

Summer 2015:

# South Dakota youth in action

Summer 2015 had two big events for the youth of the South Dakota Synod.

The first was the ELCA Youth Gathering in Detroit. In July nearly 30,000 Lutherans gathered in Detroit for worship, service and fellowship. South Dakota had 1,100 youth in attendance, more than any other synod in the ELCA. Way to go, South Dakota Synod!

One particularly exciting part of the Gathering for the South Dakota Synod was the day we spent together as a synod for “Proclaim Story.” All 1,100 youth and adults gathered in a ballroom to worship, sing together and discover ways to proclaim that Jesus is the good news to the world. The band, Bible study leaders and worship assistants all included South Dakota youth. It was a great day to be the synod together.

In August, synod youth gathered again for “Rise Up, South Dakota.” AGAPE\* and Rachel Kurtz, popular musicians who performed at the Youth Gathering, gave a concert, the youth collected trash around the Big Sioux River, and Bishop Dave Zellmer grilled burgers for supper. It was a beautiful evening.

While the purpose of the event was to bring the synod’s youth together, it was also a time to raise money and awareness for ELCA World Hunger: Walk for Water ([www.elca.org/walk4water](http://www.elca.org/walk4water)).

Globally, 1.8 billion people—that’s about 1 in 4 people—drink from contaminated water sources. Unsafe water leads to illnesses that claim the lives of 840,000 people each year, almost half of whom are children under the age of 5.

The “Rise Up SD” event included a Walk for Water course where youth could get a glimpse of what it’s like to carry 5 gallons of water, weighing 41.5 pounds, just a fraction of the distance youth their age and younger carry around the world. Along the course they read about real-life situations around the world, learned eye-opening water facts and discovered the dangers of drinking contaminated water.

Participants raised nearly \$1,000 for Walk for Water.

We give thanks for the youth and leaders of this church. Stay tuned for more opportunities for fellowship and growth with the young people of our church. □



## Meet the synod's first-call pastors

### **The Rev. Warren Lahammer** Faith Lutheran, Rapid City

The Rev. Warren Lahammer was born and raised in Aberdeen. After serving in the U.S. Marine Corps, he received his bachelor of science degree in business administration from Northern State University, Aberdeen. He also has a master's degree in business from the University of Mary, Bismarck, N.D., and a master of divinity from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

Before entering seminary, he worked as a banker for several years in four states.

Lahammer and his wife, Robyn, have five daughters and four grandchildren. They are excited to be in the beautiful Black Hills.



### **The Rev. Tera Lowe** Prairie Fellowship Parish, Bison

The Rev. Tera Lowe serves Prairie Fellowship Parish, which is American Lutheran, Bison; Indian Creek Lutheran, Meadow; and Rosebud Lutheran, Shadehill.

She graduated from Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, May 17 and was ordained May 22 at First Lutheran Church, Gladstone, Mich. Lowe moved to Bison June 11, beginning her ministry with Prairie Fellowship Parish June 14.

Before seminary, Lowe worked for nine years in youth and family ministry in the Northern Great Lakes and Greater Milwaukee synods. During seminary she felt strongly that she was being called to rural, multipoint ministry, wanting to serve in a place that might find it difficult to get a pastor.

She now serves in the geographic area of the continental U.S. that is the farthest from any McDonald's. She loves it there and, thanks to the Internet, doesn't miss anything about living at least two to three hours from what others might consider necessary.

Lowe was born in Gladstone in the UP (Upper Peninsula) of Michigan, and spent most of her life there. Her parents, five siblings, nieces and nephews all live there. She has ventured, moving around the country to work in the mountains in Paxson, Alaska; Islamorada, located in the Florida Keys; and a few place in between.

Johnson met her husband, Roy, in 2001 on a trip to visit friends in Jamaica. They got back in contact through a mutual friend in 2012, and were married in 2013. He and his three children live in Jamaica. The immigration process is long, complicated and costly. Her hope is that they can all be here together as soon as mid-2017, but she expects it will happen in 2018.



### **The Rev. Joshua Johnson** East Side Lutheran, Sioux Falls

The Rev. Joshua Johnson is a native of Waynesville, N.C. He attended college at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, N.C., and went to seminary at the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, S.C.

He is currently serving East Side Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls, S.D., as an associate pastor.

Johnson is a chaplain candidate in the U.S. Navy and anticipates going on active duty in the future. He is married to Samantha (Sami), who was raised in Pennsylvania and is currently serving as a pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls, S.D. (see page C).



**The Rev. Cheryl Rondeau-Bassett**  
 Faith Lutheran, New Effington;  
 First Lutheran, Claire City; Our  
 Savior's Lutheran, Veblen



The Rev. Cheryl Rondeau-Bassett is from Wilmot, where she has lived most of her life. She interned with the Tri-Parish combined congregations of First Lutheran in Claire City; Faith Lutheran in New Effington; and Our Savior's Lutheran in Veblen. She was then called to be their senior pastor.

Rondeau-Bassett was on the Support to Ministries Committee for the South Dakota Synod, where she became interested in serving as a supply pastor. She was also the parish assistant for her congregation, Wilmot Lutheran, prior to attending Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. During that time, she found a love for small, rural congregations of northeast South Dakota and decided rural ministry was her calling.

She has six grown children. Four live in the Twin Cities, one in Utah and one passed away in April. She also has nine grandchildren—the oldest is in the Air Force and youngest just started preschool. Her husband is a farmer, raising crops and cattle in rural Wilmot.

Rondeau-Bassett has owned of several businesses, was a newspaper editor/publisher/owner, a real estate agent/broker, an instructor at community colleges, computer trainer and director of a computer training/learning center, and marketing communications coordinator for a telecommunications company, to name a few positions.

She received a bachelor's degree in business administration from Mount Marty College, Yankton, and a masters in mass communication and journalism from South Dakota State University, Brookings, before commuting to Luther for a master's in divinity.

**The Rev. Sami Johnson**  
 Our Savior's Lutheran, Sioux  
 Falls



The Rev. Sami Johnson grew up in Pennsylvania (home synod is Northeastern Pennsylvania) and attended seminary at the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, S.C. She went to college and studied bibli-

cal and religious studies at Grove City College in western Pennsylvania graduating in 2011.

Johnson now serves Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls as the pastor of youth and family.

**The Rev. Bryan Taffe**  
 Prairie Star Lutheran Parish



The Rev. Bryan Taffe and his wife, Becky, grew up in Morris, Minn. He attended Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall and transferred to Minnesota State University in Moorhead, where he graduated with a bachelor of arts in philosophy. He and his wife were married in 2011 and moved to St. Paul, Minn., so he could attend Luther Seminary. Their daughter, Luci, was born in 2013 and they are expecting a boy at the end of December.

Taffe has been serving his first call at Prairie Star Lutheran Parish since June 2015. There are four churches in the parish around Bryant, Vienna and Willow Lake. He is excited to be called to rural ministry in South Dakota and looks forward to exploring new parts of the state in the years to come.

**The Rev. Karen Ressel**  
 Pine Ridge Retreat center



The Rev. Karen Ressel serves the people of the South Dakota Synod as the director for Native American ministries and the Pine Ridge Retreat Center. She is a recent graduate of Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa. Before beginning seminary, Ressel lived and worked in Uganda for three years as an ELCA missionary.

She also served as the communications specialist for the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Ressel worked with the LWF to develop holistic, sustainable projects and programs.

Her daughter, Sarah; son-in-law, Matthew; and grandson, Mason, live in northwestern Wisconsin. □



## Videos: Tell the story

Over the past year, the South Dakota Synod has been working to produce new video resources to help you tell the story of our work together in your congregation.

The first video, titled “Building a Leader,” is a thank you for your mission support. Hear stories from a young adult actively involved in the work of the church, seminary students preparing for ministry, a first-call pastor making a difference in his congregation, a mission developer leading a new congregation, and a companion synod traveler whose life was changed on a trip. All this was possible thanks to your congregation’s mission support (the offerings shared with the synod and church-wide organization).

The second video is about rural ministry across South Dakota. This state has a rich history of ministry in rural communities. Hear about just a few of those communities and their growing and evolving ministry.

These videos, and more to come, may be found at [www.tinyurl.com/sdsynod-videos](http://www.tinyurl.com/sdsynod-videos).

If you would like a DVD copy, please contact Kevin Stillson in the synod office at [kstillson@sdsynod.org](mailto:kstillson@sdsynod.org). □



These images are from the videos produced by the South Dakota Synod.