



## Churchwide Assembly takes care of business

by Marcia Hahn

More than 800 voting members gathered in Phoenix July 28-Aug. 2 for the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly under the theme "For the Life of the World." Thirteen voting members represented the Northeastern Iowa Synod to vote on key decisions about the work of the church.

"Overall, it was a really informative, thought-provoking week," said Bri Ensign, of Lord of Life, Dubuque. "It was interesting seeing everybody from all over, hearing their viewpoints on very important and current issues, and gaining new information about the church and who we are."

Myrvin Christopherson of First Lutheran, Decorah, says he found the assembly's worship services to be exhilarating, with preachers and musicians who inspired joyful praise and love of neighbor. "This church is on the move with willing partners throughout the world," he said.

### ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

The assembly elected Bishop Yehiel Curry of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod to serve as the new ELCA presiding bishop. He was elected to a six-year term on the fifth ballot with 562 votes. Bishop Kevin Strickland of the Southeastern Synod received 237 votes.

Curry has served as bishop of the ELCA Metropolitan Chicago Synod since 2019. He previously served as mis-

sion developer and pastor of Shekinah Chapel in Riverdale, Ill. Curry received a Bachelor of Arts from Lewis University in Romeoville, Ill., and a Master of Divinity from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) in 2013. Speaking to the assembly, Bishop-elect Curry reflected on his time as a participant in the Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) program.

"Perhaps I'm out there in one of you," Curry said. "I never saw myself as good enough, so for two years, I said no. I finally said yes. When I said yes, your



Presiding Bishop-elect Yehiel Curry poses for a photo with Kimberly Barnes and Bri Ensign of Lord of Life, Dubuque.

support, this church's support, of that ministry meant everything. So, if you want to know what your benevolence dollars look like, it looks like me, and I



David Voigts of Zion Lutheran (Jubilee), La Porte City, speaks at the podium during the Churchwide Assembly.

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Churchwide Assembly voting members from the Northeastern Iowa Synod, front row: Karis Nye, Pastor Erika Lenth, Bri Ensign, Pastor Becky Sogge, Kimberly Barnes, Pastor Maureen Howard. Back row: Bishop Kevin Jones, David Voigts, Pastor Dena Gable, Apou Aderbuk, Myrvin Christopherson, Pastor Dave Werges, Terrance Bush.

want to say thank you. Thank you for your investment."

The Rev. Lucille "CeCee" Mills was elected to a six-year term as ELCA secretary. She has served as an assistant to the bishop in the ELCA North Carolina Synod since 2019. Previously, she served as an interim pastor, as program associate for ELCA African Descent Ministries, and as pastor of Rejoice Lutheran Church, Chesapeake, Va. Mills received a TEEM certification from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, S.C., in 2002.

"I do believe that the reason why I, an African American woman who stands before you with no degrees in a church that cares so much about education, ... is because you saw the gifts and potential in me," Mills told the assembly. "I celebrate with you that we listen to God's call and that we will become God's beloved community."

Pastor Erika Kielstrup of St. Paul, Monona, says it was an honor to be able to elect a new presiding bishop and secretary. "I was surprised that I teared up with both elections because

our church was following the Holy Spirit through their hearts."

## VOTES FOR ACTION

The assembly voted on a number of issues affecting the church's future directions and policies, including social statements, constitutional amendments, and memorials. Here is a partial list:

- **Memorial A3** — Indian Boarding School Remembrance, calling for the church to observe the National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools annually and locate records related to the complexity of the ELCA with Indian boarding schools. The Northeastern Iowa Synod was one of several synods to submit memorials on this topic.
- **Memorial B14** — Consideration of Recommendation 1 of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, calling for the church to acknowledge the importance of accountability in addressing racism within all structures of the ELCA and to continue to work with the

advisory team regarding mutual accountability, with a final report by fall 2027.

- **Memorial D4** — Stand of Palestinian Rights and End to Occupation of Palestine, calling for advocacy for human rights, an end to the occupation, and an end to the conflict in Gaza, among other actions.
- **Social Statement** — "Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All" with amendments and implementing resolutions to address civic engagement and the church's role in society.
- **Social Statement** — "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" editorial changes to align the language with current understanding of family diversity and marriage.

Imran Siddiqui, ELCA vice president, recognized the synod vice presidents attending and announced the council's passage of a new Association of Synod Vice Presidents as a first step to

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# We Are Church for the Life of the World

I returned home this morning from eight days in Phoenix at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. Twelve people, ages 17 through 80+, from Northeastern Iowa congregations joined me for six days of worship, meetings, deliberations, elections, learning, and fellowship. We learned firsthand the difference between “feels like” temperatures when the heat index is 110 degrees, and walking in the sunshine when it is 110 degrees.

Inside the convention hall (which I believe has a thermostat set at “meat locker”), we joined people from across the ELCA for as many as 12 hours a day. The very full agenda included the election of the Rev. Yehiel Curry as our next Presiding Bishop, and the Rev. CeCee Mills as the next Secretary of the ELCA. Both terms are for six years and begin on Oct. 1, 2025.

We also deliberated, amended, passed, referred, and voted down various resolutions, memorials, and constitutional amendments. In the days ahead there will be reports available on all of the actions of the assembly.

Throughout the week the assembly struggled with the messiness of being humans in community. People said things at the microphone and did things on the stage that were received

as disrespectful by other members of the assembly. These were rarely, if ever, intentional or mean-spirited words and actions. However, even the best intentions can cause hurt and harm to others. In several instances we heard people express the hurt and disrespect they received. In some cases, we heard apologies publicly. I am also aware of other cases in which people gathered privately to begin reconciling. In all instances, we had to sit in discomfort, not being able to “patch things up” neatly in our time together.

What sticks with me, however, is not the awkward feelings of those moments, but the sense that the real work we were doing in Phoenix is relational not structural. Yes, we are trying to get our governing documents and social teachings to reflect God’s kingdom “here on earth as in heaven.” I believe it is important that we do that. And yet, I can’t imagine that someone will read a constitution and think, “I can be a better, more loving person than I am now,” and begin to make changes to their life.

I can imagine that people who experience confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation (renewed life) will understand in their hearts that life can

be better for them and for others. This is the experience we have in Jesus, who lived, died, and rose from the dead for us.

The new life we have in Christ is not reserved for after we die. We are set free to participate in God’s kingdom here and now too. Isn’t that what Jesus meant when he said, “The kingdom of God is at hand!”?

I am glad to have served at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly with the marvelous people from our Synod who took personal time, left families, and worked tirelessly for our church at the assembly. Thank you for your prayers, we needed them.

And on a personal note, I am thrilled to be returning as the Bishop of the Northeastern Iowa Synod and not the Bishop-Elect of the ELCA. Being nominated is an incredible honor. I am grateful that it is Bishop Curry’s call. Please join me in praying for him, our new Secretary, and the whole Church.

— **Bishop Kevin Jones**



Bishop Kevin Jones

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acknowledge the role of synod vice presidents and the need for formal fellowship and training.

ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton was recognized for her service. “I

started my ministry as presiding bishop with these four emphases: We are church. We are Lutheran. We are church together. We are church for the sake of the world,” Eaton told the assembly. “I will end as I began.”

The assembly concluded with a video announcing that Des Moines will be the site of the 2028 Churchwide Assembly, Aug. 7-11.

Learn more at [elca.org](https://elca.org).

# Register by Oct. 8 for the Men's Retreat early-bird rate

Nov. 7-9, 2025

Camp Ewalu, Strawberry Point

Early-bird registration for the "One Year to Live" men's retreat is open through Wednesday, Oct. 8. The retreat will take place Nov. 7-9 at Ewalu Camp & Retreat Center, Strawberry Point.



The retreat is open to men of all ages to join in group discussion and activities to rethink how they set their priorities and discover how God has equipped them to live. It is led by lay members and presented by Lutheran Men in Mission, in partnership with the Northeastern Iowa Synod and Camp Ewalu.

The early bird registration fee is \$175. After Oct. 8, the rate is \$200 due by Oct. 24. Lodging, six meals and materials are included. To download the brochure/registration form and to register online, visit [neiasynod.org/2025/03/oytl](https://neiasynod.org/2025/03/oytl).

## CLERGY BOUNDARIES TRAINING

Nov. 6, 2025

Actively serving rostered ministers from the Northeastern Iowa Synod should save Thursday, Nov. 6, for this year's day of boundaries education focusing on gender justice training.

This is the second year for the ELCA Region 5 education day, which rotates between this year's gender justice training, next year's racial justice training (Nov. 5, 2026), and boundaries/ethics training in 2027 (date to be determined). This required training will be offered at satellite locations in each synod for in-person discussion and Q & A, along with the online boundaries training.

Watch for upcoming information about registration and satellite locations in this synod. For more information, visit [neiasynod.org/2024/09/s-a-f-e-ministry-team](https://neiasynod.org/2024/09/s-a-f-e-ministry-team) or contact Pastor Steve Brackett.

# Women in Ministry Retreat

Sept. 18-19, 2025

Women from Northeastern Iowa and surrounding synods who are rostered ministers or candidates for rostered ministry are invited to a Women in Ministry retreat Sept. 18-19. The retreat will take place at the Camp Ewalu Stone Center, Strawberry Point, with the theme "Cultivating Connection," led by Dr. Crystal Hall.

Everyone will have opportunities to learn about cultivating confident ministries, connect with one another, relax and create with other women in ministry.

As a former seminary professor, Hall helps bridge the gap between what women know in their heads and the actions they want to take to create truly sustainable ministries. Hall is a certified coach and holds a Ph.D. from Union Theological Seminary in New York. She lives on the Connecticut shoreline with her husband, their son and their cat, Lady Blue.

The retreat will begin with a 10 a.m. worship service on Thursday and will end with a worship service on Friday at 3 p.m. The cost to attend is \$100, which includes housing and meals. Registration is due by Thursday, Sept. 4.

Learn more and register online at [neiasynod.org/women-in-ministry-retreat-2025](https://neiasynod.org/women-in-ministry-retreat-2025).



Dr. Crystal Hall

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[neiasynod.org](https://neiasynod.org)

# Registration is open for the Tri-Synod Fall Conference

Sept. 29-30, 2025  
Clive, Iowa

Active rostered ministers, synod authorized ministers (SAMs), interns, and lay professionals from the three Iowa ELCA synods are invited to the 2025 Tri-Synod Fall Theological Conference, set for Sept. 29-30 at Faith Lutheran in Clive. The two-day conference will include worship, learning, fellowship, and connection with ministry partners across the three Iowa synods. An optional pre-gathering time is available beginning the evening of Sept. 28.

The Rev. Dr. Tamás Fabiny, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (ELCH), is scheduled to be the keynote speaker. Fabiny will

share how the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary has adapted through three distinct periods in its history in order to speak and live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

- The Counter-Reformation
- Under two different dictatorships (Nazi and Soviet occupations)
- The Present Day — defined by populism, intolerance, and refugee crisis around the world

Fabiny was elected bishop of the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary in 2005 and in 2017 was elected presiding bishop of the ELCH. He also serves



as a vice president for Central and Eastern Europe of the Lutheran World Federation and is a New Testament scholar with eight published books. Fabiny will be a guest of the Northeastern Iowa Synod during his visit to Iowa.

To learn more and register online, visit [seiasynod.org/events/fall-gathering-2025](https://seiasynod.org/events/fall-gathering-2025).

## Portico Benefits Update for 2026

Join our Portico regional representative, Jennifer Prinz, for a Zoom presentation **Thursday, Oct. 2, at 6 p.m.**, about the four new Portico health benefit options for 2026.

This virtual workshop is open to all Portico plan members (rostered ministers and lay professionals), EmployerLink Users, council members and anyone interested in learning more about the changes for 2026. The workshop will not be recorded due to Portico's policy. Register at <https://short-url.at/cALxn>.

## SYNOD POSITION OPENING

Applications are being accepted for a communication coordinator to lead digital and print communications for the Northeastern Iowa Synod. This is a 32-hour per week position with responsibilities for the synod website, social media, publications, video editing and other duties as assigned.

To learn more and apply, visit [neiasynod.org/communication-coordinator](https://neiasynod.org/communication-coordinator).

## BISHOPS' RIDE AGAINST HUNGER



Bishop Kevin Jones, Amy Jones, Bishop Amy Current and other team members enjoy a break during the Iowa Bishops One Day Ride Against Hunger. The team left Bethany Lutheran, Iowa Falls, at 6:30 a.m. on July 24 for the 51-mile RAGBRAI ride to Cedar Falls to raise awareness and funds for ELCA World Hunger and local anti-hunger ministries. People can still support their efforts by donating online at [onrealm.org/neiasynod/-/form/give/ragbrai2025](https://onrealm.org/neiasynod/-/form/give/ragbrai2025) or send a check to the Northeastern Iowa Synod office with "Ride Against Hunger" in the memo.

# Apply for the Lay Ministry Training Fall Session

The Northeastern Iowa Synod is accepting applications for the next Lay Ministry Training cohort, which begins in September 2025.

The two-year program will give lay leaders the tools and support they need to lead worship, preach, make home visits and do other basic pastoral ministries when their congregations are without an ordained pastor or deacon. Lay ministers can also use their skills to assist pastors with home visits and pastors who oversee multiple congregations.

Priority to join this year's cohort will be given to lay leaders from congregations and parishes that have been in pastoral transition for an extended period of time, or are not able to afford a full-time pastor and not able to form a sharing partnership with another congregation.

## THANK YOU FROM THE EDITOR

For the past 16 years I have been editor of the *Star* newsletter, but this will be my last issue since I am set to begin my retirement in September.



I want to thank all the ministers, congregation members, ministry partners and synod staff who have allowed me to interview them for *Star* articles over the years—sometimes with very little advance notice! I always looked forward to learning about your ministries and I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to share your stories with others. I have especially enjoyed sharing about the ministries of our smaller congregations and the inspiring ways so many of you found your call to ministry.

Thank you so much for letting me be a part of this ministry!

— **Marcia Hahn**

## TWO LAYERS OF TRAINING

Training is offered in two layers, which the students take simultaneously through an online Lutheran lay school. The formation layer teaches practical skills for preaching, pastoral care, stewardship, Christian education, leadership and administration. The academic layer offers deeper study of the Bible, Christian history, Lutheran theology and spirituality.

Students take the online classes two Saturdays a month during the school year — all day on one Saturday and the morning for the other. Students also meet once a month in person or through Zoom with their mentor who checks in to see how their training is going and to answer questions. In addition, students gather in person for an annual lay ministry retreat to receive hands-on training, join in spiritual practices, share experiences and ask questions.

Participants who complete both layers will become Certified Lay Assisting Ministers (CLAM). Some lay ministers who complete the training may be approved to serve as Synod Authorized Ministers (SAM) in specific circumstances, which means they can preside over the sacraments of communion and baptism.

Options are also available for lay members who are interested in taking a specific class rather than the entire program.

Application forms and more information can be found at [neiasynod.org/2025/05/lmt-2024](https://neiasynod.org/2025/05/lmt-2024). Email questions to Pastor Kristen Corr Rod or call the synod office, 319-352-1414.

## ROSTERED MINISTERS GATHERING

**July 6-9, 2026**

Rostered ministers may want to mark their calendars for the ELCA Rostered Ministers Gathering set for July 6-9, 2026, in Indianapolis. All ELCA deacons, pastors, bishops and approved candidates for call are invited.

Watch for more information about the theme, keynote speakers, workshop sessions and registration over the next few months.

## Pastor Jennifer Thomas joins the synod staff

Pastor Jennifer (Jen) Thomas has joined the synod staff as Assistant to the Bishop for Shared Ministry and Development. She comes to the synod with extensive experience in church-related development and fundraising, and a passion for the ministries being done by synod networks.

In her new role, Thomas will manage mission support, development, grants and stewardship resources; coordinate educational events for rostered ministers; serve as the liaison for several ministry networks, including the Global Church Together Network to foster companion synod connections; and assist with the call process and other duties to support the Bishop and congregations.

Thomas was ordained in 1998 after

graduating from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. She earned her bachelor's degree in mathematics and religion from Augustana University in Sioux Falls, S.D. She completed her internship at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, Pa.

She began her ministry as outreach pastor at Lake Park Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, and in 2007 she was called as senior pastor to Immanuel Lutheran Church in Kansas City, Mo. Thomas has since served in a variety of roles, including alumni engagement manager and gift officer at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, as well as interim pastor for two congregations in Missouri. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she worked as a financial associate at Thrivent and later served as a mid-level gift officer for the ELCA churchwide

organization. Thomas currently serves as treasurer for the Association of White Lutherans for Racial Justice.

Thomas and her family are members of Holy Trinity, Dubuque. She is married to Vance, the library director at the University of Dubuque, and they have two young adult children who attend the University of Kansas. Thomas says she is passionate about organizing, fundraising, education, and advocacy.

"I believe that we are blessed to be a blessing to others, and I look forward to serving with you in the Northeastern Iowa Synod," Thomas said.



Pastor Jen Thomas

## Kate Stierman elected Synod Council Vice President

Kate Stierman of Dubuque was elected Synod Council vice president at the 2025 Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly. Stierman is a long-time member of Holy Trinity, Dubuque, where she has served on the council and various committees. Most notably, Stierman says she enjoys her work on the board of Noah's Ark Child Development Center.

"I joined the board when it became apparent we needed to really discern how that ministry served the community," Stierman says. "Over the last seven years the program has evolved from 17 part-time students to 91 full-time students. Our building is bursting with energy and the most beautiful chaos."

In 2022, Stierman stepped in as "temporary" administrator during a time of major congregational transition for Holy Trinity.

"That 'interim' role has evolved into a rewarding vocation of support and witness," Stierman says. "I enjoy a dynamic, collaborative lay/clergy partnership with Pastor Jason Davis. We watch in awe as the Spirit has revitalized energy and

fostered new, creative approaches to ministry at Holy Trinity."

Growing up, Stierman attended St. Paul's Lutheran School and Church in Waverly. She graduated from the University of Iowa with a degree in finance and moved to Dubuque to work as a financial analyst. She is married and has three teenage children. In her spare time, she enjoys going to the driving range, sewing quilts, reading non-fiction, and traveling. She and her family have visited 49 states.

"As vice president I look forward to seeing what God is up to among us in the Northeastern Iowa Synod and really hope to approach my service with joyful curiosity."



Kate Stierman and Pastor Jason Davis team up to supervise "The Waldo Group" at the 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering.

# Synod Assembly focuses on connections

by Marcia Hahn

Some 234 voting members and visitors gathered June 6-7 in Cedar Falls for the 2025 Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly, with the theme "Created to Be Connected." Sixty-six percent of the voting members were laity and 34 percent were rostered ministers.

## WORSHIP & BUSINESS

Around 100 people attended the Friday night worship service at Fredsville Lutheran Church, with the sermon by Pastor Lee Gable and music by the Fredsville choir. Afterward, the Fredsville congregation hosted a reception with homemade pastries and displays highlighting their Danish heritage.

Saturday's activities at the Bien VenU Event center opened with a morning prayer service, followed by plenary sessions, keynote presentations, recognitions and the closing worship service, with Bishop Kevin Jones preaching.

Voting members adopted the following resolutions and one memorial to be passed on to the Churchwide Assembly:

- Minimum Compensation Guidelines for 2026 & 2027
- Mission Goals for 2026/2027 and Synod Spending Plan for 2027/2028
- Amendments to the Northeastern Iowa Synod Constitution
- Memorial calling for the churchwide organization to take actions to address the legacies of this church's role in Indian Boarding Schools.

In addition, voting members elected new members to the Discipline Committee, Nominating Committee and Synod Council, including Kate Stierman as Vice President.



Voting members and visitors take a lunch break at the 2025 Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly.

Bishop Jones recognized pastors and deacons who are new to the synod and thanked outgoing synod council members for their service: Rev. Matthew Agee, Julia Stierman, Deborah Tidwell, David Voights and Linda Groe, who served as vice president.

Everyone had an opportunity to visit displays hosted by synod networks and partners in ministry.

## BISHOP'S REPORT

In his report, Bishop Kevin Jones thanked everyone for their time to attend and prepare for the assembly, for their commitment to their congregations, for the ways they live out their connections to Jesus Christ, and for the worship opportunities and ministries they provide to others.

Jones highlighted two areas he is excited about for the coming year:

- A renewed emphasis on developing new gifts and revenue streams to fund synod level ministry.

- Development of a Mission Table to oversee disbursement of up to \$70,000 per year in grants to help congregations develop new ministry projects

"I want the synod to invest money in you and the ministries you do," Jones told the assembly.

Lastly, Jones shared about the renovation work that has been done over the past year to upgrade the synod office building. "Not only does this provide a better place to meet and work, it also makes the building more valuable if we should ever want to sell it and move to a different synod office model."

## CHURCHWIDE REPORT

Aaron Shoppa, program director for ELCA Youth Ministry, brought greetings as the churchwide representative, shared a video message from Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, and thanked the synod for its support in 2024:

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- \$383,989 given to the ELCA for Mission Support
- \$172,451 for Lutheran Disaster Response
- \$281,120 for ELCA World Hunger.

Shoppa also gave an update about the 2027 ELCA Youth Gathering in Minneapolis and shared about his work as a resource and advocate for youth ministry leaders and volunteers. He spoke about the importance of mentorship to help youth find their identity, belonging and purpose. Shoppa said that loneliness is the epidemic of today, and youth who don't have a mentorship with an adult are more likely to feel loneliness.

"The church is the best place to help youth find a faithful community where they belong and see their purpose."

Shoppa emphasized that mentorship isn't just one to one; it can be a culture for the entire congregation where adults are invested in their youth and know their names, their struggles, and their hopes and dreams.



Assembly attendees visit displays at the Synod Assembly.

"One role model makes a significant difference; five or more is an astounding difference," he said.

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Pastor Emily Harkins presented about making "Connections on the Edge" and ways congregations can connect with those living on the margins.

Harkins shared stories from The Dwelling, the mission congregation in Winston-Salem, N.C., where she is lead pastor and founding developer. The Dwelling connects with those who are housing insecure. It provides worship with a full breakfast and lunch to people who may not have had a place to sleep the night before and gives them access to showers and laundry. Each year hundreds of young people



Pastor Emily Harkins

from around the country come to The Dwelling to do mission work beside them.

"It looks unconventional, but it is the church," Harkins said.

When someone at The Dwelling is struggling, Harkins says the rest of the community steps in—not as charity, but as an interdependent connection.

"Our answer as a church should always be, we are so glad

you're here. That is connection."

Harkins told the assembly that to follow Jesus is to go toward places where others won't, to do ministry at the edges with people in their own context. It is about building a world where everyone is equal at the start. Instead of asking how to get someone to come to church, she suggests congregations start asking how to become a church where the people already are.

"Design a church not for them, but with them," Harkins said. "As neighbors, provide a seat where the table is long enough, but also low enough for everyone to reach. Start understanding that margins were always the starting point."

## ASSEMBLY OFFERING

Congregations and individuals have given more than \$4,600 to the Synod Assembly offering to support The Dwelling ministry in North Carolina and the Dwelling in Faith Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community in Mitchell, Iowa.

Offering gifts can still be made [online](#) or by sending a check to: Northeastern Iowa Synod, 201 20th St. SW, P.O. Box 804 Waverly, IA 50677-0804.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The next Synod Assembly will take place in 2027 and will include a Bishop's election. A ministry event is planned for 2026 with opportunities for everyone to come hear speakers, connect with one another and learn about new ideas in ministry. Dates for both events are yet to be confirmed.

*Find photos, election results, resolutions summary and other resources at [neiasynod.org/2025/06/2025-synod-assembly-recap](https://neiasynod.org/2025/06/2025-synod-assembly-recap).*

# Growing Generous Hearts: A Synod Invitation

As your new Assistant to the Bishop for Shared Ministry and Development, I am filled with gratitude and excitement to walk alongside you in this season of ministry. I look forward to getting to know the people, congregations, and ministries of the Northeastern Iowa Synod—each of you is a vital part of the Spirit’s work in this place.

As we journey together through this season of the synod, we are invited to reflect deeply on the gifts God has given us—and how we are called to share them. Generosity is not just about giving; it’s about growing. It’s about opening our hearts to the needs of others and responding with love, compassion, and faith.

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”  
— 2 Corinthians 9:7

In the words of Henri Nouwen from *A Spirituality of Fundraising*, “Fundraising is, first and foremost, a ministry. It’s a way of announcing our vision and inviting other people into our mission.” This is a sacred invitation to offer our time, talent, and treasure in service of our parish community and beyond. Whether it’s volunteering for a ministry,

sharing a skill, or supporting a mission financially, every act of generosity helps build the Body of Christ.



Pastor Jen Thomas

Thank you to all who already give so freely and faithfully. Your generosity is a living witness to God’s grace at work in the world.

Let us continue to grow generous hearts—together. How will you respond to the call?

— Jen Thomas

## Lutheran Campus Ministry-Ames sets new goals

Since the temporary suspension of its ministry in 2024, the Lutheran Campus Ministry (LCM) Board has continued its work to discern how God is calling this ministry into the future and possible next steps. During the first half of 2025, the LCM Board engaged students, alumni, the three Iowa Synods, and community partners in a visioning process to reimagine what campus ministry might look like in 2026 and beyond.

Board members heard stories of ministry restarts at Lutheran Campus Ministries in other contexts to learn from their best practices. They engaged in conversations with campus ministry leaders of full-communion partner congregations in Ames to learn about their ministries and collaboration possibilities.

Now, with renewed energy and purpose, the Board is working to lay the groundwork for a sustainable and



impactful future, with a commitment to maintain the witness of Lutheran Campus Ministry at Iowa State University. The Board’s goals include expanding student outreach, deepening spiritual formation, and strengthening LCM-Ames’ financial foundation to ensure presence and witness of ministry on campus.

Continued contributions and prayers

make this ministry possible. While financial contributions are essential, there are many other ways to support the work of this rebuilding ministry:

- Do you know someone who might be interested in receiving these updates? Send them the form link below.
- Are you passionate about ensuring the presence of an ELCA ministry at Iowa State? Let the Board know and they can equip you to share with your own local congregation.
- If you feel called to give or to learn more about how you can support Lutheran Campus Ministry in Ames, contact Rev. Erika Uthe at [lutheran-campusministryisu@gmail.com](mailto:lutheran-campusministryisu@gmail.com).

Sign up to receive LCM updates at : [forms.gle/PR99mmnL3TUye5qy7](https://forms.gle/PR99mmnL3TUye5qy7).

Read more updates about the work of the Board at [tinyurl.com/2s4fau7m](https://tinyurl.com/2s4fau7m).

# What I Did Over Summer Break to Support My Recovery

by The Northeastern Iowa Synod Substance Abuse Network

Summer can be a season full of sunshine, celebration, and connection—but for those of us in recovery, it can also bring unique challenges. Whether it's backyard barbecues, vacations, or family gatherings, staying true to our commitment to sobriety takes intention and care.

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*A little thoughtfulness  
goes a long way in helping  
those in recovery feel safe,  
seen, and supported!*

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In our Substance Abuse Network, we know that recovery doesn't take a break. So, we asked some of our members: What did you do this summer to support your recovery? What follows are real answers from people walking the recovery journey—simple, powerful actions that help them stay grounded, joyful, and sober through the season.

**BRIAN:** "One thing I did this summer to support my recovery was to be sure my fridge and cooler were stocked with non-alcoholic delicious options. When I have friends over or go places to celebrate, I am prepared to join in festivities without reaching for alcohol. I also make sure those I'm with

know I'm a person in recovery and seek their support. I need them to understand my need to refrain from drinking alcohol and if not outright support me, at least refuse to offer me or cajole me into drinking."

**JANE:** "Whenever I attend a gathering where alcoholic beverages are offered, I give myself a pep talk about how much I cherish my sobriety—and as tempting as it may be to partake—I think it all the way through to the end. I remember the reasons I don't drink anymore and how much I love waking up every morning feeling great—and that those who are drinking excessively probably won't feel so great tomorrow. It gives me strength and confidence in myself. I also give myself permission to leave a situation where I don't feel safe about my sobriety—without feeling the need to explain why I'm leaving!"

**BOB:** "I usually bring with me a can of sparkling water or bottled water when I go to summer gatherings. I also let folks know I enjoy a hot cup of coffee anytime of the year. I have some family who are heavy hitters and they usually gather in the basement, so I avoid going to the basement and spend time visiting other family members who like to chat. They also know of my fondness for

coffee so there is usually a pot on for me and I am free to make myself at home so when the pot runs out I can make another. I also try to hit a meeting on that day or around that day to remember who I am."

If you are planning a gathering or spending time with someone in recovery, you can help support their journey by offering non-alcoholic options, by avoiding any pressure to drink, and by creating a welcoming, inclusive environment.

Brian also offers this suggestion: "When hosting parties, I have found it helpful to clearly label cooler contents and to separate alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. This helps people in recovery, like myself, cope with the allergy we have to substances. Much like we honor people's food allergies with clear labels and distinctions, it is vital to host gatherings with alcohol present along the same lines—ensuring that folks in recovery have plentiful alternatives."

These same helpful ideas can apply to any seasonal gatherings and events, such as fall tailgate parties and holiday celebrations. A little thoughtfulness goes a long way in helping those in recovery feel safe, seen, and supported!



# Check out the newest Racial Justice resources

by Lisa Nelson, Racial Justice Advocacy Network

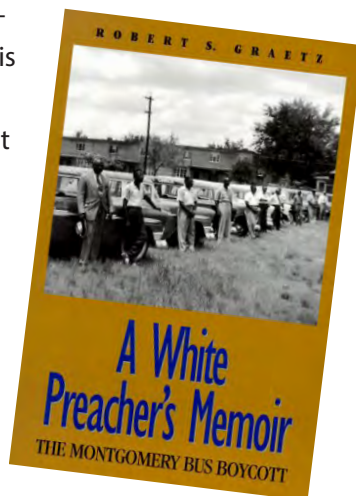
## RECOMMENDED READING

A list of recommended books is now available on the Racial Justice Network page on the Northeastern Iowa Synod website. The list was compiled by Racial Justice Network members who were invited to recommend books they have read that relate to racial justice. Each recommendation includes a summary, suggested audience and use, and any connection there may be to Lutheranism or Iowa.

Network members will continue to add to the list and are open to suggestions from others as well. The list includes books for youth, adults, book study groups, and church leaders, and varies from biographies to graphic novels to Bible commentaries. Download the pdf at [neiasynod.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Racial-Justice-Advocacy-Book-List.pdf](https://neiasynod.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Racial-Justice-Advocacy-Book-List.pdf).

A biography on the list, recommended by Reg Green, is *A White Preacher's Memoir: Montgomery*, by Rev. Robert S. Graetz. Reg summarizes, "In the late 1950's, Montgomery, Alabama was the hot spot for the modern Civil Rights movement. Lutheran Pastor Robert Graetz was one of the few white people bravely standing with bold

Black preachers, audacious enough to face racism, hatred, and threats to their lives in the deep South. Graetz shares stories of the events and his participation in the famous Montgomery bus boycott, including two bombing attempts to kill him and his family. His memoir provides a first-hand account of one of the most significant and ef-



fective non-violent protests of the 20th century. He is a human rights icon in the Lutheran churches in America." This book is recommended for young adults and adults.

## LUTHERAN MEMOIR

Another resource offered by the Racial Justice Network is the "Lutheran Memoir" project which presents information on the contributions of Black pastors in the history of the Lutheran Church and the historical involvement of the church with native populations. The posters have been displayed and shared at Synod Assembly and other leadership gatherings around the synod in the past months, and the posters and handouts/study guides are now available online.

Please visit [neiasynod.org/lutheran-memoir](https://neiasynod.org/lutheran-memoir) to download and use the Lutheran Memoir resources for display, study, discussion, or whatever fits best within your context. Also available are three-foot tall posters and stands that can be borrowed by emailing the network at [neiasynodrjan@gmail.com](mailto:neiasynodrjan@gmail.com).

Find more resources at [neiasynod.org/download-category/racial-justice-advocacy](https://neiasynod.org/download-category/racial-justice-advocacy).



## AUGUST 2025

**Aug. 1-2 CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY**, Phoenix, Ariz.

**7 TRANSITIONAL/INTERIM MINISTRY**, Synod Office, 10 a.m.

**8 CANDIDACY COMMITTEE**, Synod Office, 9:30 a.m.

**14 GLOBAL CHURCH TOGETHER NETWORK**, Zoom, 1:30 p.m.

**14 RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY NETWORK**, Synod Office & Zoom, 3 p.m.

**21 FIRST CALL RETREAT**, Synod Office, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

**23 SWO BOARD MEETING**, Synod Office, 9 a.m.-12 noon

**26 SUBSTANCE ABUSE NETWORK**, Online, 1:30 p.m.

## SEPTEMBER 2025

**1 SYNOD OFFICE CLOSED**, Labor Day

**3 DEANS & CHAPLAINS**, Synod Office, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

**4 TRANSITIONAL/INTERIM MINISTRY MTG.**, Zoom, 10 a.m.

**4 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING**, Zoom, 3 p.m.

**7 GOD'S WORK. OUR HANDS. SUNDAY**

**11 GLOBAL CHURCH TOGETHER NETWORK**, Zoom, 1:30 p.m.

**11 RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY NETWORK**, Synod Office & Zoom, 3 p.m.

**13 SYNOD COUNCIL**, Synod Office, 9:30 a.m.

**18-19 WOMEN IN MINISTRY RETREAT**, Ewalu Stone Center, Strawberry Point

**18-21 ELCA WORLD HUNGER LEADERSHIP GATHERING**, Columbus, Ohio

**29-30 TRI-SYNOD FALL THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE**, First Lutheran, Clive

## OCTOBER 2025

**2 TRANSITIONAL/INTERIM MINISTRY MTG.**, Zoom, 9:30 a.m.

**2 PORTICO BENEFITS UPDATE FOR 2026**, Zoom, 6 p.m.

**9 GLOBAL CHURCH TOGETHER NETWORK**, Zoom, 1:30 p.m.

**9 RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY NETWORK**, Synod Office & Zoom, 3 p.m.

**18 SWO M & M FIELD TRIP**, Clayton County

## NOVEMBER 2025

**6 BOUNDARIES TRAINING EVENT-GENDER JUSTICE**, Satellite Locations, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

**7-9 ONE YEAR TO LIVE MEN'S RETREAT**, Camp Ewalu

**12 COLLEAGUE GROUP LEADERS ANNUAL MEETING**, Synod Office, 10 a.m.

**13 GLOBAL CHURCH TOGETHER NETWORK**, Zoom, 1:30 p.m.

**13 RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY NETWORK**, Synod Office & Zoom, 3 p.m.

**15 SYNOD COUNCIL**, Zoom, 9 a.m.

**20 TRANSITIONAL/INTERIM MINISTRY MTG.**, Zoom, 9:30 a.m.

**27-28 SYNOD OFFICE CLOSED**, Thanksgiving Break

## DECEMBER 2025

**4 TRANSITIONAL/INTERIM MINISTRY MTG.**, Zoom, 9:30 a.m.

**5 CANDIDACY COMMITTEE**, Synod Office, 8 a.m.

**11 GLOBAL CHURCH TOGETHER NETWORK**, Zoom, 1:30 p.m.

**13 RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY NETWORK**, Synod Office & Zoom, 3 p.m.

**25 SYNOD OFFICE CLOSED**, Christmas Break TBD

## ORDINATIONS

• **ChyAnne Slick**, St. John, Sumner, July 19

• **Jared McLey**, St. Paul's, Waverly, July 20

• **Laurie Iudin-Nelson**, First, Decorah, Sept. 6

## INSTALLATIONS

• **Rev. Jared McLey**, St. John (Maxfield), Denver; St. John (Crane Creek), Tripoli; St. Paul UCC, Denver (contract), Aug. 10

• **Rev. ChyAnne Slick**, St. Peter, Greene, Aug. 17

• **Rev. Laurie Iudin-Nelson**, Our Savior's, Osage, Sept. 7

## 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

• **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**, Minn., 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, contract

• **Ossian**, Ossian

• **Thornton**, *St. Paul\**

• **Toeterville**, St. Peter & Carpenter, Deer Creek

• **Tripoli**, Grace, Rev. Karen O'Malia, contract interim

• **Waterloo**, *Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd\**

• **Waterloo**, *Our Savior's, Lisa Ames-Kruse, SAM, contract\**

## SELF-STUDY

• **Cedar Falls**, Bethlehem

• **Cedar Falls**, St. John, staff

• **Clarion**, First

• **Decorah**, *St. John's & Hauge\**

• **Garnavillo**, St. Paul & McGregor, First

• **Hawkeye**, *Trinity\**

• **Oelwein**, Zion

• **Washburn**, *Redeemer\**

• **Waukon**, St. John

## ROSTER CHANGES

• **Rev. Jennifer Thomas**, transferred from Central States Synod

• **Rev. Jonathan Dolan**, transferred from Southeastern Iowa Synod

• **Rev. David Lenth**, retired

*\*Part-time Call*

FOLLOW UPDATES ON OPEN CALLS AT [NEIASYNOD.ORG/OPEN-CALLS](https://neiasynod.org/open-calls).

God's work. Our hands.



September 7, 2025

# PRAYER CALENDAR

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

## AUGUST 1-9, 2025

### • H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders

- Rev. Jack Gannett
- Rev. Becky Sogge
- Rev. Brad Hanson
- Rev. Martin Lohrmann
- Rev. Dan Christensen
- Rev. Ann Fritschel
- Rev. Charlie Underwood
- Zion Lutheran Church, Dysart
- St. Peter Lutheran Church, Eldorado
- Elgin Lutheran Church, Elgin

## AUGUST 10-16, 2025

- Rev. Brian Julin-McCleary
- Rev. Nancy Solomonson
- Rev. Randy Nielsen
- Highland Lutheran Church, Elgin
- Bethany Lutheran Church, Elkader
- Hope Lutheran Church (Littleport), Elkader
- Zion Lutheran Church (Clayton Center), Elkader

## AUGUST 17-23, 2025

- Middle East Peace
- Rev. Daryl Schultz
- Rev. Tom Jones
- Rev. David Severtson
- American Lutheran Church, Grundy Center
- St. Paul Lutheran Church (Maple Leaf), Elma
- Rev. Dean Williams

## AUGUST 24-31, 2025

- Rev. Sid Bohls
- St. John Lutheran Church, Farmersburg
- St. John Lutheran Church, Frederika
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of Peace (Clayton), Garnavillo
- St. Paul Lutheran Church, Garnavillo
- St. Peter Lutheran Church, Garnavillo
- Faith Lutheran Church (Miller), Garner
- St. Peter Lutheran Church, Greene

## SEPTEMBER 1-6, 2025

### • H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders

- Rev. Bob Scheurer
- Rev. Joel Nye
- Amy Wrightsman
- St. John's American Lutheran Church, Guttenberg
- St. Paul Lutheran Church, Guttenberg

## SEPTEMBER 7-13, 2025

- Marcia Hahn
- Rev. Nikoli Falenschek
- Rev. Paul Hougen
- Rev. Sam Hernes
- Rev. Matthew Becker
- Edna Kamper
- St. John's Lutheran Church, Hampton

## SEPTEMBER 14-20, 2025

### • Middle East Peace

- Jan Glaspie
- Rev. Jim Klosterboer
- Rev. Katie Pals
- Rev. Sue Cira
- Rev. David Nelson
- Rev. Liz Bell

## SEPTEMBER 21-30, 2025

- Rev. John Largen
- Rev. Erika Lenth
- Kathy Liddle
- Rev. Paul Nelson
- Rev. Sue Garbes
- Rev. David Tielbar
- Rev. Jim Carpenter
- Rev. Kathy Wicks
- Rev. Mike Ashman
- St. Paul Lutheran Church, Hampton
- Grace Lutheran Church, Hanlontown
- Trinity Lutheran Church, Hawkeye





# Good News

July/ August 2025

*As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society and the world.*

## **President's Sparks**

Hello to all the Women of the Church and others who make things happen. We had a great time at our Sharing Party in June with 32 people attending. We had 4 speakers and a great worship service. A special thank you to Pastor Liz Bell for coming and helping with the question/ answer portion of our service. Also thank you goes to our other speakers from LSI, EWALU and Shepherd of the Hills and a shout out to Zion Lutheran in Oelwein for hosting us.

A couple of questions were given to Mike Knipp from LSI and he sent back these answers:

1. **Do children in detention get to keep the quilts that are given to them?** As far as LSI knows, they do get to keep them.
2. **What early childhood programs are covered in our areas?** Black Hawk County Birthing hospitals are staffed 5 days a week by LSI. Starting in Oct. 2024, coordinated efforts gave information out to 450 new parents. They had a baby shower where 200 parents received resources and education. I asked what they needed. Early childhood programs can use baby blankets, potty seats, board books and developmental toys for ages 0-3, , high chairs that strap to a regular table chair, Moby wraps, and retractable sun shades for the car.

Regular sized quilts are welcome for all other programs: refugee, detention center youth, host families, and transitional housing for young adults that age out of the system.

Now looking into the future, plans are being made for the fall field trip to Clayton County, Oct. 18. Hope you can come and enjoy the day.

*Sparkling with Jesus,  
Christine Schmitt*

## **Discipleship Committee**

When we practice discipleship we give our love in the form of service, even at the price of sacrifice. We enthusiastically learn about Jesus and his teachings. BUT if we stop at this point, we fail to complete the second part of discipleship – spreading the word. Spreading the word can be as easy as bringing someone to circle, letting others help you in a community church pantry or garden, asking the neighborhood kids to help clean a yard for someone who can't or taking lunch to a farmer during harvest season. Let it grow and see the benefits you will reap!

In the ELCA we have "God's Word, Our Hands" Sunday, Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>. This isn't meant to be only one day of the year. It's meant to be a starting point for getting out in the community and sharing the love of God, the gift of grace given by Jesus, and the energy of the Holy Spirit with others will melt a heart and let the Spirit enter.

The discipleship road isn't always newly paved asphalt. We know that it may take years of enduring potholes before the new road is paved, so too is the way of Christ. Nothing comes easy, but endurance will strengthen and challenge you in your service to others.

*Holy One, you stretch wide your tent that all may be welcomed in, and in Jesus you stretched out your hands in expansive love for a weary and wounded world. Help us to reach out with your own wounded hands of love, that through us your life may be known in the world, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

*Submitted by Becky Paul*



NE IA Women of the ELCA- Check us out and give a like or post about your church's activities!

## ***Justice Committee***

Our purpose statement (see header for this newsletter), was quite evident in our sharing party held in Oelwein on June 14<sup>th</sup>. Thank you for all who attended. Our 'brag' board certainly showed our commitment to these goals. Examples:

- Immanuel, Cresco – 14 years of free clothing give-away for school children; donate and visit Pine Ridge Indian Reservation for 30 years
- Zion Lutheran, West Union – cookie walk fundraiser, quilts and LWR kits
- Zion Lutheran, Oelwein – LWR quilts and personal care kits, Global Health rolled bandages
- Zion St. John Lutheran, Sheffield – sponsor and provide program and treats for local care center; quilt auction for campership assistance
- Our Savior's, Mason City – Little Free Pantry (food & personal care items); volunteer at Community Kitchen.

I recently volunteered at the Community Kitchen. It was very surprising to learn that it has been serving the Mason City community for 43 years and the need is growing. In the last five years the program has grown from serving 806 adults and 82 children to 1346 adults and 282 children.

We all need to continue our mission and serve our neighbors in need, both here and abroad.

*Submitted by Jan Nelson*

## ***LWR Totals***

Saturday, May 3, 2025 was the LWR Spring In-Gathering Day at Olson's Explosives in Decorah, Iowa. We received donations from 34 churches in Upper Iowa River and Shepherds Of The Hills clusters and Trinity Lutheran, Spring Grove, MN. Workers from Calmer, Decorah, McGregor, and Postville churches were busy unloading and stacking 594 boxes in the truck.

Donation Totals were: 1423 Quilts, 673 Personal Care Kits, 174 School Kits, 409 Baby Care Kits, 23 Fabric Kits, and 5 Blankets.

Many thanks to all who helped with the "heavy lifting" (loading the truck), to Olson's Explosives for their continued support, and especially to each and every individual for the countless hours spent quilting, organizing, and assembling various kits. We CAN and DO make a difference!

*Submitted by Carol Maki & Sue Darling*

## ***2026 Triennial Update***

The next Triennial for the Women of the ELCA will be July 16-19, 2026, in Des Moines!! This is a wonderful opportunity for all of us, especially those who have not had been, to experience this national event, in our own backyard! Because it is so close, it makes it more affordable, even if you want to attend for just one day! The theme is *I am Worthy* registration opened on July 15, 2025. You can find more information at [New Triennial Event Page - Women of the ELCA](#). Our SWO offers a scholarship if you need help to offset the cost of registration. You can find the form on the Facebook page or the WELCA webpage. Don't miss this once in a lifetime chance!!

**2026 Triennial Gathering in Des Moines:**

[www.WELCAtg.org](http://www.WELCAtg.org)

## **CALENDAR**

Aug 23 SWO Board Meeting  
Oct 4 Cluster D Fall Gathering, Zion, West Union  
Oct 11 LWR In-Gathering, Albert Lea  
LWR In-Gathering, St John, Sumner  
Oct 18 SWO Field Trip  
Oct 25 Cluster B Fall Gathering, Zion, Oelwein  
Nov 1 Triennial Scholarship App Due  
LWR In-Gathering, Decorah

## **NEIA Women of the ELCA Executive Board**

**Christine Schmitt, President**

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**Alice Greimann, Vice President**

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**Chris VanDeventer, Secretary**

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**Nancy Poppe, Treasurer**

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