



South Dakota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Winter/Spring 2024 Newsletter Inserts

From the Bishop's Desk

Dear SD Synod,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Emanuel, God with us. A new year with new and old possibilities lies before us as we continue to journey together in Christ. Here are some road markers for you to be curious about:

- **Form A:** this form helps the church wide office to determine the number of attendees from each synod at the upcoming church wide assembly in Phoenix, AZ (August 2025).
- **Congregational Leadership Form:** It helps your synod office to effectively communicate with you and stay in touch. Even if there are no changes in your leadership it's always good to send us a form, since there may have been changes in a leader's personal contact information, which we should note in our database.
- **Forms of Intent:** These help your synod council plan for next year's (2025) mission plan, aka budget, which will be brought for discussion and vote at the June assembly.
- **"I have been Elected to the Council. Now What?":** This is an annual Zoom opportunity for all lay leaders in the synod. It has been growing in attendance over these past four years and those in attendance always expressed how helpful the breakout sessions were. The group gathers via Zoom for 90 minutes and every year those in attendance shared that time was yet too short. Thank you for showing up, participating and your leadership in your congregation. This year's Zoom gathering is scheduled for Tuesday, March 5, 2024 from 7-8:30 PM CT. Registration details are forthcoming.
- **Synod assembly:** will be at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls, SD from May 31 - June 1, 2024. This year's theme is "Connect", and will highlight how each

and every person and context is connected to a network of partners. Things will look and feel a bit different this year, stay tuned! It's going to be fun...

- **STAR Grants:** STAR stands for "Small Town And Rural". The synod's STAR Team under Pastor Alan Blankenfeld and Pastor Jackie Braun's co-leadership has developed two grants that are available to all congregations of the SD via the synod's website. The guidelines and application process are straightforward and self explanatory. But if you have questions, please, reach out to Pastor Alan at ablankenfeld@sdsynod.org.
- **Journeying Together in Christ Initiative:** The Lilly Endowment has recognized the vision and mission you have drafted through a \$1.1 Million grant. The grant over the next four years will be used to support people of and ministries in the SD Synod. Pastor Kari Webb, Director for digital community and learning would love the opportunity to share greater details about this opportunity and generous support through the Lilly Endowment with you. You can reach her at kwebb@sdsynod.org to schedule a visit so you can learn more.
- **Youth Ministry:** We continue to partner with Lutheran Outdoors in SD to provide youth ministry opportunities. LOSD is planning to schedule more listening sessions across the synod to hear directly from you about hopes and dreams for youth ministry across the synod. If you have questions regarding the 2024 National Youth Gathering in New Orleans, please reach out to Mara Stillson, who is the synod's contact person. Mara can be reached at mara@losd.org.

These are only a few highlights, for other travel opportunities, registration links etc. please subscribe to the weekly e-news on the synod's website www.sdsynod.org. You can also connect with the synod via Facebook.

Journeying in Christ with you,
Rev. Constanze Hagmaier
Bishop of the SD Synod

Discerning God's Call

"You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last ..." (John 15:16)

Jesus speaks these words to those who follow him right after he commands them to love one another as he has loved them. No matter our vocations (callings) in life, Christ is with and works through us all to bear good fruit. For some, Christ leads them into public, ordained ministry, for others, he empowers them to take on other leadership roles within the church.

How does one know if they are called to be a pastor or a deacon? How might one sense they have the gifts for lay leadership within their congregation? These questions are all part of *discernment*. Discernment is never meant to be done alone, nor is it something we do just a few times in our life. As baptized people we are constantly asking the question: How best can I serve you during this time of my life, Lord? No one is too young or old to ask this question and ponder it faithfully.

Perhaps you have been curious about what stepping into a leadership role in your congregation may entail. Maybe you have wondered: *Might God be calling me to seminary?* If either of these are true, there are people who are ready to listen to your story, connect with you, help discover your gifts, and give you information about what is available for education and training.

One of these opportunities is February 28 – March 1: "Discerning God's Call Retreat at Arrowwood Retreat Center." This 3-day retreat is designed to explore tools for discernment and is for both current and emerging ministry leaders alike. Enrollment is limited, so don't hesitate to register! Should you need financial assistance to attend, reach out to the synod office for a "Lifelong Learning" grant application. To find out more about this in-person retreat, visit:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeQd383EZU7q3vdAF9cyxFonvdmYu1RFR93y3EKqvI68HcByw/viewform?pli=1>

You can also contact the synod office, or see the synod e-news for more information.

Another opportunity for discernment and learning is the Graduate Certificate Program through Luther

Seminary. To learn more, visit: <https://www.luthersem.edu/academics/degrees-and-programs/graduate-certificates/>

Know that your Synod staff are accessible to you for conversation. There will continue to be opportunities to reflect on how the Spirit is working in your life, and whether or not God is asking you to take a step you haven't taken before. Regardless, know this: Jesus the vine, with the help of the Spirit, helps you to grow fruit, fruit that will last wherever God has planted you.

Rev. Renee Splichal Larson
Associate to the Bishop for Candidacy,
Congregation, and Rostered Minister
Accompaniment

"Generous" is My Word for 2024

"You The synod staff had a retreat at the beginning of December at which we each picked a guiding word for the upcoming year. While it wasn't the word I picked spur-of-the-moment, "Generous" is the word I will use moving forward. When I think of what generosity means, it goes far beyond the idea of money and monetary things, even if that is a part of it. Before I give any examples, let me share a little about why this word is used. The world needs us to be generous. To live with a sense that defies a false scarcity mindset. I see signs of that all around. The world around us exists in a mindset that there isn't enough. Not enough money, time, energy, compassion, and understanding. And when we *feel* as if there isn't enough, we hold on to what we have. When we don't *feel* understood, we don't seek to understand others either. When we don't *feel* others have shown us compassion, it's easy to withhold it from others. See how this goes? What we *feel* is often reactionary and shifts our behavior.

So, in 2024, I'm going to be more intentional in my generosity. Financial, of course, but also in the grace, understanding, and compassion I give. But this isn't some new self-help concept; it is central to our discipleship as followers of the Messiah who has done all this first.

In Christ Jesus, we experience the fullness of God's generosity. In Jesus, there is no shortage of grace, understanding, and compassion. There is no shortage in how the world is provided and cared for.

And when we look for examples of how the Holy Spirit is revealing God's generous mercy, it is easy to find examples.

Rev. Jonathan Vehar

Associate to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission

Equipping the Saints

I am truly humbled to serve the SD Synod as the new Director for Rural Ministry. But what does that mean? Director of what? Do I really think that I am able to do this work? These are some of the questions that I struggled with and still do, but it's not about me but rather the work that I am called to do. This is the work of the Holy Spirit as Paul writes in Ephesians 4:12, "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." You see, no matter what our chosen vocation in life we are all called and equipped for the work at hand. We are all to be about the work of God's kingdom. No matter if you are an ordained pastor, SAM, lay leader or someone sitting in the pew on Sunday morning, we all have a part of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

This new job is actually a continuation of the work I started two years ago but now this work can be expanded through the Lilly Grant. We will be able to explore various opportunities for ministry in communities throughout the SD synod. We live in changing and challenging times and as our lives get more hectic the church at times becomes less important, but I think in those times the church is all the more important. My hope is that through these changing times we as a synod can help you explore ways for your congregation to engage the people in the pews and those in the community with some thinking outside the box or looking at doing something perhaps differently than you have done it in the past. It's hard for most of us to take the leap of faith into an unknown future and to really trust but isn't that part of what we are called to do?

I look forward to the new challenges that await me and for the opportunity to walk with both rural and urban churches in the SD synod as together we can explore where the Holy Spirit is leading. To come together and talk about each individual church and

also being a part of the synod, because you are not alone, we are on this journey with you. And if by chance you are feeling the Holy Spirit call to you about doing more, let's have coffee and explore this some more.

Looking forward to journeying together with you!

Blessings,
Pastor Alan Blankenfeld
Director for Rural Ministry