



Northeastern
Iowa Synod



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America

Stay Awake

Bishop Kevin Jones

Earlier this fall I began using the parable of the 10 Bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-13) with the Synod Council and other groups. We listen to the text, reflect silently, and note what sticks out for us. We repeat the process, this time noting any questions that arise. If time allows, we do it one more time while imagining where this intersects in our own lives or in our congregations or larger church.



Earlier this fall I began using the parable of the 10 Bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-13) with the Synod Council and other groups. We listen to the text, reflect silently, and note what sticks out for us. We repeat the process, this time noting any questions that arise. If time allows, we do it one more time while imagining where this intersects in our own lives or in our congregations or larger church.

I started this practice because I realized that the world is in a season of Advent. I mean that in a broader way than the liturgical season preceding Christmas. Something big is ending and something just as big is starting to emerge. And just like the liturgical season of Advent, we need to be awake and alert to the quiet, unexpected ways and places that Jesus is showing up.

There are so many voices demanding my attention and moral outrage right now that it can feel like I am awake and alert: Oppression, human trafficking, injustice, foreign occupation, deportation, government corruption, violence, abuse of the environment, hunger, disasters, and wars. The news channels and social media feeds are designed to keep me watching and scrolling, anxious and irritated.

I worry that these things are lulling us to sleep, exhausted by the incessant irritation that simmers just below the surface, erupting at the slightest provocation. We are being driven to distractions (games, shows, substances, endlessly scrolling) seeking ways to feel less anxious and irritated. We become weary and desensitized. We fall asleep with our eyes wide open and our screens, like modern day oil lamps, flicker away through the night.

I am fascinated by the end of the parable. Jesus doesn't admonish his listeners to be prepared. He doesn't tell us to be wise. He says, "Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." We need to be awake to welcome Jesus when and where he shows up. We need to be alert to his presence among us.

I believe that Jesus continues to show up, it's not a once and done experience. Sometimes we are out looking for something we may not even need (like extra oil) and we miss out. Other times we are present and we get let into the banquet here and now.

In Northeastern Iowa, Jesus will continue showing up in our worship, children's Christmas programs, Bible studies, food pantries, clothing closets, confirmation classes and Sunday Schools. Jesus is also showing up in community conversations that cross denominational lines. Jesus is showing up in local, innovative congregational ministries supported by new Outreach Fund Grants. And Jesus will keep showing up in places and times we can't even imagine (manger, temple, restricted lands, cross, resurrection).

Let's stay awake friends.

Grants are available from the Synod Outreach Fund

The Northeastern Iowa Synod is excited to partner with congregations and affiliated ministries eager to try creative and innovative ministries that engage the community around them. New *Outreach Fund Grants* are being made available from a fund that was dormant for a number of years and are available by application to the Synod's new "Mission Table."

Over the years, individuals and congregations in Northeastern Iowa have generously donated to new mission starts in the hope of seeding new congregations. In a couple of instances, those new missions failed to develop into viable congregations, and the Synod was able to recoup some of the investments. These investments were then used to establish a fund to support "new ministries" in the Synod. In November 2023, the Synod Council determined that "new ministries" meant more than "new congregation starts" and approved using the Outreach Fund to support innovative ministry experiments at local congregations and affiliated ministries through grants. \$70,000 per year would be made available for 10 years while the rest would be invested to make grants available beyond the 10 years. A new "Mission Table" was started and their framework for grant disbursements, guidelines, and forms for applying and reporting were approved by the Synod Council at the November 2025 meeting.

Several other synods in the ELCA have launched similar initiatives, offering grants to spark creative and imaginative ministry projects. Inspired by this movement, the Mission Table seeks to ignite holy imagination across Northeastern Iowa by exploring what God might be calling us to do in new ways. To help congregations dream boldly, the application includes a page of "Ideas for Qualifying Ministry Experiments," drawn from successful projects in other synods. These examples are not prescriptions but invitations—to think big, listen deeply, and trust the Spirit's leading. If you'd like to learn more about what others are trying, reach out to Pr. Kristen Rod, DEM, at rodk@neiasynod.org.

The Mission Table is comprised of creative and imaginative people who love Jesus and believe that ministry happens in both non-traditional and traditional settings. Some of their goals are to accompany congregations growing their Holy Imagination, equip people with skills to better listen to God, to each other, and to their communities, share stories of new ministries and ideas, and oversee the distribution of the grants. We look forward to how the Holy Spirit will work through this new program in the Northeastern Iowa Synod.

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Global Church Together Worship Resources for Epiphany Season on the synod website:

[\[https://neiasynod.org/2025/12/epiphany-resources/\]](https://neiasynod.org/2025/12/epiphany-resources/)

As we prepare for worship in the season of Epiphany, we are reminded of the magi who journeyed from afar, bearing gifts for the Christ child. Their pilgrimage was more than an act of generosity—it was a profound sign that the light of Christ shines beyond borders, cultures, and nations. In their gifts, we see the beauty of mutual sharing and the call to recognize Christ revealed in the diversity of God's people.

This season invites us to celebrate that same global connectedness through our **Companion Synod relationships**. Just as the magi's gifts honored the newborn King, our partnerships with churches across the world honor Christ's presence among us all. These relationships are not one-sided; they are exchanges of prayer, wisdom, and hope that enrich our witness to the Gospel.

Conversations for the Common Good

A Lutheran, a Methodist, and a Catholic walk into a church... It sounds like the set up to a bad joke, but it really happened. Bishop Kevin Jones of the Northeastern Iowa Synod, Pastor Scott Keele-Kober, Pictured Rocks District Supervisor in the United Methodist Church, and Archbishop Thomas Zinkula of the Dubuque Diocese of the Catholic Church met in August to talk about ways to work together in support of the communities that in which our congregations and people lived.

Pastor Keele-Kober had been working with Courtney Dufford, Lead Organizer of AMOS (A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy). AMOS is a group of over 100 congregations and organizations in the Des Moines metro area that join together to build relationship and work towards the common good in local communities. Dufford was also part of that August meeting with the three church leaders and encouraged them to bring more people into the conversation.

On Sunday, November 16, folks from nine ELCA congregations in Northeastern Iowa, joined with neighbors in the United Methodist Church and Dubuque Diocese of the Catholic Church in Jesup to continue the conversation. Dufford facilitated the conversation along with Dennis Epley of Waverly. (Dennis served as Parliamentarian at the NEIA Synod Assemblies in 2023 & 2025.) The afternoon was spent getting to know one another, learning about the process of building relationships and working together for the common good, and thinking about next steps.

In order to invite more people into the conversation, it was determined that conversation facilitators needed to be recruited and trained. The next rounds of conversations needed to be more local and spread across Northeastern Iowa. So far, volunteers have offered to host facilitator training in Dubuque and Decorah. The group is hopeful that more will be offered in the central and western parts of the Synod/District/Diocese. Information will be posted on the Synod website when available.

If you would like to learn more or would simply be interested in joining a local conversation, contact Pr. Jen Thomas at the Northeastern Iowa Synod office.

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Courage for the Common Good

MLK Day Celebration at Luther College with ELCA Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry

Luther College invites you to special programming honoring the witness of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on Monday, January 19, 2026. The featured keynote speaker is the Rev. Yehiel Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The theme for the day's programming is *Courage for the Common Good*. This theme honors Martin Luther King, Jr. and his namesake, Martin Luther, both of whom exemplified courage in addressing systems of injustice and advocating for the needs of the neighbors in their midst. *Courage for the Common Good* invites all to bold, brave, and benevolent action for the building of the beloved community.

The keynote begins at 10:30 a.m. in the Main Hall of the Center for Faith and Life. A limited number of visitor and accessible parking spaces are available near the CFL; otherwise the Library Lot is recommended for visitor parking. All who desire are invited to sing with a volunteer community choir as part of the keynote festivities; plan to arrive in the CFL for rehearsal at 9:30 a.m.

Following the keynote, all are invited to a community lunch in the Luther cafeteria. Lunch cost is \$10 (free for children and youth) and advance lunch registration is requested. Visit tickets.luther.edu to register for lunch. A special set of hands-on activities for youth will be offered during the lunch hour as well.

Following lunch, there will be two concurrent sessions at 1:15 p.m. Youth and youth leaders are invited to a follow-up conversation with Bishop Curry. All others are invited to a panel conversation with ELCA bishops from nearby synods to talk further about the church's role as a courageous witness in our world.

We hope that you will be able to join us for this meaningful day. This is a wonderful opportunity for our communities and congregations alike. Consider coming as a group with your congregation, confirmation class, youth group, or church council! For questions and more information, contact ministry@luther.edu or 563-387-1040.

VIRTUAL TREASURERS MEETING JAN. 22, 2026

Congregation treasurers, pastors, financial committee members, and anyone interested are invited to attend the **Treasurers Meeting on Thursday, Jan. 22, from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. via Zoom.**

Presenters include:

- **Pastor Steve Brackett**, Assistant to the Bishop – Overview of the Northeastern Iowa Synod's 2026 Minimum Compensation Guidelines
- **Keith D. Oltrogge, CPA**, Denver – Guidance on W-2s, church payrolls, and contributions
- **Jennifer Prinz**, Regional Representative for Portico Benefit Services (Region 5) – Health and retirement benefits

There is no cost to attend. Zoom access details will be emailed to treasurers by **Dec. 15**. Others interested in joining may call the synod office at **319-352-1414** or email **Jan Glaspie at Glaspiej@neiasynod.org**.

THANK YOU, PASTOR JOELLE COLVILLE-HANSON!

We celebrate Pastor Joelle Coville-Hanson for her incredible service and dedication! After retiring from the synod staff as DEM in March 2022, Pastor Joelle graciously continued to serve as Editor of our weekly E-news publication. Her commitment has kept our community informed and connected, and we are deeply grateful for her generosity and leadership.

On December 18, Pastor Joelle will officially retire from this role. Please join us in giving thanks for her years of faithful service and the countless ways she has blessed our synod through her gifts and hard work.

Looking ahead, we're excited to welcome our new Communication Coordinator, Mallory Jensen, who will step into the role of Editor for the weekly E-news. The newsletter will return in January—stay tuned!

Worship Planning for Lay Leaders workshop

Join us *on January 15, 6:30-8:30pm* for a virtual workshop on Worship Planning for Lay Leaders. This workshop is designed to equip lay people with resources and best practices for planning and leading worship in their congregations. Participants will learn about how we are grounded in the historic structure of the Sunday liturgy, while allowing for creativity. This interactive workshop will introduce a wide variety of music and worship resources, and will also include conversation about ways to lead worship with or without instrumental accompaniment, as well as time for Q&A.

This workshop will be led by retired pastor Luther Thoreson. Pastor Thoreson retired in 2020, after 39 years as a congregational pastor. Along the way he completed the Leadership Program for Musicians while serving in the Western Iowa Synod, and he then served as faculty for the program. Register [here](#) to receive the Zoom link.

Welcome, Mallory - Communications Coordinator



My name is Mallory Jensen and I am the new Communications Coordinator for the Northeastern Iowa Synod. I am starting my new role with the Synod on December 8th, 2025, and look forward to meeting all those I will be working with in this role. I wanted to take a minute to introduce myself and share a few fun facts.

I am married to my husband, Ryan, of 18 years. Together we have two boys, Colten and Myles. Colten is a junior at Hudson High School, and Myles is in 8th grade at the middle school. Right now our lives revolve around four seasons of sports, along with lots of random school activities that pop up along the way.

I have always called the Cedar Valley my home. I grew up in Hudson, Iowa, and graduated high school in the spring of 2002. After high school, I pursued a degree in Communication Arts, emphasizing in Public Relations, from Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa. While attending Wartburg College, I participated for a season on the cross country team, found a deep passion for missional opportunities within the community, and participated in the many opportunities available to students on campus. One of my fondest memories at Wartburg College was traveling to San Bernardino, California to serve at the Central City Lutheran Mission. Not only were we there to serve and help with projects at the center and in the city, we experienced firsthand the cultural differences within different areas of the country.

Prior to starting at the Synod, I worked for Nazareth Lutheran Church and Orchard Hill Church. While working for the churches, I focused on discipleship, administrative and communication duties, and website design. When I am not at work, I love taking long jogs and walks and enjoying nature. This October I completed my first marathon in Des Moines. I also love coffee, visiting Colorado, and Hawkeye football games.

I am excited to start my journey working at the Synod and meeting all of you!



Mission Support: Making Ministry Possible and Vibrant

When you give Mission Support, you join a ministry bigger than any single congregation. Your generosity sustains the shared work of the Northeastern Iowa Synod and the ELCA, helping us live out our calling together as the body of Christ. Thank you!

Mission Support funds ministries that form faith, serve neighbors, and raise up leaders, including: ELCA colleges, seminaries, and campus ministries, Lutheran Services in Iowa, leadership development and lay training, youth ministry and global partnerships, synod assemblies, communications, and essential support.



Rev. Jen Thomas

How Can Congregations Help? Share impact stories in worship and newsletters. Include Mission Support in your budget. Pray for our shared ministry across the congregations, conferences, synod, region 5 and the ELCA.

2026 Pledges

Please submit your congregation's pledge by **Feb. 1**. Forms were sent electronically to presidents and treasurers. Thank you for your partnership in Christ's mission!

The Reality of the Call Process Today

by Pastor Steve Brackett, Assistant to the Bishop for Rostered Leadership

When I came onto the Synod Office staff in March 2015 and began helping congregations to call a new pastor, things were very different. When a congregation completed their Ministry Site Profile and were ready to enter the interview phase of the call process, I would always have at least one pastor to bring to them who had expressed interest in their call. Our larger congregations would typically receive the paperwork of 3-7 candidates. And in most cases, other names would come soon after if the initial candidates were not a good fit for the congregation or vice-versa. The entire call process would last about one year to 15 months, on average.



Rev. Steve Brackett

Today, it is rare to have the paperwork of even one pastor to give to a call committee when they reach the interview phase of the call process. So, what has changed? Why is it taking so long now to find and call a new pastor?

First, there are far more congregations in the call process than there are pastors to fill them. As of November 15, 2025, nationwide the ELCA has 578 ministry sites that have submitted a Ministry Site Profile to begin the interview process, compared to only 366 pastors (including recent seminary graduates) who are ready to interview. Retirements are the biggest factor in this gap. And since for the foreseeable future we will have more pastors retiring than seminary graduates to take their place, this gap will only widen—and quickly.

Second, the preferences of pastors have changed. Ten years ago, pastors were far more open to taking a call where the wider church had the most need. That usually meant taking a call in a rural area and in a ministry site that was made up of two or more congregations. That was a typical first call for our new seminary graduates. That shifted dramatically following the pandemic. The isolation experienced during the shutdown has resulted in most pastors now seeking calls based on geography—in larger communities with more amenities, closer to children and grandchildren, or closer to aging parents. Fewer pastors are willing to consider calls in rural communities, especially if their spouse and older children cannot find employment. In past years, we would hold between 25-30 interviews with pastors from outside our Synod each year. Obviously, not all of them would choose to seek a call in our Synod, but many would at least interview in one of our settings. As of mid-November, in 2025 we have interviewed only 11 pastors from outside our Synod. Of those, only 4 asked to have their paperwork sent to one or more of our ministry sites.

Third, there are many congregations just like yours looking for a pastor. As worshipping communities, we do not like to think of ourselves as being in competition with one another, but you are. You are not only competing with similar calls in our own Synod, but you are also competing with similar calls in Synods all around us. Pastors can be very selective in where they interview because they have so many choices available.

Finally, mission and ministry matter. Most pastors today seek to become a part of a ministry site that is active in the community, has strong faith building programs for all ages, has strong lay leadership and member participation, and is open to trying new ways to better serve the needs of people inside and outside of the church. Pastors today do not want to simply be a chaplain for a dying congregation or a congregation that is satisfied with maintaining the status quo.

So, what can we do to respond to these ongoing changes and challenges?

First, invite someone to consider becoming an ordained pastor or deacon. Many congregations in our Synod have a history of supporting members to attend seminary and become ordained pastors. Unfortunately, few congregations have done so in recent years. Our Bible camps and Lutheran colleges continue to cultivate young people to consider the vocation of ministry, but their efforts alone are not enough. With the many pathways to ordained ministry available today, gifted individuals, young and old, will find an avenue to becoming a pastor or deacon that works for them. But first, someone must encourage them to explore the call to ministry. The Synod Office helps with discernment conversations, with a caring Candidacy Committee to walk with seminarians, and with scholarships to cover tuition.

Second, it is okay to brag about your ministry site and community. We do not like to brag as Midwesterners and Lutherans. But I tell call committees that the call process **is a time to brag**. The only way to override the preferences of where pastors and deacons **think** they want to serve is to convince them that they will love your community and congregation as much as you do. Bishop Kevin Jones and I participate in all interviews of pastors who are willing to consider a call in our Synod. We are the first to lift up the many positive aspects of northeastern Iowa, our communities, and our congregations. You can build on those conversations through an inspirational Ministry Site Profile, Facebook page, and website.

Third, set yourself apart. With so many similar calls from which pastors can choose, it is important to think of ways to help your ministry site and community to rise above the rest. A well written Ministry Site Profile, and up-to-date website, and current pictures and postings on social media help, but more effective advertising is needed in today's call process environment. Again, the Synod Office is here to help. To meet this need I have developed the Enhance Call Process, which involves setting up a call process webpage for a ministry site. Each website includes links to call process documents and helpful ministry site and community information, but the most helpful part of the webpage is a video that helps to tell the story of the congregation(s) and the community. It is an effective way for pastors to get to know people and the community from a distance. Thus far, two pastors directly credit the Enhanced Call Process videos for piquing their interest in the calls that they have now taken in our Synod. The hope is to eventually have a call process webpage for every congregation/ministry site that is seeking a new pastor. The current Enhanced Call Process webpages can be viewed on our website: <https://neiasynod.org/open-calls/>. Click one of the "Watch the video!" links.

Finally, do at least one thing well. This is especially important in small congregations with shrinking membership. All of us long for the glory days of parish ministry when churches were full, children and youth were abundant, and there were plenty of people to participate in the ministries of the congregation. Those days are gone. Rather than pining for the past, put your energy into focusing on **one thing** that you will do well. If you have no children in your congregation, then have the best possible ministry to homebound and nursing home residents. If you no longer have functioning committees, then become the congregation whose mission is to ensure that no one goes hungry in your community. If your membership is declining, then do not focus on your attendance numbers. Instead, count the number of "ministry touches" you have each week. That is, count the number of times a member shared the Good News with someone else, prayed with someone, visited someone, or served them in any way. Share those counts in worship each week. So, find the one thing that energizes your members, and make that the focus of your mission and ministry.

We regularly pray for our congregations and ministries that are in the call process. We hope that you are praying, too; praying not only that your open call will soon be filled, but also praying that the Holy Spirit will lead and guide your ministry as you continue to hold worship services, ensure that the gospel is preached, and live out the gospel of Jesus Christ as you serve your neighbors.

So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. Galatians 6:9

Lutheran Disaster Response Network

In mid-October, representatives from all reaches of the ELCA gathered in the Washington, D.C. area to collaborate through Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR). On behalf of the NEIA Synod, Assistant to the Bishop Rev. Jen Thomas and Disaster Response Network Facilitator Rev. Kyle Barton journeyed east to gather with colleagues sojourning under the topic of disaster response and how the church reacts to and helps mitigate crisis in the world.

The group's time together began with fellowship and introductions. It became clear very quickly that some synods have a near-perpetual presence with Lutheran Disaster



Response due to their location and frequency of significant disasters, while others, such as our own, maintain a strong presence through preparedness and fundraising.

The ultimate goal of the gathering was to meet with elected representatives in the House and Senate to discuss the necessity of a Federal partnership with non-profit organizations in responding to disasters. Specifically, the goal was to encourage members of Congress to consider and support the FEMA Reform Act of 2025. One of the purposes of this bipartisan legislation is to streamline the application process for Federal aid after a disaster.

At the time of our travel, the government was in the height of the “shutdown” as financial appropriations for the new fiscal year had not been made. The shutdown did not prevent us from completing our task. We were able to meet directly with Senator Ernst in addition to appointments with the staff of Senator Grassley and Representative Hinson. All of our meetings were productive while we advocated for FEMA reform on behalf of Iowans (and all of the United States). Individuals we met with know the importance of prompt response after a disaster, and they are committed to the ongoing work of supporting God's children after a disaster strikes.

Are you interested in learning more about or becoming a part of the synod's disaster response network? Please reach out to Rev. Jen Thomas with any inquiries.

Summary of Trip to ELCA Churchwide Office

The Rev. Jen Thomas attended the **Gathering of Racial Justice Synod Partners** at the ELCA Churchwide Office, a collaborative event led by **Rev. Christina Montgomery** and **Jennifer De Leon**. The gathering focused on deepening partnerships across synods, sharing best practices, and advancing the ELCA's commitment to racial justice. Key highlights included:

- **Vision and Leadership:** Rev. Montgomery and Jennifer De Leon provided inspiring guidance on building sustainable racial justice initiatives within synods.
- **Collaborative Learning:** Participants engaged in conversations about equity, advocacy, and dismantling systemic racism in church structures and communities.
- **Networking and Partnership:** The event fostered connections among synod leaders, creating opportunities for shared resources and mutual support.
- **Action Planning:** Practical strategies were discussed for integrating racial justice into synod priorities and congregational life. Jen's partners in strategy were leaders from Region 5 synods.

The Racial Justice Barriers Task Force is delighted to announce that we've contracted with the Rev. Dr. Jia Starr Brown as our coach for the process. A STAD grant makes this work possible. **STAD** stands for **Strategy Towards Authentic Diversity**, adopted by the ELCA at its 15th Churchwide Assembly in August 2019. [resources.elca.org]

It calls ELCA members to **confession, reflection, and healing action**, urging deeper engagement with systemic racism and fostering **structural accountability**, leadership development, and ecumenical partnerships. [resources.elca.org]

Hunger Network Attends ELCA World Hunger Leadership Gathering

In September, Heather Hageman and Deborah Tidwell traveled to Columbus, Ohio, to meet with 130 ELCA participants at the World Hunger Leadership Gathering. This represented 45 of the 66 synods across the nation. The experience occurred over four days, and included learning sessions at the conference site, as well as field trips to local food-related projects and programs. Heather and Deb met with 9 other participants in the Region 5 focus group to discuss needs and challenges for our area. There were so many rich and engaging encounters during the gathering, yet in the space provided in this newsletter article, Heather and Deb wanted to share the following highlights: urban farming (Mid-Ohio Food Collective), ELCA Indigenous ministries and tribal relations, Dominican Sisters and the Shepherd's Corner Ecology Center, and the EcoEternity forest.



The Mid-Ohio Food Collective is the largest food bank in Ohio that works with more than 600 local charities and programs to help neighbors in 20 counties find fresh, healthy food. They collect and grow fresh food, turn it into healthy meals, and make it easy for people to access healthy food. Their farming practices use hydroponics, with plants growing in both outside planting stations and inside greenhouses. Through an interactive field trip, Heather and Deb were able to see hydroponic practices firsthand. Part of the collective's work is around the idea of *farmacy*, where through their farming practices they work with doctors to help patients get fresh food as part of their health care.

ELCA Indigenous ministries and tribal relations focuses primarily on their Truth and Healing Movement. This movement is an opportunity for the church to increase understanding of the colonizing impacts on Indigenous people in the past and present. With this focus, the ELCA provides awareness on issues and needs as reported by Indigenous populations. One focus is on the current crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW). An additional focus is on the connections across access, poverty, and hunger.

An important part of the gathering was the sharing of stories from those engaged in working with communities, developing leadership opportunities, and creating access to food. These stories highlighted work in such places as South America, Africa, Asia, and more locally across the United States. What we learned from these stories is that leadership grows from taking the initiative to be a part of change. It is, as John Eggen stated, "the little things that we do that make a difference collectively...the power of yeses that create collective power."

Reflections on the 4-day gathering left both Heather and Deb with a deeper understanding of food insecurities, the people that it affects, and the ways we can come together to problem solve. The gathering allowed for the building of relationships with people with similar views and common goals. Networks were built across congregations, synods, and regions. Through the different activities, participants were able to engage in conversations about local struggles and successes with food shortage and food insecurities. Great ideas were shared regarding ways to positively impact local communities and ways to increase participation within and across regions.

During the close of the 4-day gathering, a group of musicians sang a song written by university students that contained a refrain "Be here now" repeated again and again. This phrase reflected the overarching meaning of the experiences provided at this year's World Hunger gathering. To be here now means to be present, to be a part of what is real, what is happening, what is needed; to seek the understanding of those with whom you engage. Be. Here. Now.

See the following links for more information about the impact of ELCA's World Hunger.

[Intersections: Justice Ministry with ELCA Partners \(Documentary\)](#)

[ELCA World Hunger](#)

[50 Years of ELCA World Hunger](#)

EVENTS

December 2025	January 2026
<p>4- Transitional/ Interim Ministry mtg 9:30am</p> <p>8- Candidacy Committee, Synod Office 8am</p> <p>11- Global Church Together, Zoom 1:30pm</p> <p>11- Racial Justice & Advocacy, Zoom 3pm</p> <p>19- Candidacy Committee, Synod Office 8am</p> <p>24-Jan. 2- Office Closed for Holidays</p>	<p>5- Office reopens</p> <p>8- Global Church Together, Zoom 1:30pm</p> <p>8- Racial Justice & Advocacy, Zoom 3pm</p> <p>15- Worship Planning for Lay Leaders, Zoom 6:30pm</p> <p>17- Synod Council, Zoom 9am</p> <p>19- Synod Office Closed, MLK Day</p>
February 2026	March 2026
<p>6-7- Candidacy Retreat, Dubuque</p> <p>12- Global Church Together, Zoom 1:30pm</p> <p>12- Racial Justice & Advocacy, Zoom 3pm</p>	<p>12- Global Church Together, Zoom 1:30pm</p> <p>12- Racial Justice & Advocacy, Zoom 3pm</p> <p>21- Synod Council, Synod Office, 9:30am</p>



CONGREGATIONS

INTERVIEWING

- **Arlington**, St. John; **Elkader**, Hope (Littleport); **Strawberry Point**, St. Sebald; **Volga**, St. Paul (One in Faith Lutheran Parish)
- **Asbury**, Lord of Life, Rev. Karla Wildberger, interim
- **Cedar Falls**, Bethlehem
- **Clarion**, First
- *Dows, First**
- **Dysart**, Zion
- *Eldorado, St. Peter**
- **Independence**, Immanuel
- *Janesville, Messiah**
- **Jesup**, American, Rev. Patricia Mohr-Kelly, interim
- **Jewell**, Bethesda, Rev. Jonathon Dolan, interim

- **Joice**, Bethany; **Lake Mills**, Winnebago; **Northwood**, Silver Lake; **Albert Lea, MN**, Lunder (One in Christ Lutheran Parish)
- **La Porte City**, Zion (Jubilee)
- **Lake Mills**, Salem
- *Leland, Our Savior & Garner, Faith (Miller)**
- **New Hampton**, Trinity, Rev. Sue Cira, interim
- **Ossian**, Ossian
- *Thornton, St. Paul**
- **Toeterville**, St. Peter & **Carpenter**, Deer Creek
- *Waterloo, Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd**
- *Waterloo, Our Savior's, Lisa Ames-Kruse, SAM contract**

- **Decorah**, Glenwood & Canoe Ridge
- *Decorah, St. John's & Hauge** **Garnavillo**, St. Paul & **McGregor**, First
- *Hawkeye, Trinity**
- **Mason City**, Our Saviour's & St. Paul
- **Oelwein**, Zion
- *Washburn, Redeemer**
- **Waukon**, St. John, Rev. Mark Oelhart, interim
- *Waterloo, St. Ansgar**
- *Waterloo, Trinity**
- *Waterloo, Zion**

ROSTER CHANGES

- **Rev. Rebecca Baird**, on leave
- **Rev. Jane Harris**, retired
- **Rev. Nathan Wicks**, on leave

SELF-STUDY

- **Allison**, St. James
- **Cedar Falls**, St. John, staff

**Part-time Call*

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

December 1-7, 2025

- **H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders**
- Rev. Dennis Niezwaag
- Rev. Lee Gable
- Jean Swiggum
- Rev. Cindy Krause
- Zion Lutheran Church, Oelwein
- St. Peter Lutheran Church, Oran
- St. John Lutheran Church (Rock Twp), Osage

December 8- 14, 2025

- Rock Creek Lutheran Church, Osage
- Rev. Lynn Noel
- Rev. Denise Anderson
- Rev. Kristin Wendland
- Rev. Tracy Hinkel
- Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Osage
- Dwelling in Faith, Mitchell

December 15-21, 2025

- **Middle East Peace**
- Stavanger Lutheran Church, Ossian
- Ossian Lutheran Church, Ossian
- St. Paul Lutheran Church, Postville
- Rev. Charles Peterson
- Rev. Donovan Hommen
- Peace Lutheran Church, Ryan
- Rev. Nathan Wicks

December 22-31, 2025

- Rev. Jim Cherry
- Rev. Keith Sievers
- Joan Dalen
- Rev. Joan Haug
- Rev. Paul Schaedig
- Rev. Dan Baldwin
- Rev. DeWayne Teig
- Rev. Cal Fick
- Rev. Maureen Howard
- Carolyn Oppedahl
- Karen Fretheim
- Rev. David Werges

January 1-11, 2026

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

January 12-18, 2026

- **Middle East Peace**
- Zion Lutheran Church, Rockford
- St. Peter Lutheran Church, Rockwell
- Rev. ChyAnne Slick
- St. Paul Lutheran Church (Thornton), Rockwell
- Bergen Lutheran Church, Roland
- St. Peter Lutheran Church (Toeterville), St. Ansgar
- Rev. Adam Starrett

January 19- 25, 2026

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

January 26-31, 2026

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