



South Dakota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

January/Winter 2025 Newsletter Inserts

From the Bishop's Desk

Dear South Dakota Synod,

Grace and Grace and peace to you in this new year. Maybe you, like our family, still have one of these old-fashioned calendars that hang in a prominent place in your home so everyone can see what's happening. Hopefully, much of the year is blank yet filled with things, people, and places that give you joy. We know that there will be days coming; we don't know when, and that will zap our energy; we will pencil in dates and times for farewells of neighbors and friends, funerals, retirements, and other things that can cause sadness and anxiety. So, my hope and prayer for you is that days of joy in your future may outshine the darkness of life.

Please also add a few dates to your calendar for 2025 that mark the journey we, as the SD Synod and the ELCA, are on together in Christ.

1. Your conference assemblies will take place on Sunday, February 23, 2025. So that you know – the location and time for your assembly will be communicated to you through your conference leadership. Please watch for communication from your conference leaders. At the 2025 conferences, you can pre-identify candidates for the call to serve as the SD Synod Bishop and other business. While I am eligible and available to serve for a second term, I am not automatically on the ballot or in the pool of candidates. I pray for the Holy Spirit to be at work in the people of the synod.

2. We will assemble at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls, SD, on Friday, May

30th, and Saturday, May 31st, 2025. I hope every congregation will show up not just to elect a bishop and do business but also to meet Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, who will be our churchwide representative, deliver reports, listen to you, and preside over the bishop's election.

3. July 28 - August 2, the church will gather in Phoenix, AZ, to be church together. We will elect a new Presiding Bishop and Secretary and be in discernment together about matters coming before the church. The SD Synod will show up with a group of voting members from different people of the SD Synod.

If you would like to talk about any or all of these things with me, please reach out, and I am happy to talk. Please mark your calendars and watch for more updates through the weekly e-news. If you are not subscribed to the weekly e-news, please visit www.sdsynod.org. Scroll to the end of the landing page and enter your email address in the box before clicking subscribe.

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

What Does It Mean to Be “Called?”

Dear People of God,

In How do we think and speak about “call” as baptized people of God, particularly from a Lutheran lens? In the last two synod newsletters, we have been focusing on discernment. Simply put, discernment is “perceiving the will and way of God in the church and in your life (*What Shall I Say? Discerning God's Call to Ministry*, p. 5).” One resource a person (like YOU!) can utilize is titled *Called to Lead*, written by the Rev. Paul Baglyous.

On pages 9-10, Pr. Baglyous invites the reader to reflect on what it means for every baptized person to be called by God:

Baptism is a call from God to live in active relationship with God and in active response to God as people clothed in Christ. God's call is seldom a one-time event in the lives of God's people. After the initial call to Moses in the incident of the burning bush, God called Moses again and again to undertake particular tasks in particular situations. The call of Moses at the burning bush on Mount Horeb inaugurated a vocational relationship of ongoing call and responsive action between God and Moses. Similarly, the initial call of Jesus to Simon and Andrew and James and John while they were occupied with their nets and their boats began a lifelong vocational relationship in which those disciples would hear the voice of their good shepherd calling them again and again by name to come, and to go, and to undertake particular tasks in particular situations. So it is for us as well. Our vocation as baptized people clothed in Christ is to live in active response to God who calls us again and again to particular tasks in particular situations and to embark upon new ventures in ministry.

Our baptismal vocation might not require us to abandon our occupations, although sometimes God does call us to make dramatic changes in the course of our lives. More often, God calls us to undertake a particular task of ministry within the familiar course of our lives...To live our baptismal vocation involves remaining open and expectant to God's call however and

wherever and whenever we might discern it, day by day, and to remain ready to respond.

Spend some time in the questions below in self-reflection, journaling, or with a friend or mentor. To work your way through *Called to Lead*, sign up for FREE through PASQUE, the SD Synod on-line learning community, at (www.sdsynodlearns.org).

TELLING YOUR CALL STORY

Recall or reflect upon an occasion when you discerned God's call to you. When and where did it happen? To what was God calling you? How did God call you? How did you recognize, or how later did you come to recognize, that God was calling you?

How did you respond to God's call in the situation you are recalling or upon which you are now reflecting? Did you respond with an attitude and action of "yes"? If so, what helped you to do that? What motivated you to respond in the way that you did? Or, conversely, did you respond with an attitude and action of "no," declining to undertake the particular task or commitment to which God was calling you? If so, what stood in your way or inhibited you?

What have you learned from the situation you are recalling or upon which you are now reflecting? How has it affected your relationship with God?

Find an opportunity to share your call story with others in your congregation, and to hear their call stories as well. How does our life in community with other baptized people help us to grow in our baptismal vocation?

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

Mission Planning

In my first few years as a pastor, January hit hard. The high and busyness of Christmas was over, and there was a lull before Lent. It was also the time for the Annual Meeting that lent itself to reflection on the year before and visioning for the year ahead. In some of those early years, I would think about all the things I wanted to do in the upcoming year. The things that needed to be accomplished or new ministry ideas that would fix one problem or another.

After a few years, the questions that I would wrestle with began to change. In part, because if I looked at all the things I wanted to 'do' in the previous year, I wondered what difference it made. So, instead, it became more important for me to ask questions of 'why?' than 'what?'. Of course, the 'why' of the church is pretty clear: we are "people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world." Easy.

But the 'why' also isn't so easy. It takes prayer, reflection, and conversation with others to experience a fuller view of God's creative power and the redemption and sanctification being worked out in front of us that we might be called into. From the why and listening to the needs of the community, both inside and outside of the congregation, would come a deeper sense of mission.

Mission planning takes intention and is not work that you need to go alone. Several resources offer a framework for how to go about these conversations.

- **Living Lutheran** by Dave Daubert

This is a go-to resource for congregations wanting to start thinking about who they are

and the difference it makes in the community. It makes for a good group read with questions at the end of each chapter and a sample for the work of mission and vision planning.

- **LEAD PLAYBOOK**

The Lead Playbook is a comprehensive guide to transforming your congregation's relationship with the community around it. An excellent place for congregations who are ready to dive deep into listening to neighbors and community stakeholders. Each congregation received a copy of the Lead Playbook at Synod Assembly (2022), so look around the office and dust off your copy. Or, we still have a few extra in the synod office.

Rev. Jonathan Vehar
Associate to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission

Rural Ministry News

Beloved Travelers,

Would your congregation like to host a seminarian and help them become the future leader we need for thriving rural ministries? Part of the *Journeying Together in Christ* initiative is to connect the next generation of leaders to our rural congregations in South Dakota. Through the funding of the Lilly Foundation we can host ELCA seminarians in South Dakota for an immersion experience that will introduce these students to the joys and challenges of rural ministry. Reach out to me at jpakan@sdsynod.org for more information.

Pastor Joel Pakan
Director for Rural Ministries
jpakan@sdsynod.org