

Cultivate spiritual practices for a deeper connection to God

by Marcia Hahn

Early mornings are a spiritual time for Pastor Lee Gable, who begins each day by taking his prayer life outside.



Pastor Lee Gable

"I like those first moments of morning light, so I spend intentional time outside facing the rising sun," he says. "It reminds me of the Resurrection dawn when Mary Magdalene saw the risen Christ in the morning light."

While outdoors, Gable prays for people on his prayer list. Sometimes he uses Google Maps so that he can turn and face toward different people he is praying for, near or far away.

Gable, who serves Fredsville Lutheran near Cedar Falls, has made the art of spiritual practices a priority in his personal life and in his ministry to help others deepen their relationship with God. His own spiritual journey includes a two-year training course in contemplative spiritual direction with the Oasis Ministries for Spiritual Development community, a spiritual immersion with the monks of the New Melleray Abbey near Dubuque, and a 119 km pilgrimage with his wife, Pastor Dena Gable, on the Camino de Santiago in Spain.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES CENTERED ON LISTENING TO GOD

Spiritual practices can help people step back from the busyness of their day to focus on getting closer to God. Jesus often sought solitude in nature to pray and meditate in silence. He fasted, rested on the Sabbath, read scripture, worshipped publicly and shared meals with others. He taught his disciples to follow spiritual disciplines, as well.

Anyone can begin a spiritual practice at home or at another quiet, meaningful place to nurture calmness and reflection to listen to God. Spiritual practices can be done with others as part of a devotion through singing and fellowship. They can also be part of an activity that connects with work, a walk in nature or a community service.

"There is no one right way to express and experience the work of the Holy Spirit in your life," Gable says.



Sunrise photo by Pastor Lee Gable.

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To get started, Gable suggests setting an intentional time each day, even if it's for only 10 minutes of silence and contemplative prayer.

"Make an appointment to pay attention to God to listen to what the Spirit is saying," he says. "Listen with the ears of the heart. If you have to clear your mind and start over, that's perfectly fine. Use a word or phrase from scripture to make sure you know it will call your attention back to God."

In addition, set aside a special place at home or outdoors dedicated for those appointments with God. In the same way that dining tables are used for eating meals, an intentional space can be dedicated to listening to the spirit.

"Come to that space at the same time in the morning or evening," Gable says. "You might pray with words, but sometimes the language of prayer is silence and stillness so we can hear as much as we speak."

Many people prefer a more active prayer life, such as the reflective Benedictine practice of "Ora et labora"—to pray and work. Gable learned about the practice from the monks at New Melleray Abbey. They took their tools and the psalms to the fields to connect the work of their hands with prayer and God, based on Psalm 90:17—"May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands."

"We can pray with wrenches, hammers, kitchen tools or books—our hands can pray with the work we do," Gable says.

People can also connect with God through their recreational activities. "We can take time to dedicate an outdoor experience with renewal in

A PILGRIMAGE OF FAITH IN EASTERN IOWA

Twelve community members from six different congregations joined a pilgrimage of faith across Eastern Iowa in September, co-sponsored by Trinity Lutheran and St. John's Episcopal, Mason City. According to Becky Elsbernd, Trinity's parish nurse, this three-day "Walk A Way" was an opportunity for people to step away from their noisy, busy lives to listen to and be in God's presence.

The 30-mile walk began at the Field of Dreams in Dyersville and followed the Heritage Trail to Dubuque. Each morning began with a prayer and scripture reading, and everyone was encouraged to do reflection on their own during the walk. The first day included a stop at the Basilica of St. Francis Xavier in Dyersville and an overnight stay at the New Melleray Abbey in Peosta.

"We joined the brothers in their prayer services and rituals," Elsbernd says. "There is very little talking there, so we could really lean into the solitude and silence."

With the help of a support van, the group returned to the trail to continue their walk to Dubuque and an overnight stay at the Shalom Spirituality Center. The final day included a closing ritual of prayer and reflection to mark the end of the walk.

"This walk was an opportunity to step away from our ordinary life and be surrounded by God and nature to listen more closely to what is stirring in our life," Elsbernd says. "We became closer to one another and formed new friendships with the others we walked with."

A FOCUS ON FAITH AND WELLNESS

This was the third pilgrimage walk that Trinity has offered as part of its faith and wellness outreach ministry, which includes support groups, exercise classes and spiritual practices to participate in as a group or online. Their Lectio Divina sessions are offered in person and online for people to



pray the Scriptures together. Participants take turns reading the selected Scripture passage out loud three times, with time for silence and reflective questions in between. Trinity's new Visio Divina sessions take place at the McNider Art Museum where people can select an art piece to sit with and listen to what it stirs inside of them.

The Centering Prayer invites people to sit together in silence online or in person for 20 minutes to practice the art of letting go and to focus on a sacred word to stay centered on God. "This is a great practice of being," Elsbernd says. "For me, that being is just as important as doing."

A community Labyrinth in Trinity's courtyard guides visitors through a path focused on prayer. Trinity also offers a Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry, which integrates prayer, the laying on of hands and anointing with oil by trained volunteers to enhance the body's capacity for healing.

"Healing touch is designed to be a complementary part of a treatment plan that can help us let go of things and strengthen our relationship with God."

peace, reconnecting with stories of Jesus,” Gable says.

People may want to use their gift of music to sing and share with others. Those who enjoy writing may keep a prayer journal. Gable likes to get out on the bike trail to “pedal in prayer” and keep a photographic journal. “I like to capture images of what God is up to in the natural world and make it part of my prayer life to share with others.”

Some people draw closer to God through the spiritual discipline of fasting or putting some things aside for a season to make more time for prayer and intentionality with God.

People can also engage in spiritual practices in community with others. In his ministry, Gable encourages people to have a listening partner to intentionally pray, listen to God and reflect together.

“God’s intention for us is a life together in beloved community and how we build one another up in life,” Gable says.

During their six-day Camino pilgrimage, the Gables met people from all around the world walking in the same direction on parallel journeys, each carrying and receiving different belongings on the walk. Gable says that experience was a way to put motion into prayer.

“Jesus walked everywhere, so pilgrimages are naturally a part of faith tradition,” Gable says. “For me, the Camino walk made me consider how I pray for those whose lives are always in motion and have to carry everything with them to find a safe place to be.”

Gable says his spiritual direction training has helped him discover better ways to express his spirituality and guide others through their own spiritual journey. He invites

people to share about their own spiritual pilgrimage and what God has been up to in their life.

“As we do Bible studies at Fredsville, at the conclusion we join hands in a circle and pray one at a time for concerns, and then say the Lord’s Prayer together,” Gable says. “It unites us across time and space since there is most likely someone else out there praying the Lord’s prayer at the same time.”

MUSIC, LAUGHTER AND SCRIPTURE

Pastor Jane Harris is open about her recovery from alcoholism and the spiritual practices that helped her through it. She says laughter, music and scripture enabled her to find God at a time when alcohol had taken over her life.



Pastor Jane Harris leads a Holy Humor Sunday worship service.

Harris says she was raised in a loving family of hardworking people, but there were a lot of addictions. She recalls her mom giving her a small glass of champagne when she was 12 to help her sleep one night.

“I think that planted the seed in me,” says Harris, who serves Our Savior’s and St. Paul in Mason City.

Harris didn’t drink much for the next 25 years, but as an adult taking

care of her sick mother and going through a divorce, she began to rely on alcohol to cope.

“Drinking became like a mini vacation because I didn’t think I had time to care for myself,” she says. “It got out of control over the next 10 years.”

A number of church friends helped Harris realize it was time to get help. She attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and learned the 12-step program, admitting that she was powerless and believed in a power greater than herself.

While working on her sobriety, Harris says she realized she needed to do more to care for herself, so she began listening to Christian music and worship songs.

“Music was probably one of the best things for me,” Harris says. “Good Christian music or any kind of music would calm me down. Listening to Christian music stations with Bible verses, I realized we can do all things through Christ.”

Harris says that embracing laughter was also important. “We take ourselves too seriously,” she says. “People have fun drinking and think that being sober for the rest of their life means their fun is over, but we can find God in laughter and music and talking to people.”

Harris had always been an active volunteer in her church, but after getting sober she stopped going to church. Her pastor invited her to come back and just worship.

“That’s when I thought there was more to church than just teaching Sunday school,” she says. “There really is something to this God stuff.”

After becoming sober in 2003, Harris returned to school to earn a

YOUTH EXPLORE PRAYER STATIONS

Prayer stations set up annually at Decorah Lutheran introduce youth to a variety of spiritual practices they can try individually or in small groups. According to Ace Hoefs, youth ministry director, youth in grades five through 12 can explore a new station every week during Lent, followed by group discussion about the stations and prayers to lift each other up.

Here is a look at some of the stations:

- **World Map** – Use a battery-operated candle to mark where they are praying for in the world. Newspapers may be added for current events happening around the world.
- **Self Affirmation** – Take time for a private prayer to thank God for their unique God-given gifts.
- **Home Altar** – Add an item to the candlelit altar and share about what they brought and how it connects to God.
- **Prayer Pebbles** – Create a personal pray pebble out of clay, then decorate and fire it to keep.
- **Community Scripture Painting** – Use acrylic paint to add color to a scripture-related painting outlined in black lines.
- **Prayer Puzzle Pieces** – Color a puzzle piece and add it to the bigger picture to complete together.
- **Prayer Beads** – Receive a prayer bead and share with the group who or what they prayed for, then keep the bead. Many students add the beads to their shoe laces.

“Our goal is to always offer new and additional ways for students to surround themselves with prayer,” Hoefs says. “These stations help the students center themselves and take a moment to breathe while exploring different opportunities. With six to 10 different prayer stations, no one loses focus or goofs around. This activity has helped our faith community dig deeper into what a prayer life can look like, not just at church, but in their daily lives.”



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master's degree in congregation and community care. She worked as a licensed alcohol and drug counselor in Minnesota for three years, then decided to get a master's in divinity degree. She was ordained as a Lutheran pastor in 2015.

Harris says that reading the Bible daily as part of her recovery helped her feel better and sleep better. Last January, she invited parishioners to join her in reading the Bible through daily video posts. She reads from the Old Testament, New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs, with a goal to complete the entire Bible by the end of the year. Links to the 15-minute videos are posted on her “Together — with Pastor Jane” Facebook page.

“For some reason, reading out loud makes you get a lot more out of it,” Harris says. “I have to concentrate on what I’m reading and then I listen to it before posting.”

Harris says that a lot of people think that doing a spiritual practice means reading from the Bible, but any type of devotion can work.

“There is a saying in AA to keep it simple,” she says. “Spiritually, we can meet God anywhere — in music, laughing, talking. We need to be alert to where God is active in our life. There are amazing signs to see and recognize that God is with us all the time. Being alert to the little things that happen every day can be better than any long devotional.”

NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD



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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 neiasynod.org/blog/newsletter. To request a printed version, call the synod office.



neiasynod.org

Synod youth invited to connect at Nov. 3 event

High school youth and adult leaders from the Northeastern Iowa Synod are invited to come together for an afternoon of games, Bible study and other fun activities on Sunday, Nov. 3, at the "Created to Be Connected" event. This new event will take place 2-5 p.m. at St. John Lutheran in Cedar Falls.

Youth and leaders will have an opportunity to connect with one another, share ideas and get energized and inspired in their faith. Special guest Aaron Shoppa,



program director for Youth Ministries for the ELCA, will share about youth ministries and other programs of the wider church.

REGISTER BY OCT. 28

The event is open for all youth in grades 9 through 12 and their youth leaders, whether they attended the 2024 Youth Gathering or not. The cost to attend is \$5 per person, which includes refreshments. Check-in will begin at 1:30 p.m.

Register online at neiasynod.org/connected-youth. Contact Pastor Kristen Rod, 319-352-1414, with questions.

New season of youth ministry webinars begins Oct. 17

Northeastern Iowa Synod youth workers, clergy and volunteers are invited to join a new season of free webinars offered in partnership with Youth Ministry Consultants.

Youth Ministry Consultants is a non-profit organization that offers webinars on a variety of youth ministry topics to help congregations, parents and leaders pass faith on to the next generation. Tiger McLuen, who serves as executive director, presented three youth ministry workshops at the synod's C3 Ministry Fair in June.

Three upcoming sessions will be offered live on Thursdays at 11 a.m.:

OCT. 17, 2024

Celebrating Chaos and Implementing Structure

Learn about effective programming for middle school ministry and how to retain volunteers.

NOV. 14, 2024

3 Values Great Ministries Embrace

Learn practical ideas to move your ministry to thrive.

DEC. 12, 2024

What Every High Schooler Needs From Your Ministry

Discover effective approaches to youth ministry for high schoolers.

REGISTER FREE WITH CODE

Anyone from the Northeastern Iowa Synod can register free by entering the code **NEIA24**. Recordings of past sessions are also available for viewing.



Visit neiasynod.org/ym-webinar-f24 to learn more and register.

NEW YOUTH MINISTRY CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Youth Ministry Consultants will launch a new Children's and Youth Ministry Certification Program in January 2025. This nine-month program will feature in-person retreats, monthly interactive learning modules, and online cohort meetings. The modules will provide practical training on children's ministry topics that can be applied in a variety of ministry contexts. Leaders will be equipped with insight, strategy and tools to grow and strengthen their ministry and leadership influence and impact.

YMC is offering 50 percent off for those who register for the pilot cohort, which begins in January. Learn more and register at youthministryconsultants.org/cymcp.

Register for Region 5 day of Boundaries Education

NOV. 7, 2024

Actively serving rostered ministers from the Northeastern Iowa Synod are reminded to register for the ELCA Region 5 Boundaries Education day set for Thursday, Nov. 7.

This required training will be offered from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at satellite locations in each Region 5 synod for in-person discussion, Q & A, and online training. In this synod, the training will take place at these locations:

- **Dubuque** — St. Peter Lutheran, 3200 Asbury Rd.
- **Iowa Falls** — Bethany Lutheran, 2712 Washington Ave.
- **Mason City** — St. James Lutheran, 1148 4th St.
- **Postville** — St. Paul Lutheran, 116 E. Military Rd.
- **Waverly** — St. Paul's Lutheran, 301 1st St. NW

COORDINATED ANNUAL TRAINING

The 12 synods of ELCA Region 5 (synods of Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and the Northern Great Lakes Synod) have joined to offer coordinated boundaries education annually for rostered ministers. The training days will rotate between this year's professional ethics/boundaries training, next year's gender justice training, and racial justice training to be offered in 2026.

Rostered ministers from the Northeastern Iowa Synod are expected to complete professional development in boundaries every year. This year's professional ethics/boundaries training will be repeated in three years. Clergy members who have al-

REGISTER TODAY!

Boundaries Education

November 7, 2024

9:00 AM - 3:00 PM (lunch provided)

ready renewed through Safe Gatherings will still need to attend the Nov. 7 training to get on the new renewal cycle for professional ethics/boundaries training.

The registration fee for the Nov. 7 training is \$100, which includes lunch. Read more and register online at neiasynod.org/s-a-f-e-ministry-team.

'Leading in Turbulent Times' webinar series continues

The final sessions of the six-part "Leading in Turbulent Times" webinar series will be offered in October and November.

Sponsored by the synod's Disaster Response Network, the free webinars focus on topics related to disaster response and preparedness, and coping strategies related to traumatic events.

Rostered ministers, lay leaders, staff members and others interested are invited to join the one-hour Zoom sessions over lunch at 12:30 p.m. The

interactive sessions include group discussions and time for questions.

Oct. 8 — A Coaching Approach

Presented by Jill Beverlin, professional certified coach and director of Coaching Ministries in the ELCA

Oct. 22 — Community Grief and Mental Health Triage (Part 1)

Presented by Pastor Liz Retz, Pastor Kristi Grieder and Pastor Steve Brackett

Oct. 29 — Community Grief and Mental Health Triage (Part 2)

Presented by Pastor Liz Retz and

Pastor Kristi Grieder

Nov. 12 — Check In, Next Best Steps, and Being Community Together
Presented by the Northeastern Iowa Synod Disaster Response Network

Registration is required in order to receive the Zoom link. People can register anytime up to the last session. Once registered, they can attend any or all of the sessions.

Visit neiasynod.org/lunch-learn to learn more and register.

Let's finish 2024 strong!

This synod is full of generous, forward-looking people who invest in what matters!

Your gifts to the Northeastern Iowa Synod's Annual Fund help support congregations in their ministries and foster deeper connections within our faith community. This year our fall appeal will support the ways this synod is "Created to be Connected." Over the past year, this synod's connections in ministry included:

- 6 new rostered leaders (pastors and deacons) ordained.
- 190 people learned and networked at the first synod-wide C3 Ministry Fair.
- 437 youth and leaders attended the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans.
- 3 congregational lay leaders enrolled in the synod's first year of Lay Ministry Training.
- Synod networks and ministries provided resources and learning related to racial justice, substance abuse,

care for creation, the global church, disaster response, hunger, youth ministry, coaching ministry, lay ministry and more.

- Educational and networking opportunities supported rostered ministers through the Fall Theological Conference, Spring Day of Renewal, and First Call Gatherings.
- 300 flood buckets delivered to those impacted by flooding in Western Iowa this summer.

I hope you will consider how you might participate in the 2024 Synod Fall Appeal to help finish 2024 strong and keep these connections going! Stay tuned to learn more.



— *Pastor Liz Bell*

OBITUARIES

Rev. David A. Anderson, 86, of Lakeville, Minn., died Aug. 15, 2024. Funeral services took place Aug. 24 at Christiania Lutheran Church in rural Lakeville.

He graduated from the University of Minnesota and Luther Theological Seminary, and was ordained into the ministry of the American Lutheran Church on June 7, 1964. He served at Trinity Lutheran, Mason City; First Lutheran and Vernon Lutheran, Dows; and St. James Lutheran, Mason City.

Rev. Anderson is survived by his wife, Louise, and three children. His obituary is available at biernanfuneralhome.com/obituaries/David-Anderson?obid=32773567.

Rev. Harley Refsal, age 79, of Decorah, died Sept. 8, 2024.

He was ordained in 1972 and served as the campus pastor at Luther College until 1982. He continued serving Luther College as a professor of Scandinavian Folk Art and Norwegian language. He retired in 2010.

Rev. Refsal is survived by his wife, Norma, and their two children, Carl and Martin. A Celebration of Life will take place Friday, Oct. 11, at Good Shepherd Lutheran in Decorah at 11 a.m. Visitation will be from 9:45 a.m. until the time of service at the church. Lunch and time of remembrance will follow the service. View his obituary at helmsfuneralhomes.com/obituary/harley-refsal?

Register early for Men's Retreat

NOV. 1-3, 2024

Early-bird registration for the "One Year to Live" Men's Retreat is open through Monday, Oct. 7. The event will take place Nov. 1-3 at Camp Ewalu, Strawberry Point.

The retreat is an opportunity for men of all ages to rethink how they set their priorities and discover how God has equipped them to live. It is led by lay members and presented by Lutheran Men in Mission, in partnership with the Northeastern Iowa Synod and Camp Ewalu.

The early-bird registration fee is \$175. After Oct. 7, the rate is \$200, due by Oct. 21. Lodging, six meals and materials are included. Download the brochure/registration form at neiasynod.org/2024/05/oytl.

Festival highlights global cultures and ministries

Guests at the synod's first Global Church Together Festival learned about ministry partnerships in Namibia and Hungary and experienced their customs, cuisines, music and more.

The Global Church Together Network sponsored the festival in August at Trinity Lutheran, Mason City. The event featured interactive displays, hands-on workshops, global music, worship and a sampling of traditional Hungarian food prepared by Trinity congregation members.

The Rev. Dr. Themba Mkhabela, ELCA regional representative for Southern Africa, gave the keynote about ELCA ministries in Namibia and other parts of the world. In addition, guests participated in a "World of 100" simulation to learn about disparities in populations around the world related to income, access to clean water, being able to read and write, hunger and more.

"Thank you to the members of Trinity and the Global Church Together Network for such a wonderful celebration of God's Global Church," says Pastor Liz Bell, assistant to the Bishop. "I left the day encouraged by a great sermon, uplifted by global music, filled with delicious food, and inspired by insights from our keynote speaker and the creative workshops."



Open-face sandwiches prepared by Trinity members represent different parts of Europe.



Pastor Margaret Yackel-Juleen provides musical accompaniment at the festival with a piano decorated with mementos she has brought back from her travels to Hungary.



Guests participating in the "World of 100" simulation are separated into different groups to demonstrate the uneven distribution of global resources around the world.



Left, the Rev. Dr. Themba Mkhabela attends a workshop at the Global Church Together Festival where he gave the keynote address. Right, guests explore an interactive display at the festival.



Talking Out Loud About Addiction

by Pastor Jane Harris, Substance Abuse Network Member

"I will and I ask God to help me." These words are often spoken during special services such as baptisms or affirmations of baptism; installations of council members, and, for some of us, at our ordination service. In these words, we are saying we want to love, follow and serve God—but that we know we can't do it alone! We need God to help us!

As both a person in recovery from an addiction and a pastor, these words mean a lot to me—every day. That's why I'm so grateful to be a part of the Synod's Substance Abuse Network. This network was started to provide help, resources and hope for those in our synod, churches, and communities that are suffering with an addiction, or have a loved one who is struggling.

According to the 2023 United States National Survey on Drug Use and Health: 48.5 million (16.7%)

"It's time to start talking out loud about ways we can support one another on the road to recovery."

Americans (aged 12 and older) battled a substance use disorder in the past year.

Substance use disorders can develop in anyone—regardless of the age, gender, race, financial status, or education level of a person. Yet, because of the stigma surrounding substance abuse, few seek help for this treatable disease. And often, the consequences are devastating.

We here at the Substance Abuse Network, want to change that. We want to be available for you or your loved one when issues of substance abuse arise. It's time to start talking out loud about ways we can sup-

port one another on the road to recovery. Our network is unique in that every one of our members has experience with substance abuse or behavioral health disorders, either personally, or in helping a loved one in their recovery.

Our network includes the following members, and we are here to help you in a confidential and understanding manner: Pastor Brian Julin-McCleary, Deacon Jackie Schilling, Pastor Jane Harris, Pastor Bob Scheurer, Pastor Tom Martin, Pastor Becky Sogge, Pastor Maureen Howard, and Pastor Steve Brackett (Synod liaison).

Please contact the synod office, 319-352-1414, for contact information to reach out to any member!

We are looking for lay members to join our network! Please contact one of the members above, if you are interested!

Remember 'Saint Congregations' that have shaped your faith

by Pastor Kristen Rod, DEM

In early November, congregations in the Lutheran church and many other denominations celebrate All Saints Day, a day in which we remember our loved ones who have died, but whose legacies live on in the ways they shaped our lives and our faith.

Last year, I read a blog post by the Good Friday Collaborative that introduced me to the concept of Saint Congregations. The Good Friday Collaborative is an ecumenical group of grief coaches that provide guid-

ance and support for congregations (of many denominations) that are discerning or going through consolidations, mergers, and closures. They used the term "Saint Congregations" in reference to congregations that had completed their ministry and were now closed.

I love how the term "Saint Congregations" honors the ministry that happened in and through the lives of congregations, even when those congregations have now closed.

If a congregation is facing closure, it can be tempting to think of that congregation as a "failed congregation." That term looks back



Pastor Kristen Rod

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Lay Training and Social Statement Updates

LAY MINISTRY TRAINING

The inaugural group of lay ministry training participants have begun their studies. The Northeastern Iowa Synod has three participants in this cohort. I am grateful for the financial and prayer support we have received for this program.

As we get started, there are many details coming together as we go along. Individuals or congregations who are interested in the cohort beginning in September of 2025, please contact Pastor Kristen Corr Rod at the Synod office. More information can also be found on our website, neiasynod.org/lay-ministry-training. We would be happy to set up a time to visit with those who are interested.

RECONSIDERATIONS OF HUMAN SEXUALITY: GIFT & TRUST SOCIAL STATEMENT

In 2022, the Churchwide Assembly approved the study and recommendations for two reconsiderations of the 2009 Social Statement. The first reconsideration was editorial, asking for word changes that reflect changes in federal law and more current learning about sex, sexuality, and gender. The second reconsideration deals with the four positions of bound conscience. In May, I was named as one of the two bishops to serve on the diverse task force.

In October, the task force will release a draft of the initial editorial changes asked for in the first reconsideration. ELCA members will have an opportunity to read and comment on the proposed changes before the task force makes a final recommendation to the Church Council in February. Any and all changes will be voted on at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly, with a two-thirds majority needed for approval.

The reconsideration of bound-conscience will not be taken up by the task force until fall of 2025. Any proposed changes will also come out in draft form for study and comment, go back to the task force for final recommendations, and then come before the 2028 Churchwide Assembly.

The members of the task force reflect the demographic and ideological diversity of Lutherans in the ELCA. I have found the meetings to be deeply respectful, friendly, and fun (you read that right). Our time has been filled with prayer, listening, seeking everyone's perspective, laughter, and singing. It has been a joy getting to know them and work with them on behalf of the church.

I encourage you to review the draft when it comes out and provide feedback.

— Bishop Kevin Jones



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on the life of the congregation and assumes that the ones who closed the congregation failed their ancestors in the faith. But we would never sit with a loved one who is dying and call their life a failure. When we think of the life of this loved one, we remember all the ways that this loved one formed, shaped and affected the lives of others. Our loved ones live on in our memories, in the stories we tell about the profound impact they had on our lives.

And it is the same with congregations and other ministry organizations. They do amazing work of ministering to and with the people of God in a certain time and place, shaping the faith lives of the people who connect with them. But congregations change, demographics change, energy levels change, and ministry needs change, and sometimes those changes lead congregations and other organizations to discern that it is time for them to complete their ministry and

close. But the ministry of these Saint Congregations lives on in our memories, in the stories we tell about them, and in the ways they have shaped our faith lives and the faith lives of those who have gone before us.

In this season of remembering, I invite you to remember the Saint Congregations that have enriched your life and the lives of your loved ones, and to reflect on the ways in which their ministry lives on.

OCTOBER 2024

- 3 TRANSITIONAL/INTERIM MINISTRY COLLEAGUE GROUP**, Zoom, 9:30 a.m.
- 8 WEBINAR: "A COACHING APPROACH"**, Zoom, 12:30 p.m.
- 10 RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY NETWORK**, Synod Office & Zoom, 3:30 p.m.
- 13-15 FALL THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE**, Holiday Inn/Bien Venu Event Center, Cedar Falls
- 19 SWO FIELD TRIP**, West Bend Grotto
- 22 WEBINAR: "COMMUNITY GRIEF & MENTAL HEALTH TRIAGE (PART 1)"**, Zoom, 12:30 p.m.
- 22 SUBSTANCE ABUSE NETWORK**, Zoom, 3:30 p.m.
- 29 WEBINAR: "COMMUNITY GRIEF & MENTAL HEALTH TRIAGE (PART 2)"**, Zoom, 12:30 p.m.
- 31 SYNOD COUNCIL EXECUTIVE MEETING**, Zoom, 4 p.m.

NOVEMBER 2024

- 1-3 ONE YEAR TO LIVE MEN'S RETREAT**, Ewalu, Strawberry Point
- 3 "CREATED TO BE CONNECTED" YOUTH EVENT**, St. John, Cedar Falls, 2-5 p.m.
- 7 BOUNDARIES TRAINING FOR CLERGY**, Satellite Locations, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.
- 9 SWO MEETING**, Synod Office, 9 a.m.-12 noon
- 12 WEBINAR: "CHECK IN, NEXT BEST STEPS & BEING COMMUNITY TOGETHER"**, Zoom, 12:30 p.m.
- 14 TRANSITIONAL/INTERIM MINISTRY COLLEAGUE GROUP**, Zoom, 9:30 a.m.
- 14 RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY NETWORK**, Synod Office & Zoom, 3:30 p.m.
- 16 SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING**, Zoom, 9 a.m.
- 28-29 SYNOD OFFICE CLOSED**, Thanksgiving Break

DECEMBER 2024

- 5 TRANSITIONAL/INTERIM MINISTRY COLLEAGUE GROUP**, Zoom, 9:30 a.m.
- 6 CANDIDACY COMMITTEE**, Synod Office, 9:30 a.m.
- 12 RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY NETWORK**, Synod Office & Zoom, 3:30 p.m.
- 23-31 SYNOD OFFICE CLOSED**, Christmas Break

JANUARY 2025

- 1 SYNOD OFFICE CLOSED**, New Year's Day
- 2 TRANSITIONAL/INTERIM MINISTRY COLLEAGUE GROUP**, Zoom, 9:30 a.m.
- 9 RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY NETWORK**, Synod Office & Zoom, 3:30 p.m.
- 16 DEANS & CHAPLAINS MEETING**, Zoom, 9 a.m.
- 18 SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING**, Zoom, 9 a.m.

INSTALLING

- **Rev. Matthew Becker**, Big Canoe & Highland, Decorah, Oct. 6

INTERVIEWING

- **Asbury**, Lord of Life, Rev. Karla Wildberger, interim
- **Decorah**, Decorah, staff
- **Decorah**, Good Shepherd, Rev. April Ulring Larson, interim
- **Dows, First***
- **Dysart**, Zion
- **Eldorado, St. Peter***
- **Elgin, Elgin & Elkader, Highland**, Rev. Adam Starrett, interim*
- **Greene**, St. Peter, Rev. Jennifer Edinger, interim
- **Independence**, Immanuel
- **Janesville, Messiah***
- **Jesup**, American & La Porte City, Zion (Jubilee), Rev. Patricia Mohr-Kelly, interim
- **Lake Mills**, Salem
- **Leland, Our Savior & Garner, Faith (Miller)***
- **Maynard**, St. Paul, Rev. Susan Friedrich, interim

- **Osage**, Our Savior's
- **Rockwell**, St. Peter
- **Thornton, St. Paul***
- **Toeterville**, St. Peter & Carpenter, Deer Creek
- **Waterloo, Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd***
- **Waterloo, Our Savior's**, Rev. Lisa Kruse, contract*

SELF-STUDY

- **Cedar Falls**, Bethlehem
- **Decorah, St. John's & Hauge***
- **Decorah**, Washington Prairie
- **Hawkeye, Trinity***
- **New Hampton**, Trinity, Rev. Sue Cira, contract
- **Ossian**, Ossian
- **Tripoli**, Grace
- **Washburn, Redeemer***

ROSTER CHANGES

- **Rev. David Anderson**, deceased
- **Rev. Harley Refsal**, deceased
- **Rev. Patricia Mohr-Kelly**, transfer from Rocky Mountain Synod

*Part-time Call

PORTICO ENROLLMENT

The annual enrollment process to select health care coverage, pre-tax contributions, vision care services and more begins in October.

Sponsoring congregations and organizations will make selections Oct. 1-14. Plan members will select in waves starting Oct. 17 and non-sponsored members select in waves starting Nov. 5.

Watch for an email from Portico with more details.

PORTICO[®]
Benefit Services

PRAYER CALENDAR

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

OCTOBER 1-5, 2024

- **H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders**
- Hanna Langholz
- Rev. Dr. James B. Martin-Schramm
- Rev. Joel H. Becker
- Rev. James K. Knudson
- Stavanger Lutheran Church, Ossian

OCTOBER 6-12, 2024

- Rev. Rev. Melinda McVey
- Rev. Anita Nuetzman
- Rev. Jennifer J. Bohls
- Ossian Lutheran Church, Ossian
- St. Paul Lutheran Church, Postville
- Peace Lutheran Church, Ryan
- Madison Lutheran Church, Ridgeway

OCTOBER 13-19, 2024

- **Middle East Peace**
- Carol Hasvold
- Rev. James A. Mattson
- Rev. Mark D. Walker
- Orleans Lutheran Church, Ridgeway
- Peace Lutheran Church, Ridgeway
- Zion Lutheran Church, Rockford
- St. Peter Lutheran Church, Rockwell

OCTOBER 20-26, 2024

- Rev. Mark A. Anderson
- Rev. Victoria L. Shepherd
- Rev. Elizabeth A. Olson
- Rev. Gregory T. Bjornstad
- Rev. Larry A. Trachte
- Bergen Lutheran Church, Roland
- St. Paul Lutheran Church (Thornton), Rockwell

OCTOBER 27-31, 2024

- Rev. Dena M. Gable
- Rev. William J. Peters
- Rev. Dennis A. Hugdahl
- St. Peter Lutheran Church (Toeterville), St. Ansgar
- Deer Creek Lutheran Church, St. Ansgar

NOVEMBER 1-9, 2024

- **H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders**
- Rev. Leo Combs-Lay
- Rev. Mike Blair
- Rev. Lisa Robison
- Rev. Nichole Robson
- Rev. Rebecca Baird
- Ellen Ward
- Rev. Jane Granzow
- Zion St. John Lutheran Church, Sheffield
- Faith Lutheran Church, Shell Rock

NOVEMBER 10-16, 2024

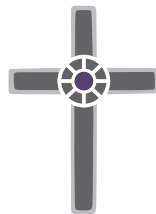
- Rev. Jeff Jacobs
- Rev. Ole Winter
- Rev. Jenny Edinger
- Rev. Bob Edwards
- Rev. Corey Smith
- St. Paul Lutheran Church, Balltown
- Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Stanhope

NOVEMBER 17-23, 2024

- **Middle East Peace**
- Rev. Kate Johnson
- Rev. Mike Erickson
- Rev. Gary Hatcher
- St. Petri Lutheran Church, Story City
- St. Sebald Lutheran Church, Strawberry Point
- Emanuel Lutheran Church, Strawberry Point
- St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church, Sumner

NOVEMBER 24-30, 2024

- St. John Lutheran Church (Buck Creek), Sumner
- St. Peter Lutheran Church (Richfield), Sumner
- Grace Lutheran Church, Tripoli
- St. John Lutheran Church (Crane Creek), Tripoli
- St. Paul Lutheran Church, Volga
- Redeemer Lutheran Church, Washburn
- St. Ansgar Lutheran Church, Waterloo



Living Faith @



Dear Friends,

September is a month of changes ... in seasons, as we start Fall programs, the leaves are turning colors or falling off the trees, the daylight hours are getting shorter, the heat and humidity have decreased, the excitedness of anticipated Reformation Sunday, Advent, and Christmas planning. There is a lot to do and hopefully, you have plenty of volunteers to pitch in and help.

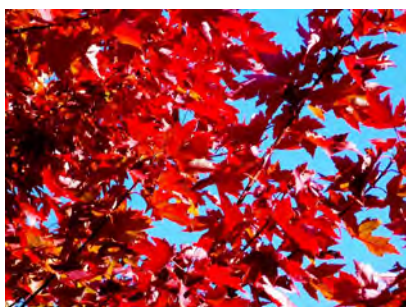
We, who write these articles to help folks with faith formation at home, are seeing changes as well. Our group began when the Synod made the change from committees to Networks. Those who believed that faith formation begins at home, met and determined ideas to pass along through articles written and delivered with the *Star* every month. Our numbers have become less throughout the years, so with two left, we have made the decision to take a break. We know and understand the number of you readers who utilized our newsletter will now be without; however, you can still find past newsletters on the synod website at www.neiasynod.org/download-category/home-life. With that in mind, I will include a few ideas for fall and the upcoming holiday seasons.

May the peace of the Lord be with you all in your planning and teaching the faith to the "littles" in your house, your congregations, and your communities.

God Bless You,

Pastor Sue Cira and Deacon Lisa Kammerer - Home Life Network, NEIA Synod

here is the link to our Facebook page: [Northeastern Iowa Synod Home Life Network ELCA](#)



**Playing in the leaves is a
fun activity!!**

(Always make sure there are
adults to supervise)



There are many fall activities to do with leaves ... or leaf shaped paper cut-outs. Here's one idea of thankfulness:



A
D
V
E
N
T

Advent - means arrival or coming. We often use an Advent Calendar to help count the days of Advent. Advent is a four-week period intended to be a time of preparation for the arrival of Jesus Christ. Advent begins on Advent Sunday, which is the fourth Sunday before Christmas. Many calendars are made of paper with little doors that contain a prize of candy, puzzle pieces, or a scripture reading. The First Sunday of Advent this year is on December 1st — it ends on December 25th with Christmas.

If you find a picture you like that you can make into a window cling decoration ... here is an example for Halloween:



Put your image into a ziplock bag. Trace around the image with puffy paint & let dry. Peel them off and stick to your window.



Winter brings snowflakes.

Pipe-cleaners and beads make a fun snowflake ... just remember to bend the ends over to keep the beads from falling off.

We leave you with the following reminder:
Be like Jesus and use your voice, ears, arms, hands, mind & heart accordingly.





Good News

Sept/ Oct
2024

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

Hello everybody. My name is Christine Schmitt and I am the new president of the NEIA Women of the ELCA Board. We have an exciting year ahead!! I'm just sparkling everywhere!

We are going on the Mary and Martha theme. Talkers, listeners, and doers. I know a lot of you are Do-ers! We have such a great group of Ladies that give and serve their churches and the organizations that they support like Lutheran World Relief, Global Health Ministries, local food pantries and charity shops, prayer shawl ministries, Bible studies and many other things. As a group of women we can do more together than separately. Share your events with the women's synod board and you may have a couple of people from a different area come to visit.

Our Board goals this year are to have 3 events/parties and tell you all about them and to work hard and have fun. So get your calendar out and save the dates.

1. Our first BIG party is a field trip! We are heading to West Bend to see the Grotto of the Redemption. Then to Algona to see the POW museum and nativity scene. Let us know if you are coming!!
2. Our winter retreat at the Stone Center in Strawberry Point is scheduled for Feb. 22 and 23. Come and spend the night or just come for the day! More details to come!
3. And we will have a party, June 14, where we plan on having a bunch of things to hear about and learn.

*Sparkling with Jesus,
Christine Schmitt*

Justice Committee

Where has 2024 gone? It is now fall and our women's groups are busy starting to think of Fall Bazaars, Fall Breakfasts, etc. My church ladies started quilting after taking 3 months off. It is also

time for us to be thinking of the Thankoffering service, LWR quilt/kit drop offs, and Thanksgiving meals or services at the church. Stewardship always makes me think about Thankoffering. We give thanks for all the blessings we have received. As Women of the ELCA, we are so grateful for what God has given us. We have generously given Thankofferings to help support the ongoing ministries of the churchwide organization. Almost 50 years ago I learned about Thankoffering boxes, a box placed somewhere in the home, where small amounts of are deposited throughout the year. I remember placing money each Sunday for the new week God had planned for me. Then I bring my gifts to the Thankoffering service. This was and is a great way to celebrate the ministries of the women in our churches. A Thankoffering service does not have to be a once-a-year event. Hopefully we are grateful more than once a year! Why not start a monthly event, having people share what they are grateful for that month. [Thankofferings - Women of the ELCA](#)

Submitted by JoAnn Brunsvold

Stewardship Committee

As many of you know, LSI no longer has a residential children's facility in Waverly. The mission now is to help welcome and settle LEGAL immigrant families to our state from around the globe. So the offerings of money and inkind gifts have a new focus. The kits have now changed to Meal Service, Meal Prep, Cleaning, Adult Bedding, Child Bedding, and Baby. These supplies will help get a family started in their new surroundings, many in the Waterloo/ Cedar Falls area. At our June gathering, we gathered gifts and completed kits. For more information you can go to [Home main - Lutheran Services in Iowa \(lsiowa.org\)](#) or contact Mike Knipp @ 319-610-3202 or Michael.Knipp@lsiowa.org. Mike is very prompt to answer messages and emails. Donations of kits, kit items or money can be delivered or mailed to the Waterloo office @ 3460 University Ave. They estimate the total cost of most kits is around \$100.

Jesus reminds us in Matthew 25:40, *Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.*

Submitted by Nancy Poppe

Discipleship Committee

What does discipleship mean to you? Discipleship is a noun that means • a lifelong journey of living out and spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and • disciples are followers of Jesus who are intent on carrying out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”) and the Great Command (Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”). In WELCA, we practice seven marks of discipleship: praying, studying, worshiping, inviting, encouraging, serving, and giving. We pray, study the Bible, and worship together. We make quilts and health and school kits for Lutheran World Relief. We grow in faith and share what we’ve learned with friends and neighbors. Whether it is at home or in a different country, when we share our faith and talents we are being disciples of Christ.

Submitted by Karen Weltzin

Fall Field Trip to West Bend Grotto

When: October 19, 2024
Where: Meet @
Our Savior’s Mason City, 8:15 am
St Paul, Lime Springs, 7:05 am
Salem, Lake Mills, 8:20 am
Cost: \$5, POW Museum
Free will, Grotto & Nativity
Lunch, on your own
Schedule: 10 Grotto, West Bend
11 :15 Lunch, Wagon Wheel
1:15 POW Museum, Algona
2:30 Nativity, Algona

RSVP to Chris VanDeventer @ 515-320-2877 or
cdvandeven@gmail.com by Oct 14
[grotto-trip 33.pdf \(neiasynod.org\)](#)



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

Cluster B Gathering

The fall gathering of Little Flock Cluster B will be Saturday, October 26, 2024 at 1st Lutheran in McGregor. The theme will be "Plentiful, Bountiful Harvest". Key scriptures are Leviticus 26:3-5 and Leviticus 19: 9-10. Speakers will be Adelyn Helle trip to Europe, Utioni Ruff from Clayton County Food Shelf and Heather Hagaman, Shepherd of the Hills. Contact Betty Schweitert, 563-873-2031 or Donna Staples, 563-534-7663.

CALENDAR

Oct 5	Cluster D Gathering @ St Paul, Lime Springs
Oct 12	C/E/H LWR Ingathering, LaPorte City
Oct 19	Grotto Field Trip, West Bend
Oct 26	Cluster B Gathering @ 1 st , McGregor
Nov 2	LWR In-gathering @ Decorah

NEIA Women of the ELCA Executive Board

Christine Schmitt, President

641-220-5361, candschmitt2@gmail.com

Alice Greimann, Vice President

641-456-2973, algreimann@wbfreq.com

Chris VanDeventer, Secretary

515-320-2877, cdvandeven@gmail.com

Nancy Poppe, Treasurer

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Checks payable to NE IA SWO, include Form A

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

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Contact Women of the ELCA:

<http://www.womenoftheelca.org/>
773.380.2730 or 800.638.3522, ext. 2730

2026 Triennial Gathering in Des Moines:

www.WELCAtg.org

Contact NEIA Women of the ELCA:

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



Northeast Iowa Synodical Women's Organization

Women of the Church

It's a celebration!

Have fun and fellowship with other Christian women!

West Bend Grotto Fall Field Trip

Saturday Oct 19, 2024

Cost: \$5.00 for the POW Museum; the other two are free-will donations; lunch on your own.

10am West Bend Grotto (freewill donation)

11:15 am Lunch Wagon Wheel restaurant (pay your own way)

Note: For gluten-free offerings at the Wagon Wheel, one may request no bun or eat a salad.

1:15pm Algona POW museum (\$5/person)

2:30 pm Algona Nativity Scene (freewill donation)

Car pools will meet at 'hubs' and travel to West Bend for the first tour at 10:00 a.m.,

lunch at 11:15, and the Algona tours in the afternoon.

Hubs: places to meet and carpool

- St. Paul Lutheran 215 N. Miller St. Lime Springs leave 7:05am to get to Mason

-Our Saviour's Lutheran Church Mason City parking lot leave there by 8:15 a.m.

-Salem Lutheran Church at 401 South Lake Street, Lake Mills, IA. They will leave by 8:20 a.m.

Car pooling is encouraged.

All women are invited, bring a friend (men too if they want to hang out with the ladies.)

but you must RSVP to Chris VanDeventer at

cdvandeven@gmail.com or phone 515-320-2877 by Monday October 14th .

RSVP info so we can contact you with any additional information.

Number of people coming _____

(numbers for our hosts.)

Contact Name: _____

Address: _____

Church: _____

Phone# _____

email _____