2021 EVENTS

- 1 **Office Closed**, New Year's Day
- 7 **Zoom Meeting**, Interim Ministry Colleague Group, 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 7 **Zoom Meeting**, Youth Ministry Network, 10 a.m.
- 9 **Meeting**, Synodical Women's Organization Cluster, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Synod Office (Zoom if bad weather)
- 9 **Zoom Meeting**, Congregation Treasurers
- 18 **Office Closed**, Martin Lutheran King, Jr. Day

## FEBRUARY 2021 EVENTS

- 5 **Zoom Meeting**, First Call Theological Education Executive Committee, 10 a.m.
- 5 **Zoom Meeting**, Interim Ministry Colleague Group, 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 26-28 **Event**, Candidacy Retreat, Shalom Spiritual Center, Dubuque

## 'FAITH AND RACE' EVENT VIDEO

Some 100 youth and youth ministry leaders participated in the Oct. 18 "Faith and Race" live online event, and now other youth groups can join in the recorded version.

The event included music, poetry and conversations about racial experiences shared by the artists Teddy the Great, Joe Davis and Agape (David Scherer). Youth groups can view the entire event and download documents with discussion topics, along with links to other resources. A follow-up survey is also available for participants to complete.

The event was the first in a series of "Three Tough Talks" sponsored by the Northeastern Iowa Synod and Lutheran

## INSTALLING

**Rev. Kristen Briner Wiperman**, St. Matthew and Luther Manor, Dubuque, pending  
**Rev. Katie Pals**, Trinity, Belmond, pending

## 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  
**Waverly**, LSI/Beloit (chaplain)  
**West Union**, Zion

Campus Ministry of the University of Northern Iowa. Two more live online Tough Talks are planned for Sunday, Jan. 31, on "Faith and Mental Health," and Sunday March 21, on "Faith and Poverty." The link to view the "Faith and Race" event and download related documents can be found at [www.neiasynod.org/youth-ministry](http://www.neiasynod.org/youth-ministry).

# PRAYER CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 2020						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
<b>H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders</b> Rev. Michael R. Blair, Waverly Rev. Leo E. Combs-Lay, Cresco <b>1</b>	Immanuel, Scarville <b>2</b>	Faith, Shell Rock <b>3</b>	St. Paul, Balltown <b>4</b>	Ellen Ward, Decorah <b>5</b>	Deer Creek, Carpenter <b>6</b>	Our Savior's, Stanhope <b>7</b>
Rev. Jane Granzow, Iowa Falls <b>8</b>	St. Petri, Story City <b>9</b>	Rev. Jeffrey D. Jacobs, Lime Springs Rev. Ole Winter, Decorah <b>10</b>	Rev. Dr. Jennifer E. Edinger, Decorah <b>11</b>	Emanuel, Strawberry Point <b>12</b>	St. Sebald, Strawberry Point <b>13</b>	Rev. Robert L. Edwards, Story City Rev. William P. Thalacker, Waverly <b>14</b>
St. John, Sumner <b>15</b>	Rev. Corey W. Smith, Waverly <b>16</b>	<b>Middle East Peace</b> St. John (Buck Creek), Sumner <b>17</b>	St. John (Stapleton), Waucoma <b>18</b>	St. Peter (Richfield), Sumner <b>19</b>	St. Paul, Thornton <b>20</b>	Rev. Gary G. Hatcher, Garnavillo <b>21</b>
Grace, Tripoli <b>22</b>	St. John (Crane Creek), Tripoli <b>23</b>	St. Paul, Volga <b>24</b>	Redeemer, Washburn <b>25</b>	Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Waterloo <b>26</b>	Our Savior's, Waterloo <b>27</b>	St. Ansgar, Waterloo <b>28</b>
St. John (Bennington), Waterloo <b>29</b>	Trinity, Waterloo <b>30</b>					

*Introducing 'Safe Gatherings' Training to Protect Children*  
 << Continued from page 5

sive nature of the Safe Gatherings program in helping to keep our children and vulnerable adults safe is well worth the cost.

So, what are the costs? The total cost per person for each lay volunteer is \$37. The background check and training are good for three years, so this averages out to \$12.33 per year per volunteer. Congregations/ministry sites can choose to pay this cost for their volunteers or ask the volunteers to cover the cost. The cost per person for each paid staff member, including rostered ministers, is \$45. This higher fee covers a multi-county background check, which is required since rostered ministers and other church staff usually serve in a number of locations during their ministry. Congregations should cover this fee for all staff. However, to help in this time of

transition between programs, the Northeastern Iowa Synod will cover the full fee in this first round of training for all rostered ministers. We will also be able to cover a small amount of the cost for each youth worker in this first round of training.

Congregations and ministry sites that have staff or volunteers who transport children or youth to activities can also request a Department of Motor Vehicle check. The cost for this is \$12.50, the amount that Iowa charges for this check.

Finally, our enterprise account with Safe Gatherings also gives us access to CongregationU, the sister company of Safe Gatherings. CongregationU can help provide training on a wide range of topics for rostered ministers, staff, volunteers, and laity. Most courses

are only \$12 per person. We will require all rostered ministers to complete the Clergy and Ministerial Ethics course at a cost of \$22 each. The Northeastern Iowa Synod will also cover the cost of this course in the first round for all rostered ministers. Subsequent training costs should be covered by the congregation as a general budget item or a continuing education expense.

For more information about Safe Gatherings, visit their website at <https://safegatherings.com>. For more information on CongregationU, including a list of courses offered, go to <https://safegatherings.com/congregationu>. Congregations and rostered ministers will also be receiving information from Safe Gatherings and from the synod office once the program goes live.



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

# Good News

November 2020  
Volume 33  
Number 10

*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**

Here it is November already. We start the month with All Saints Sunday and end the month with Thanksgiving celebrations and the start of Christmas shopping. November also includes Election Day, Veteran's Day, Remembrance Day (Canada) and Revolution Anniversary (Mexico). I'm sure there are more holidays, birthdays, anniversary dates than the ones listed in my planner. But when I think of November, I think mostly of Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving makes me think of all that I am thankful for. All the blessings God has bestowed to us. All the people in my life, I call family and friends. But it also brings to mind a long-standing tradition at my church of having a potluck meal after the Thank Offering Service usually held the Sunday before Thanksgiving.

The Women of the ELCA has taken into account that many of the normal things we have done as a matter of tradition, may not be happening this year. They have published ***Giving Thanks to God, All Day, Every Day*** at the [WomenoftheELCA.org](http://WomenoftheELCA.org). I am very grateful for this organization. I have been a life long Lutheran, but other than knowing my mother and grandmother participating in circle and Ladies Aid meetings, I didn't really know or understand the full scope of this organization until 2008 when I attended my first Triennial Gathering in Salt Lake City. I am still learning and growing in my faith. What are you grateful for? Please join me in supporting our ministry together, not just at our local level in your congregation, but at the cluster, synod and church-wide expression as well. Together we can do great things!

*Anna Jetson  
NE IA SWO President*

## **Stewardship Committee**

In the month of November our idea of stewardship turns to our annual Thankofferings. "Thankofferings show gratitude for God's blessings and give us an important and tangible way to express that gratitude. It is a tradition grounded in our celebration of community, of meeting together to joyfully give thanks for what God has given us.

Thankofferings have always been, and still are, our opportunity to say thank you to God in both significant and ordinary moments."

<https://www.womenoftheelca.org/filebin/pdf/resources/AllAboutThankofferings.n.pdf>

Your thankofferings join you together with all the women of the ELCA to be impactful in fostering change and promoting service and community. As has been said many times; "together, we do more than we could ever do apart".

*Deb Jacobsen*

## **Justice Committee**

"Mirrors and Windows"

I teach middle school students. Returning to school during this time in our lives was something that brought anxiety to many of us. I knew that a focus in my classroom community was to be for the social and emotional well-being of the students. We began the year with the metaphor of *mirrors* and *windows*. "What does it mean to look at something through a mirror"? "What does it mean to look at something through a window"? Through discussion, students were telling me that they can't yet relate to a time and place when they were ever much different than their peers. In our small town in Iowa, the people they knew all had the same race, the same economic class, similar religious beliefs, and more. They have the self-awareness and social awareness to know that as they expand their horizons beyond their hometown, they will have different lived experiences. As Women of the ELCA, let us come together and use our voices to speak and act boldly with a heart towards justice so that young people will have role models.

"Some of the best and hardest work God calls us to do is to love other people". Lisa-Jo Baker, from the blog post "6 Helpful Ways to Respond to Hard Conversations", July 23, 2015 @ [incourage.me](https://www.incourage.me).

Join Lutheran women across the church every Tuesday at noon to **pray** together.

<https://www.womenoftheelca.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/prayer2020fi.pdf>

*Jennifer Larson*



## Discipleship Committee

What is discipleship? It is teaching others Bible truths while living a life that reflects what living for Christ is all about. This is not a one time thing. We are to practice every day. There are some facets to being a disciple we do not always realize. Our hand has appendages to help us do the things for others and ourselves. What are the appendages? They are our fingers, five small bones attached to our hands. But what mighty things we can accomplish with them.

A disciple has appendages too, Justice, Evangelism and Stewardship.

Justice asks us to treat all people with dignity and respect and support them when they need help. Evangelism means praying for others, making kits and quilts and studying the Bible together. These and many other things are the ways we carry out God's great command, service to others. Stewardship is managing and sharing the resources God has given us. We can do this by supporting the Women of the ELCA through the different funds, like Katie's fund, encouraging units to use the Gather for Bible studies and sharing what we have with those in need in our communities and around the world.

As people of God we may not always be of one mind but we are to be of one heart. We are meant to be united in the mission of Christ. May our unity as the family of God bless the world with God's love. (some excerpts from 9-15 Christ In Our Home)

Bonnie Dralle

## 2020 LWR Ingathering

As you know, our scheduled Spring Ingatherings for LWR were cancelled because the St Paul warehouse had to shut down. Fortunately, with the support and assistance of managers at LWR, we were able to organize an IN-Gathering for September 12. Frankly, we were unsure what to expect, but the response was remarkable!!

Our pick-up began @ 7:30 am in Olson's Explosives' parking lot in Decorah. We had a terrific crew of loaders from Hesper and Big Canoe. Even though it was raining, it did not dampen their enthusiasm! By 10:30 am, they had received a total of 1,030 boxes, considerably more than we have had for a few years! Donations came from Upper Iowa, Little Flock and Shechem clusters as well as donations from Albert Lea MN, Mason City, Elma, Osage, Grafton and Belmond. Totals were:

2178 Quilts	892 Personal Care kits
2317 School kits	533 Masks
456 Baby Care kits	74 Fabric kits
7 Blankets	

This is the only Decorah In-Gathering for this year. We hope to return to our "normal" schedule next year. And the driver who delivered our items reported

that the LWR personnel were extremely excited and appreciative to see the load arrive. The need is great and they have little right now. That means we need to get busy!!!

Dee Wyatt & Sandy Gavle

## CALENDAR

- Nov. 7 LWR Ingathering for Clusters CEH, St Timothy Lutheran, Hudson  
SWO Board Meeting, 9-noon, Zoom
- Nov. 9 LWR Ingathering, Southport Mall, Mason City, 9-11 am
- Dec 1 Deadline for January *Good News*
- Jan 1 Deadline for February *Good News*
- Jan 9 SWO Board Meeting, 9-3, Synod Office, (by Zoom if weather issues)
- 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

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*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)

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

We would 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

# Living Faith @

Dear Faith Shapers,

Advent is coming. I don't know about you, but I really need an advent this year. Advent is a season of waiting. With all of the unknowns we have faced in 2020 it is comforting to come back to advent. Advent is a time of anticipation and waiting for the gift of the season which is Jesus. If we pay attention, God will surprise us with God's presence in unexpected places. Just like Jesus being unexpectedly born in a manger in Bethlehem.

Preparing our hearts for Christmas is not just another thing to accomplish on an already overflowing to do list. Advent leads us to pause, to breathe, and to capture those simple moments. Advent invites us to slow down and enjoy the hope and miracle of the season. When we embrace advent, we will find what we are seeking- Emmanuel- God with us.

May your advent be filled with good news of great joy!

Deacon Lisa Kammerer



## 10 Benefits of Giving Thanks to God

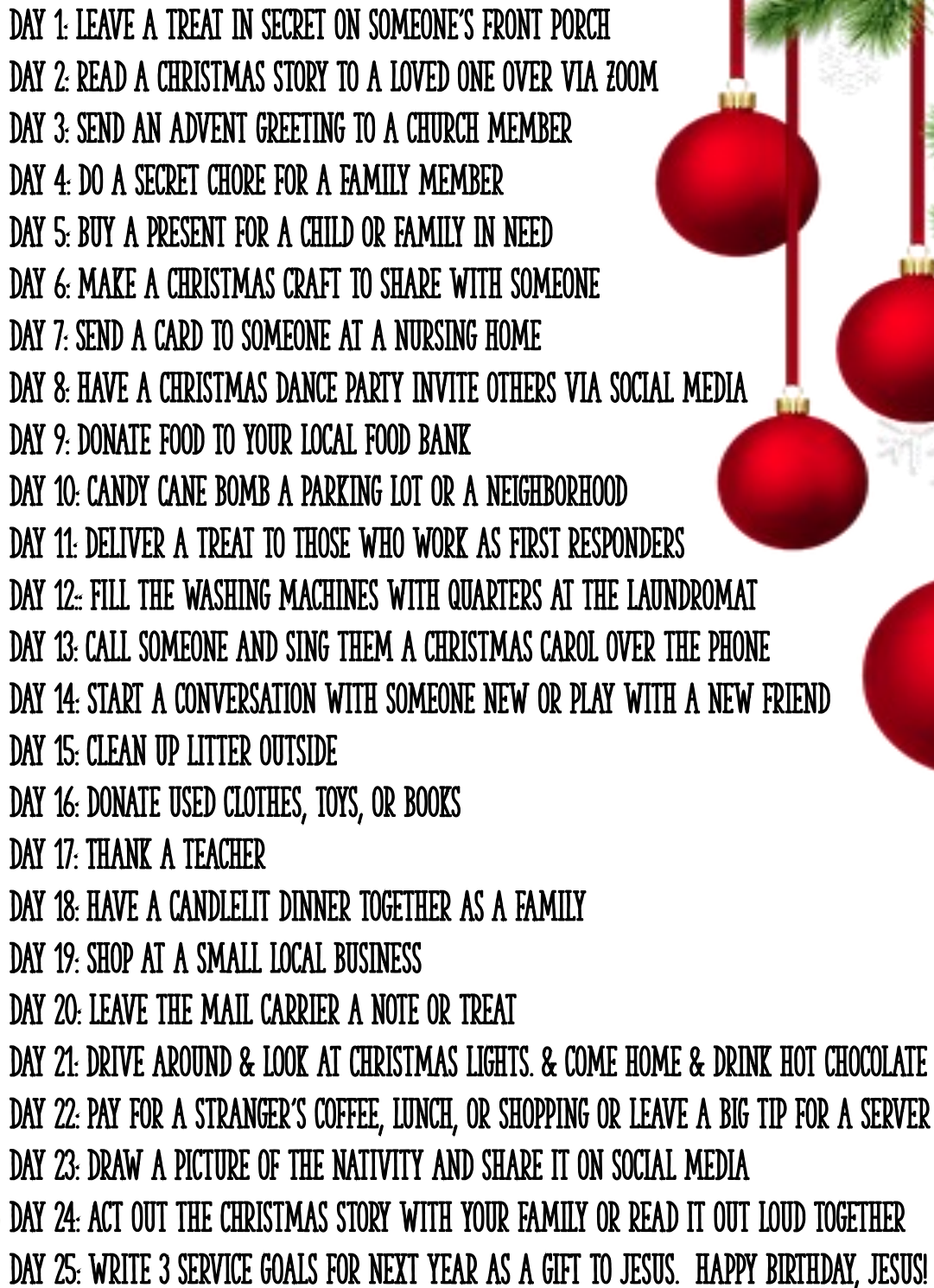
1. **Gratitude Glorifies God.** Our gratitude glorifies God when we exalt not the gifts but the Giver. Gratitude helps us realize all we have comes from God and not from us.
2. **Gratitude Opens Our Eyes.** There's a beautiful cycle in giving thanks. The more we thank God, the more we will see God working in and around us.
3. **Gratitude Brings Peace.** Gratitude helps us see God's hands over all of our circumstances which gives us peace.
4. **Gratitude Draws Us To God.** Gratitude for the magnitude of undeserved kindness draws us to God.
5. **Gratitude Brings Contentment.** It's not happy people who are thankful, it's thankful people are happy! Gratitude turns what we have into enough.
6. **Gratitude Deepens Our Faith.** Keeping record of God's past faithfulness is a faith boost when we face difficulty.
7. **Gratitude Leads To Joy.** Realizing God's abundant goodness, even when times are hard, is a gateway for joy.
8. **Gratitude Guards Against Envy.** Gratitude makes us realize we have far more than we deserve. A grateful heart has no room for envy.
9. **Gratitude Helps Us Live In The Present.** Gratitude opens our eyes to the simple beauty of ordinary days.
10. **Gratitude Is A Testimony to God's Goodness.** When we acknowledge what God's done for us we show God to the world around us.

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](#)

 Find us on  
Facebook

# TIS THE SEASON TO SERVE

- 
- The image features a festive Christmas theme with green pine branches and white snowflakes framing the text. On the right side, four large red Christmas ornaments hang from the branches. The list of 25 service ideas is presented in a simple, black, sans-serif font.
- DAY 1: LEAVE A TREAT IN SECRET ON SOMEONE'S FRONT PORCH
  - DAY 2: READ A CHRISTMAS STORY TO A LOVED ONE OVER VIA ZOOM
  - DAY 3: SEND AN ADVENT GREETING TO A CHURCH MEMBER
  - DAY 4: DO A SECRET CHORE FOR A FAMILY MEMBER
  - DAY 5: BUY A PRESENT FOR A CHILD OR FAMILY IN NEED
  - DAY 6: MAKE A CHRISTMAS CRAFT TO SHARE WITH SOMEONE
  - DAY 7: SEND A CARD TO SOMEONE AT A NURSING HOME
  - DAY 8: HAVE A CHRISTMAS DANCE PARTY INVITE OTHERS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA
  - DAY 9: DONATE FOOD TO YOUR LOCAL FOOD BANK
  - DAY 10: CANDY CANE BOMB A PARKING LOT OR A NEIGHBORHOOD
  - DAY 11: DELIVER A TREAT TO THOSE WHO WORK AS FIRST RESPONDERS
  - DAY 12: FILL THE WASHING MACHINES WITH QUARTERS AT THE LAUNDROMAT
  - DAY 13: CALL SOMEONE AND SING THEM A CHRISTMAS CAROL OVER THE PHONE
  - DAY 14: START A CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE NEW OR PLAY WITH A NEW FRIEND
  - DAY 15: CLEAN UP LITTER OUTSIDE
  - DAY 16: DONATE USED CLOTHES, TOYS, OR BOOKS
  - DAY 17: THANK A TEACHER
  - DAY 18: HAVE A CANDLELIT DINNER TOGETHER AS A FAMILY
  - DAY 19: SHOP AT A SMALL LOCAL BUSINESS
  - DAY 20: LEAVE THE MAIL CARRIER A NOTE OR TREAT
  - DAY 21: DRIVE AROUND & LOOK AT CHRISTMAS LIGHTS. & COME HOME & DRINK HOT CHOCOLATE
  - DAY 22: PAY FOR A STRANGER'S COFFEE, LUNCH, OR SHOPPING OR LEAVE A BIG TIP FOR A SERVER
  - DAY 23: DRAW A PICTURE OF THE NATIVITY AND SHARE IT ON SOCIAL MEDIA
  - DAY 24: ACT OUT THE CHRISTMAS STORY WITH YOUR FAMILY OR READ IT OUT LOUD TOGETHER
  - DAY 25: WRITE 3 SERVICE GOALS FOR NEXT YEAR AS A GIFT TO JESUS. HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JESUS!