

# Coming Soon: A New Training Program for Lay Ministers

This year, more than 600 pastors will retire from full-time ministry in the ELCA. This fall, just 186 people were entranced into candidacy to become pastors and deacons in the ELCA. This is just one factor in the widening gap between the number of pastors and the number of congregations in our church and in our synod. If we doubled the number of people entering into ministry, we would still be falling behind by more than 200 pastors every year. (All mainline protestant denominations are experiencing this difficult reality. We are not alone.)

One way to bridge this gap is to train lay members of our congregations to lead worship and do some basic pastoral ministry when an ordained clergy is not available. This might be for an extended time while a congregation seeks a new pastor or for a few weeks when a pastor is on vacation or sabbatical. Lay ministers could assist pastors with home visits or by leading care center worship services. Or they might serve in a parish setting where one pastor is overseeing as many as six congregations.

## LAY MINISTRY TRAINING

The Northeastern Iowa Synod is joining together with the Western Iowa Synod, Southeastern Iowa Synod, and South-Central Synod of Wisconsin to develop a Lay Ministry Training Program for all four synods. This program will have options for people who simply

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want to learn more about our Lutheran faith. Additional courses will pave the way for certified lay ministers who could serve as Synodically Authorized Ministers in specific circumstances. Our goal is to start this program in the fall of 2024.

The synod is beginning a \$50,000 Fall Campaign to help raise up lay leaders in our synod and to defray some of the costs of identifying and training people to serve our congregations as lay ministers.

I encourage you to pray and reflect on how God is calling you to participate in this movement. Are you being called to serve your congregation or parish in one of these ways? Are you able to financially support those who are called, to ensure that our worship and proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ are carried out faithfully? Keep your minds and hearts open to where the Spirit is leading in these interesting times.

— Bishop Kevin Jones

*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.*  
— Matthew 9:37

