



South Dakota Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

## April/Spring 2025 Newsletter Inserts

### From the Bishop's Desk

Dear South Dakota Synod,

Dear South Dakota Synod,

It is the time of year again when we prepare to gather as a synod in assembly. Your presence and active participation are very important. This year's assembly will be at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls, SD, from May 30 to 31, 2025. This year's theme is "Called". While we will elect a bishop who will lead the synod for six years, we are also all called to be church together through word and deed. Throughout the assembly, you will have ample opportunities to hear how we are the body of Christ.

Please note that Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton will be our ELCA churchwide representative and make herself available for table conversation in the late afternoon of Thursday, May 29, 2025. This is a unique opportunity for you to engage in faithful discussions about our shared ministry. Your voice and perspective are essential.

I am looking forward to welcoming you to the assembly. You can find details about the assembly, registration, and opportunities at [sdsynod.org/assembly](https://sdsynod.org/assembly).

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

### Discernment, Call, and Vocation

Dear People of God,

How do we think and speak about "call" as baptized people of God, particularly from a Lutheran lens? In the last three 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 *Called to Lead*, written by the Rev. Paul Baglyous.

On page 15, Pr. Baglyous invites the reader to reflect on what it means for every baptized person to hear and proclaim the Good News:

Because the ministry of Jesus included proclamation as well as action, the vocation of the baptized therefore also includes a call to speak as well as to act, a call to preach and teach, to bear the good news of God's love for the world in words as well as deeds. Writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul affirms that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13, quoting Joel 2:32). Paul goes on to ask a series of questions: "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?" (Romans 10:14). With these questions, Paul addresses the particular ministry task of proclaiming the good news so that people have an opportunity to hear it and believe it. A little later in his letter to the Romans, Paul concludes that "faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

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 online learning community, at ([www.sdsynodlearns.org](https://www.sdsynodlearns.org)).

### YOUR STORY OF HEARING AND BELIEVING

Who have been the most important proclaimers of the good news in your life, the people whose words have helped you to hear and believe the words and the word of Christ? In what times and places, in what settings and on what occasions, did those people share the good news with you?

What is the earliest occasion that you remember hearing the good news? Do you remember what was said on that occasion? How did it affect you?

What has been your most memorable occasion of hearing the good news? How would you describe

the way your faith was influenced on that occasion? What helped you to believe what you heard on that occasion?

What makes it easier or more difficult for you to believe the proclamation of others? Are there certain factors or circumstances that help you to believe the speech and words of others regarding the good news? Are there certain factors or circumstances that hinder you or make you less likely to believe the speech and words of others regarding the good news?

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

## Mission Planning

It's been a long time since I had to write a book report. But, I was recently given a copy of "Future-Focused Church" and thought it was worth sharing. First, a disclaimer – I'm generally pretty skeptical of anyone who offers one right way to do things or a fix to all of our church problems. Our world is messier than that. Or to say it better, God has created our world with a much richer diversity than single-minded thinking can lead us.

*Future-Focused Church* addresses the pressing challenges faced by contemporary church leaders, particularly the need to adapt to rapid societal changes, engage younger generations, and foster diversity within the congregation. Drawing from extensive research, interviews, and case studies, the authors provide a roadmap for churches aiming to navigate change faithfully and effectively.

### Core Concepts

1. *Transformation Teams*: The book emphasizes the importance of forming dedicated teams within the church to lead and manage the change processes.
2. *Discerning God's Direction*: Churches are encouraged to seek divine guidance actively, especially when the path forward is uncertain.

3. *Leading Like Jesus*: Leadership models are drawn from Jesus' example, focusing on humility, service, and vision.
4. *Engaging the Next Generation*: Strategies are provided to connect with younger demographics, ensuring the church remains relevant and vibrant.
5. *Embracing Diversity*: The authors advocate for intentional efforts to build diverse communities that reflect the Kingdom of God.

## Practical Applications

The book offers actionable steps, including:

- Activating a transformation team to guide change initiatives.
- Clarifying the church's mission and vision to align with current realities.
- Developing systems for ongoing adaptation and growth.

These steps are designed to help churches move from a state of stagnation to one of dynamic engagement with their communities.

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

## Rural Ministry News

Beloved Travelers,

I am writing to you from the Gather Coffee House in Watertown in route to worship with our sibling congregations in Langford, Bowdle, Hosmer, and McLaughlin. The work of connecting and reconnecting our body of congregations, conferences, and synod continues as I and the Rural Ministry Ambassadors show up to accompany congregations in transition and celebrate new beginnings.

Ambassador Reid Christopherson recently celebrated with Vicar Kendra Kappler as the Seminarian Intern for Benton Lutheran in rural Crooks, and Willow Creek Lutheran in rural Dell Rapids. Ambassador Rev. Becky Piper is accompanying Our Savior's in Hermosa with a

ministry self-study (available on Pasque) and helping to prepare Grand River in Buffalo to receive a seminarian in June for a rural immersion experience. And Ambassador Jill Munger has connected with the leaders of Salem in Mt. Vernon to hear of their journey and strengthen our bonds to one another.

These are just a few examples of what's growing in rural ministry. Whether there's a need in your congregation or a milestone to celebrate, you can reach our whole rural ministry team with one simple email: [ambassadors@sdsynod.org](mailto:ambassadors@sdsynod.org). How may we accompany your congregation in 2025?

Looking forward,

Pastor Joel Pakan  
Director for Rural Ministries  
[jpakan@sdsynod.org](mailto:jpakan@sdsynod.org)  
[sdsynod.org/rural](https://sdsynod.org/rural)

## **Come play at the Holy Playground!**

Beloved Travelers,

Passing faith on to the next generation has always been an important part of Christianity – and one of the best ways to do that is to not only warmly welcome children into worship, but also to provide a space and an experience that is developmentally-appropriate based on the latest brain research. THAT is what the Holy Playground is all about. We are in the business of pulling together experienced educators and early childhood professionals with faithful congregations to create intergenerational worship experiences that are for EVERYONE! Want to be part of the movement? Contact me at 605-274-4027 or [rboehmer@sdsynod.org](mailto:rboehmer@sdsynod.org).

Pastor Renae Boehmer  
Director for the Holy Playground Initiative  
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