

## Lay members prepare to lead

*Lay ministry training equips lay members with skills and knowledge to lead in their congregations*

by Marcia Hahn

Kerri Wilson has led lay worship services many times in the 33 years that she has been a member of St. John Maxfield, Denver. Now, for the first time, she is receiving professional training to hone her ministry skills and understanding of Lutheran theology as part of the Northeastern Iowa Synod's Lay Ministry Training Program.

"I was not really sure what to expect, but I have already learned a lot," says Wilson, who began the training last fall. "I am enjoying the classes and diving deeper into learning about the Bible, preaching, writing sermons, worship, and pastoral care."

Wilson is one of six lay members from the Northeastern Iowa Synod enrolled in the first cohort of the new training program, which was developed jointly with the Western Iowa Synod, Southeastern Iowa Synod and South-Central Synod of Wisconsin. The program was formed to equip lay leaders with ministry skills to help them fill in for congregations without pastors or to assist pastors that serve multiple congregations. Some lay ministers who complete the training may go on to serve as Synod Authorized Ministers (SAM) in specific circumstances, which means they can preside over the sacraments of communion and baptism.



Pastor Todd Burrichter and Lisa Ames-Kruse, left, watch as Kerri Wilson, right, practices saying the baptism liturgy during the Lay Ministry Retreat in April.

### TWO LAYERS OF TRAINING

The two-year program offers two layers of training, 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.

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“One area I was really lacking in was writing sermons—that class was very helpful to me,” Wilson says. “I have also learned a lot about the history of the Old and New Testaments.”

Wilson says congregation members have supported her in words and prayers and by paying for her tuition. In return, Wilson plans to assist their lay pastor, Jared McLey, who currently splits 20 hours a week between St. John Maxfield and St. John Crane Creek, Tripoli, as a collaborative learning student through Wartburg Theological Seminary. A third congregation may potentially join the sharing agreement.

“I am enjoying working with Jared to make things easier for him and to make sure our congregations have a back-up,” Wilson says. “This is a way for me to help out. I believe God has led me to this program at this time in my life.”

Julaine Jarvis, a member of Bethlehem, Manly, says she also wants to help her four-point parish and area congregations that are without pastors.

“We have so many churches that are unserved, and pastors retiring all over the place,” Jarvis says. “I enjoy people, I like doing home visits and nursing home services, so I thought I could be of use.”

Pastor Linda Johnson Prestholt serves the four congregations of Hope United Lutheran Parish with help from Steve O’Neil, who assists as a SAM. Jarvis has been filling in for a few years to lead some of the worship services and preach sermons written by the pastor.

“I put feeling into the sermons and I go to two different text studies, so I think the training could help me step up to writing a sermon,” Jarvis says.

Sondra Nelson joined the lay ministry training to help her fill in as needed for her church, Salem, Lake Mills, but she says her main goal is to gain knowledge to be the disciple that God wants her to be.



Sondra Nelson creates art at the Lay Ministry Retreat to reflect on a season of the church that has meaning to her.

“I want to grow in my faith and share it with others,” Nelson says. “As a congregation member, I am being led to help those who are struggling with their faith and go wherever God leads me.”

In April, Nelson joined the other students for hands-on training at a lay ministry retreat at St. John’s, Cedar Falls. The students practiced presiding over the sacraments, worshiped together, took part in a question-and-answer session, and joined in spiritual practices.

“I could feel the Holy Spirit moving through my body during the healing exercise, and I feel that I came out as a better person,” Nelson says.

The students practiced the logistics involved in a baptism and were encouraged to consider details people don’t normally think about, such as questions to ask the family to make sure baptism records are recorded correctly. The students used stuffed animal babies to practice holding a baby for baptism, pouring water on it and anointing it.

“The retreat was a chance for the students to have hands-on practice and to build relationships with others in similar ministry situations” says Pastor Kristen Rod, Director for Evangelical Mission. “They appreciated being able to ask logistical questions to the bishops and instructors and talk together about what they are learning.”

## CALLED TO LAY MINISTRY

Word of mouth has helped turn lay ministry into a career choice for Lisa Ames-Kruse, who serves as a SAM for Our Savior’s Lutheran, Waterloo. Ames-Kruse’s lay ministry journey spans 20 years and three denominations, due to repeated requests for her to fill in to preach and lead funerals.

“I realized I have always wanted to preach and minister to people and tell them about God, but I have never been called to ordination,” Ames-Kruse says.

Some 21 years ago, Ames-Kruse

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completed an 8-week lay ministry and licensing program through the United Methodist Church and filled in every Sunday for seven years for a small congregation that had lost their pastor. She also became a go-to contact for funeral homes looking for someone to lead funerals.

“The local funeral homes got word that I’d be willing to fill in for those who were unchurched, so I got a lot of business and a lot of experience dealing with grief and the emotions that go along with it,” Ames-Kruse says. “That year I did 251 funerals, sometimes three in a day.”

Ames-Kruse moved on to a Church of the Brethren congregation where she filled in during their search and became licensed for Brethren Ministry. About two years later, a funeral director told her that Our Savior’s was without a pastor and was looking for someone to help with home visits and funerals.

“I came to a few services at Our Savior’s and I really enjoyed the atmosphere and beliefs, the people and the Lord, so I agreed to take the lay ministry class because I don’t want to leave here,” she says

Ames-Kruse is enrolled in the formation portion of the synod’s lay training and says she enjoys being in classes with people like her who are called to serve.

“It’s a great support group and the ideas shared by the students and leaders alike are wonderful because they give us fresh insight and are always appreciated. It feels like family.”



Julaine Jarvis holds a stuffed baby to practice the sacrament of baptism at the Lay Ministry Retreat. Assisting her and another student are Pastor Liz Retz and Pastor Kristi Grieder.

Students enrolled in the synod’s full training program take online classes two Saturdays a month during the school year—all day on one Saturday and just the morning for the other. The students also meet once a month in person or through Zoom with their mentor, Pastor Todd Burrichter of St. John, Nashua. Burrichter checks in to see how things are going with their classes and in their personal life, and the students support one another and ask questions. Burrichter says he has given feedback on a couple sermons and reassures the students that he is a resource for anything they want to run by him.

“A program like this is needed to bring stability to some of our smaller congregations that have difficulties finding a called pastor,” Burrichter says. “I am excited to lend my sup-

port and see where this leads.”

A synod-wide fund-raising campaign in 2023 has helped cover costs for the formation instruction, retreat and mentoring portions of the program. A number of congregations are helping their members with the tuition expenses.

Rod notes that most of the current students were encouraged by their pastors to take the training. “We hope in the future to reach out to congregations that don’t have pastors to see if some of their members would also be interested in joining the program.”

To learn more about the Lay Ministry Training Program and how to apply for the September 2025 session, visit [neiasynod.org/lay-ministry-training](https://neiasynod.org/lay-ministry-training) or contact Rod at 319-352-1414 or [rodsk@neiasynod.org](mailto:rodsk@neiasynod.org).

# Make plans for the Tri-Synod Fall Conference

Sept. 29-30, 2025

Clive, Iowa

Ministers from the three Iowa ELCA synods are invited to gather for the 2025 Tri-Synod Fall Theological Conference set for Sept. 29-30 at Faith Lutheran in Clive. The Rev. Dr. Tamás Fabiny, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (ELCH), will serve as keynote speaker.

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. He has visited Northeastern Iowa several times as part of this synod's companion synod relationship with the ELCH. Fabiny has also hosted guests from Northeastern Iowa, including Bishop Kevin Jones and eight others from this synod who visited Hungary last summer.

Watch for upcoming information about the Tri-Synod Fall Conference and how to register.



Bishop Tamás Fabiny and Bishop Kevin Jones lead a worship service in Hungary in 2024.

# Join the bishops' one-day Ride Against Hunger

July 24, 2025

There is still time to join the three Iowa ELCA Bishops on their one-day "Ride Against Hunger" to support anti-hunger ministries.

The bishops will ride with RAGBRAI on Thursday, July 24, beginning at Bethany Lutheran in Iowa Falls to St. John Lutheran in Cedar Falls.

Anyone interested in riding along can email [Bishop Kevin Jones](mailto:Bishop Kevin Jones) to receive more details when they become available, or call the synod office, 319-352-1414.

The bishops are trying to raise \$6,000 to \$8,000 from the ride, which will take their total raised over the \$100,000 mark for both of their RAGBRAI rides against hunger. Donations can be made by scanning the QR code, clicking [onrealm.org/neiasynod/-/form/give/ragbrai2025](https://onrealm.org/neiasynod/-/form/give/ragbrai2025) or sending a check to the Northeastern Iowa Synod office, with "Ride Against Hunger" in the memo.



Scan to support local hunger ministries!

## NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD

Bishop Kevin T. Jones – [jonesk@neiasynod.org](mailto:jonesk@neiasynod.org)

### Assistants to the Bishop

Rev. Liz Bell – [belle@neiasynod.org](mailto:belle@neiasynod.org)

Rev. Steve Brackett – [bracketts@neiasynod.org](mailto:bracketts@neiasynod.org)

Rev. Kristen Corr Rod – [rodsk@neiasynod.org](mailto:rodsk@neiasynod.org)

Jan Glaspie – [glaspiej@neiasynod.org](mailto:glaspiej@neiasynod.org)

### Star Editor

Marcia Hahn – [hahnm@neiasynod.org](mailto:hahnm@neiasynod.org)

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Articles in this newsletter may be duplicated for use in synod congregations and organizations, with credit to the *Star* newsletter.

Please notify the synod office with name and address changes. The *Star* can be downloaded at [neiasynod.org/blog/newsletter](https://neiasynod.org/blog/newsletter). To request a printed version, call the synod office.



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

# Update from Lutheran Campus Ministry—Ames

Since suspending active ministry offerings at Iowa State University in March 2024, the Lutheran Campus Ministry-Ames Board has been at work to reconstitute its membership, update and adopt governing documents, and consider effective strategies for rebuilding Lutheran Campus Ministries. The board heard examples of revitalized ministries from leaders at the University of Northern Iowa and University of Michigan. Work continues as the board considers a vision for LCM-Ames' future ministry.

## STAY CONNECTED

The board would like to connect with those who have an interest in LCM-Ames so that stakeholders receive updates about ongoing activity and can

be made aware of ways to support the ministry in the future.

Anyone interested in receiving future updates about LCM-Ames is asked to fill out their new contact form. The board wants to ensure their contact list is updated and accurate. Please forward this update and request to others who may have an interest in the future of LCM-Ames to help get the word out!

Thank you for your continued care for and support of LCM-Ames' work to spread the Good News of Jesus through its ministry at Iowa State University.

Please fill out the contact form at <https://tinyurl.com/2wctr5tu>.

# SUMMER YOUTH MINISTRY WEBINARS

Northeastern Iowa Synod youth workers, clergy and volunteers are invited to sign up for free webinars offered in partnership with Youth Ministry Consultants. The sessions are offered live on Thursdays at 11 a.m.

## JUNE 26

***Effective Mentorship — Helping Kids Listen to Wise Voices***  
with Ben Bevis

This mentorship webinar will explore how to guide children and teens to value and follow wise, godly voices in a noisy world. Learn about intentional mentorship and the impact it can have on children.

## JULY 10

***Keeping Kids Safer***  
with Kayleigh Leonard

Youth worker Kayleigh Leonard will share her experience building a safety framework from scratch and offer tools and steps to help congregations create a culture of protection for kids and teens.

Anyone from the Northeastern Iowa Synod can register free by entering the 2025 code, **NEIA25**. Registrants will receive a recording of the webinar. Recordings of past sessions are also available for viewing. Visit [youthministryconsultants.org](https://youthministryconsultants.org) to learn more and register.



## Register for the OYTL Men's Retreat

**Nov. 7-9, 2025**

**Camp Ewalu, Strawberry Point**

Registration is open for the "One Year to Live" Men's Retreat set for Nov. 7-9 at Camp Ewalu, Strawberry Point.

The retreat is an opportunity for men of all ages 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 cost is \$175 for those who register by Oct. 8. After that date, 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).





# See you at the Synod Assembly!

June 6-7, 2025

Some 240 people are registered for the 2025 Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly, set for June 6-7 in Cedar Falls with the theme Created To Be Connected, based on John 15:5.

Everyone is invited to the 7 p.m. worship service Friday at Fredsville Lutheran, located seven miles west of Cedar Falls. Registration is not required to attend. A reception with refreshments and displays will follow. Youth are invited to join in fellowship after the worship.

Check-in on Saturday starts at 7:30 a.m. at the Bien VenU Event Center in Cedar Falls. No walk-in registrations will be accepted. The schedule begins with opening worship at 8:30 a.m. and includes three plenary sessions, lunch and closing worship with Bishop Kevin Jones preaching. The Assembly will conclude by 5 p.m.

The keynote speaker will be Pastor Emily Harkins, lead pastor and founding developer of The Dwelling mission congregation in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Aaron Shoppa, program direc-

tor for ELCA Youth Ministry, will bring greetings as the churchwide representative.

## MINISTRY EXHIBITS

Fourteen ministry exhibits will be part of the Assembly, representing college and seminary ministries, ELCA partners, outdoor ministries and synod ministry networks. The Global Church Together Network will have Fair Trade chocolate and coffee for sale. The Racial Justice Advocacy Network will display its "Lutheran Memoir" historical posters, which are available for congregations to borrow. The Care for Creation Network will share results of their survey about creation care activities in congregations.

## ELECTRONIC VOTING

Voting members are reminded to bring a device (smart phone, tablet, laptop computer) that can access an internet browser in order to vote. Devices cannot be shared for voting; each voting member will need their own fully charged device.

Recordings of the two pre-Assembly Zoom presentations—*Budget &*



*Compensation Review and Resolutions, Memorials & Voting*—are available for voting members to view prior to the Assembly. Links to the recordings were sent to voting members.

## ASSEMBLY OFFERING

This year's Assembly offering will support The Dwelling ministry in North Carolina and the Dwelling in Faith Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community in Mitchell, Iowa.

Offering gifts can be made at the Assembly, online at [onrealm.org/ne-iasynod/-/form/give/25](https://onrealm.org/ne-iasynod/-/form/give/25), or by sending a check to: Northeastern Iowa Synod, 201 20th St. SW, P.O. Box 804 Waverly, IA 50677-0804.

Read more and download Synod Assembly resources at [neiasynod.org/2025-synod-assembly](https://neiasynod.org/2025-synod-assembly).

## New ELCA Advocacy podcast covers current events

Check out "Here I Pod," the new podcast from ELCA Advocacy. Hosted by Regina Q. Banks, the podcast connects faith-based advocacy with current events that impact our neighborhoods, worship communities, social service organizations and lives.

"Here I Pod" will have 10 episodes available across all popular podcast platforms and at [hereipod.buzzsprout.com/2454298/episodes](https://hereipod.buzzsprout.com/2454298/episodes).

### Current Episodes:

#1—*Housing and Homelessness Trends and Policy Impacts;*

#2—*Climate Care and Policy Trends;*

#3—*Connecting Faith-Based Advocates and Lawmakers (Plus: Resources to Address Christian Nationalism);*

#4—*Foreign Assistance Funding Freeze Effects and Actions;*



#5—*Migration Policy Changes and Their Impacts;*

#6—*Higher Education and Schools in Today's Policy Climate;*

#7—*People & Budget Choices – Perspective from Lutheran Services in America;*

#8—*MMIW Awareness & Indigenous Ministries of the ELCA;*

#9—*Middle East & North Africa Advocacy through Accompaniment.*

# Created To Be Connected

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“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” — John 15:5

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Our Synod Assembly theme this year is a bit misleading. It can sound like we are created with the possibility of being connected when, in fact, our very existence springs forth already connected. Those who study human development believe that an infant continues to perceive themselves and their mother as one being for several months after birth. Believing that we are isolated individuals is something that we learn.

The 2025 Synod Assembly on June 6-7 is the third Assembly that I will lead as Bishop. It is also the third Assembly with a “connection” theme. Why?

The first reason is that the Lutheran church in our culture has always been a bit siloed. Different branches of the vine (congregations, synods, church-wide, seminaries, affiliated ministries) focus on their purpose, ministry, and location. Each makes decisions and moves forward based on their own best interests. To be fair, this is not necessarily a selfish best interest, but just the reality of different organizations tasked with providing different ministries. Therefore, it is important that we remind ourselves of the truth that we are connected by Christ, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus into which we are baptized. We are one body. We are

individual branches of one vine.

The second reason to emphasize our connection is the overwhelming forces that seek to divide us in this world. It is extraordinary how we are more connected than ever before by technology and, at the same time, we experience more isolation than ever before. I don’t believe this is accidental. In this time of immense change, the more isolated we are the more powerless and hopeless we feel. Fostering divisions keeps us from joining together in powerful ways.

The connection we have through Christ exists through no action or belief of our own. It is one of the truths of the universe. When lived out, this good news brings hope and new

life to those who are lost and alone. Together with the Holy Spirit, we are capable of working towards the very thing we pray for: Your kingdom come, here on earth as in heaven.

I request your prayers for our 2025 Synod Assembly and for the voting members and guests who will be present because you are also created and connected in this beautiful, mystical way.

— *Bishop Kevin Jones*



## Farewell to Pastor Liz Bell!

It is with grief and gratefulness that I received Pastor Liz Bell’s announcement that she will be leaving the Synod office this summer.

In the fall of 2021, she contacted me wondering about returning to parish ministry. I was thrilled when she accepted the call to join the Synod staff. Pastor Liz has been a joyful, thoughtful, playful addition to the staff. Her dedication to congregations, networks, and rostered ministers has been apparent and appreciated by so many over these past three and a half years. Pastor Liz is looking forward to returning to parish ministry in her next call.

We will recognize and thank Pastor Liz for her ministry among us at the



Synod Assembly. You can also send notes, cards and emails to her at the Synod office until July 15.

— *Bishop Kevin*

# Congratulations to Seminary Graduates

**ChyAnne Slick** earned a master of divinity from Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, in May 2025. She has a bachelor's degree in religion/religious studies from Wartburg College, Waverly. She completed her collaborative learning and internship at Zion, Oelwein, and is interviewing in this synod for her first call.

**Laurie Iudin-Nelson** earned a master of divinity from Wartburg Seminary in May 2025. She has a bachelor's degree in history from St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn.; a master's degree in social science from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities; and a doctor of philosophy degree in modern languages from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She completed her collaborative learning and internship at St. Peter (Richfield), Sumner, and St. John (Stapleton), Waucoma. She is interviewing in this synod for her first call.

**Jared McLey** earned a master of divinity from Wartburg Seminary in May 2025. He has a bachelor's degree in religion from Wartburg College. He completed his collaborative learning and internship at St. John (Maxfield), Denver, and St. John (Crane Creek), Tripoli. His wife works with Waterloo Community Schools and they are expecting their first child. He is awaiting a call vote in this synod.

**Lucas Carlson** earned a master of divinity in May 2025 from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. He has a bachelor's degree in the classics from Luther College, Decorah. He served his internship at Augsburg University and Trinity Lutheran, Minneapolis. His wife is a grad student. He is awaiting approval for ordination and placement

with a synod of first call.

**Noah Dodd** earned a master of divinity from Wartburg Seminary in May 2025. He has a bachelor's degree in religion/religious studies from Wartburg College. He served his internship at St. Peter, Dubuque. His wife is a nurse and they have two children. He is interviewing in the Florida-Bahamas Synod for his first call.

**Jackson Reynolds** earned a master of divinity in May 2024 from Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey, with Wartburg Seminary affiliation. He has a bachelor's degree in religion/religious studies from Wartburg College. He is serving his internship at Messiah, Springfield, Mo., and is awaiting placement with a synod of first call following internship.

## TUNE IN TO THE CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY

The Churchwide Assembly will take place July 28–Aug. 2 in Phoenix, with the theme “For the Life of the World.” Live streaming of the worship services and plenary sessions will be available during the assembly.

The Assembly meets every three years and is the highest legislative body of the denomination. Twelve to 14 voting members from the Northeastern Iowa Synod will be among those attending.

Over the course of the assembly, voting members:

- Hear reports and review the work of churchwide officers, leaders and units.
- Receive and consider proposals from synod assemblies.

- Elect officers, board members and other leaders as specified by the constitution or bylaws.
- Establish ELCA churchwide policy.
- Worship together.
- Adopt a budget.

This year, voting members will elect a new presiding bishop and secretary and will consider a new social statement on civic life and faith, edits to the social statement Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust (2009) and recommendations from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church.

A complete schedule, resources and live streaming will be available at the Churchwide Assembly page, [www.elca.org/about/leadership/churchwide-assembly](http://www.elca.org/about/leadership/churchwide-assembly).



**July 28 – August 2**  
**PHOENIX, ARIZONA**



# Revisiting the Day of Racial Healing

by Reg Green, Racial Justice Advocacy Network Member

On Saturday, April 12, members from St. John Lutheran and Bethlehem Lutheran churches in Cedar Falls gathered for a screening of portions of the ELCA 2025 National Day of Racial Healing event. The National Day of Racial Healing occurs every year on the day after the Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday National Holiday. This screening event, sponsored by the St. John Racial Justice Team, was a time for reflection, discussion and community. The live webinar took place on Tuesday, Jan. 21, during traditional work hours, which was not convenient for many people to attend. This April Saturday morning offering was an opportunity for additional people to view and participate in the event.

The opening worship with the keynote address given by the Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Lewis started the morning. The closing worship was led by Bishop Felix Malpica of the La Crosse Area Synod.

Two sessions were shown between worship: "Congregational Stories of Racial Healing," a presentation on racial justice activity in local communities, and "Call to Allyship," a Q & A session with contributors to the book, *Call to Allyship*. Between each session the participants engaged in open discussion



of themes and topics presented in the video, with a focus on their relevance to the Cedar Valley.

If your congregation is interested in presenting a similar screening and discussion session, contact Pastor Brian Julin-McCleary at 319-268-0165 or [pastorbrian@stjohnncf.org](mailto:pastorbrian@stjohnncf.org).

## OBITUARIES

**Rev. James Allyn Mattson**, 90, died May 5 at Wellington Place in Decorah.

Mattson attended Luther Seminary and was ordained in 1967. He served St. John's Lutheran Western Douglas rural Plainfield; Zion American Lutheran Church in Wyoming, Iowa; and First Lutheran Church in Britt. He also served on several boards and committees associated with the Iowa District of the ALC, including the local church camp, nursing home, hospice and college. He retired in 1999 and served as visitation pastor at Zumbro Lutheran in Rochester, Minn.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Sharron, and is survived by three children and their families. Funeral services took place May 22 at First Lutheran, Decorah, with burial at the Lutheran Cemetery.

His full obituary is available at [www.helmsfuneralhomes.com/obituary/james-jim-mattson](http://www.helmsfuneralhomes.com/obituary/james-jim-mattson).

**Rev. Ernest Elzey** of Cedar Falls died May 3, 2025, at the age of 78.

Elzey graduated from Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio, in 1974 and was ordained in 1974 by his father, Pastor Elmer Elzey. He served congregations in Iowa and Wisconsin, including Zion (Jubilee) in rural La Porte City from 1999 until his retirement in 2011.

Elzey was preceded in death by his wife, Karen. He is survived by his two stepchildren and their families. Funeral services took place May 8 at White Funeral Home, Jesup, with burial at Memorial Lawn Cemetery, Ottumwa.

View his full obituary is available at [white-mthope.com/component/content/article/2-obituaries/1725-pastor-ernest-c-elzey.html](http://white-mthope.com/component/content/article/2-obituaries/1725-pastor-ernest-c-elzey.html).

# The Next Loving Act . . .

“What is the next loving thing you can do?” This was a quote I learned early as a pastor to share with couples in pre-marriage and marriage counseling. Asking yourself each day what you can do to make your partner’s life just a little bit better is good advice for maintaining a healthy relationship. Not only is it good advice for relationships, but it is also a healthy approach to discipleship and life to ask yourself daily, “What is the next loving thing I can do to make my community or neighborhood a little better, nicer, more beautiful, or safer?”

Well before I learned of this quote, Edwin Joehnk and Mary Evens Joehnk, members of Our Savior’s Lutheran Church in Osage, Iowa, lived their lives thinking about how to make life a

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“As you consider your own legacy, consider what you may be able to do now to make a difference long after you’re gone.”

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little better for those living in nursing homes and children’s homes. In 1996 the Joehnks worked with the Northeastern Iowa Synod to create an endowment fund that would give away its interest every year to children’s homes (like Bremwood) and nursing homes within the synod. In 1998, their gift of \$1.3 million from the

estate of Mary Evens Joehnk filled the endowment.

Since then, more than \$1.2 million dollars in interest has been granted to 15 agencies who met the defined criteria of being “supported by the Northeastern Iowa Synod.” These are nursing homes and children’s homes that are located in our part of Iowa and are members of Lutheran Services in America, a national network of human service agencies.

This year, the endowment gave away \$52,800 to 11 agencies. Over the years, making life a little better has meant funding grants for field trips for residents; training for staff around grief, CPR and dementia; scholarships for CNAs and nurses; worship materials and chaplaincy support; new TV monitors; automated external defibrillators, and more.

The foresight and kindness of Edwin and Mary is inspiring! I wonder if they could have imagined what an impact their gift would make in the lives of children and our elders. With their original \$1.3 million gift still intact, their gift keeps on giving.

As you consider the example of Edwin and Mary today, please take a moment to think about how you might make life a little better for someone. As you consider your own legacy, consider what you may be able to do now to make a difference long after you’re gone.



## Apply for Domestic Hunger Grants

Registration is open to apply for ELCA World Hunger’s 2026 Domestic Hunger Grants. The annual domestic hunger grants support ELCA congregations, social ministry organizations and community-based nonprofits working to address poverty, hunger and related social justice issues.

The application process begins by submitting a letter of inquiry.

### APPLICATION TIMELINE

- Letter of inquiry form open: April 23 – July 2, 2025
- Letter of inquiry review: July 10 – Sept. 10, 2025
- Response to the letter of inquiry (decline or accept): Oct. 3, 2025

- Invited applicants to complete grant application in ELCA GrantMaker: October – December 2025
- Review and communication between ELCA World Hunger staff and grant applicants on proposal: October – December 2025
- Award notifications shared with applicants: January 2026
- 2026 Domestic Hunger Grants start date: March 1, 2026

To learn more about the grants and how to apply, visit [elca.org/our-work/relief-and-development/elca-world-hunger/get-involved/domestic-hunger-grants](https://elca.org/our-work/relief-and-development/elca-world-hunger/get-involved/domestic-hunger-grants).

— Pastor Liz Bell

## Spirituality and recovery are intertwined

by Rev. Tom Martin & Rev. Brian Julian-McCleary, Substance Abuse Network Members

The cruise ship left the Miami port Feb. 3 with 3,500 souls on board. Among them were 25 Lutheran pastors, many of them ELCA ministers headed for the

“The journey of recovery mirrors the Christian call to transformation, humility, and dependence on God.”

Bahamas. What they all shared together was their recovery from addiction to alcohol and mood altering drugs. Two of them were from the Northeastern Iowa Synod’s Substance Abuse Network (each paid their own way).

This retreat, called “Serenity on the Sea,” gave an opportunity for these folks and their spouses to make new friends in the recovery community. There was also the benefit of disconnecting from the usual routines. Each morning on the ship they met together to discuss the book by Richard Rohr, *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps*.

Spirituality and recovery are intertwined. We are not accustomed to thinking this way. Faith and addiction can work together, as the theology of the cross reminds us. The journey of recovery mirrors the Christian call to transformation, humility, and dependence on God.

The simple truth: we all need healing (from the God “who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases” Ps. 103). Addiction does not discriminate (pastors are not immune), the Twelve Steps and treatment centers offer pathways not just for addicts but for anyone seeking spiritual growth (hence the role of the church, not to punish but to heal). True transformation happens when we surrender to the power of grace and move beyond our illusions of control. In other words, it’s not about us, it’s about Jesus, who gets us.

The ship returned to Miami after four nights and much “Serenity on the Sea”. This trip was sponsored by the Fellowship of Recovering Lutheran Clergy ([www.frlcorg.com](http://www.frlcorg.com)), an organization formed in 1990. All clergy or rostered members in any type of 12-Step recovery are welcome to join the weekly meetings during which we discuss our experiences of being in recovery while also serving as pastors (meets every Thursday at Noon CT). These are closed,



private, anonymous conference calls. If interested, contact Rev. Melanie Martin-Dent, [mmartindent@yahoo.com](mailto:mmartindent@yahoo.com), for the Zoom link. Anonymity is strictly protected. Altogether there are about 200 clergy that make up the FRLC from all Lutheran stripes.

## Give input on ELCA draft social message

FEEDBACK IS DUE JUNE 30, 2025

Lay and rostered members of the ELCA are invited to submit input on a draft of the new “Social Message on Child Protection,” which was released in March. The draft social message, which is in response to a request from the 2022 Churchwide Assembly, addresses the church’s calling to protect and nurture children and youth, both within the church and within society more broadly.

The public comment period will be open through June 30, 2025, for people to share their comments and suggestions. To learn more, read the draft and complete an online survey, visit [elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/current-social-writing-projects/child-protection](http://elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/current-social-writing-projects/child-protection).





# Care for Creation Survey Results

*Congregations respond about their creation care activities to reduce energy use*

by Donna Rasmussen, Care for Creation Network

At the beginning of this year, all the congregations in the Northeastern Iowa Synod were asked to complete a survey about their creation care activities. A summary of those results will be available at the 2025 Synod Assembly by stopping by the Care for Creation display table.

At the 2022 Churchwide Assembly, the ELCA adopted a resolution to reduce greenhouse gas pollution by 50% by 2030. In 2023, an Action Plan was developed by the Northeastern Iowa Synod Care for Creation Network, with assistance from the ELCA Coaching

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*“The highest percentage of activities were in the HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) category, with anywhere from 70% to 98% of the congregations completing an activity that reduced energy use in their facilities.”*

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Program and funded by the synod, to lay out steps for assisting member churches with making progress with creation care activities that help meet the goals set out in the 2023 resolution. One of the first steps in the Action Plan was to develop a survey/checklist in order to determine what steps congregations have already taken, to provide information about the benefits of those activities, and to determine what help congregations might want or need, or what advice or assistance they may be able to offer other congrega-



tions wanting to do similar activities. Congregations were asked to complete the survey by Feb. 28, 2025.

Of the 139 congregations in the synod, 41 congregations responded to the survey, a 29% return rate. From the checklist, congregations indicated all the operating practices that apply to them within each category. The highest percentage of activities were in the HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) category, with anywhere from 70% to 98% of the congregations completing an activity that reduced energy use in their facilities. This could range from something as simple as making sure windows and doors are closed when heating or air conditioning is on to investing in the installation of programmable thermostats or energy efficient HVAC systems. These types of things have significant economic benefits to the congregation, which may be the reason for the higher adoption rates. There were individual activities in other categories which also had very

high adoption rates often related to cost savings realized by the congregation, such as reducing paper use.

One purpose of the survey was to identify congregations willing to offer advice or assistance to other congregations that are interested in implementing a particular practice. There were 16 congregations that indicated a willingness to be a resource to other congregations. The Care for Creation Network has identified this as a significant way to expand creation care activities in the synod since the Network can only do so much as a small volunteer group. With the knowledge and expertise of those congregations who have been through the process of completing projects, much more can be accomplished.

For more information about the survey, or if your congregation would still like to complete the survey, contact the synod office to connect you with a member of the Care for Creation Network.

## JUNE 2025

- 2 MEN'S MINISTRY BIBLE STUDY**, Mondays at Grace, Tripoli & Zoom, 7:30 p.m. (except holidays)
- 5 GLOBAL CHURCH TOGETHER NETWORK**, Zoom, 1:30 p.m.
- 6-7 NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD ASSEMBLY**, Bien VenU Event Center, Cedar Falls
- 9 SYNOD OFFICE CLOSED**
- 11 CANDIDACY COMMITTEE**, Synod Office, 1-3 p.m.
- 12 RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY NETWORK**, Synod Office & Zoom, 3 p.m.
- 14 SWO SHARING PARTY**, Zion, Oelwein, 9 a.m.
- 19 SYNOD OFFICE CLOSED**, Juneteenth Observance
- 30 CARE FOR CREATION NETWORK**, Synod Office, 10 a.m.

## JULY 2025

- 4 SYNOD OFFICE CLOSED**, Independence Day
- 7 NEW SYNOD COUNCIL ORIENTATION**, Zoom, 7 p.m.
- 7 MEN'S MINISTRY BIBLE STUDY**, Mondays at Grace, Tripoli & Zoom, 7:30 p.m. (except holidays)
- 8 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING**, Zoom, 2:30 p.m.
- 10 GLOBAL CHURCH TOGETHER NETWORK**, Zoom, 1:30 p.m.
- 10 RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY NETWORK**, Synod Office & Zoom, 3 p.m.
- 17 TRANSITIONAL/INTERIM MINISTRY**, Zoom, 9:30 a.m.
- 19 SYNOD COUNCIL**, Zoom, 9 a.m.
- 24 IOWA BISHOPS ONE-DAY RIDE AGAINST HUNGER**, RAGBRAI
- 28-Aug. 3 CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY**, Phoenix, Ariz.

## AUGUST 2025

- 4 MEN'S MINISTRY BIBLE STUDY**, Mondays at Grace, Tripoli & Zoom, 7:30 p.m. (except holidays)
- 7 TRANSITIONAL/INTERIM MINISTRY**, Zoom, 9:30 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

## SEPTEMBER 2025

- 1 SYNOD OFFICE CLOSED**, Labor Day
- 4 TRANSITIONAL/INTERIM MINISTRY MTG.**, Synod Office, 9:30 a.m.
- 7 GOD'S WORK. OUR HANDS. SUNDAY**
- 8 MEN'S MINISTRY BIBLE STUDY**, Mondays at Grace, Tripoli & Zoom, 7:30 p.m. (except holidays)
- 11 GLOBAL CHURCH TOGETHER NETWORK**, Zoom, 1:30 p.m.
- 11 RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY NETWORK**, Synod Office & Zoom, 3 p.m.
- 18-21 ELCA WORLD HUNGER LEADERSHIP GATHERING**, Columbus, Ohio
- 29-30 TRI-SYNOD FALL THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE**, First Lutheran, Clive, Iowa

## INSTALLATIONS

- **Rev. Kristen Larsen-Schmidt**, Good Shepherd, Decorah, June 22
- **Rev. Adam Starrett**, Elgin, Elgin & Highland, Elkader, June 22

## INTERVIEWING

- **Asbury**, Lord of Life, Rev. Karla Wildberger, interim
- **Dows, First\***
- **Dysart**, Zion
- **Eldorado, St. Peter\***
- **Greene**, St. Peter
- **Independence**, Immanuel
- **Janesville, Messiah\***
- **Jesup**, American & La Porte City, Zion (Jubilee), Rev. Patricia Mohr-Kelly, interim
- **Jewell**, Bethesda
- **Joice**, Bethany; **Lake Mills**, Winnebago; **Northwood**, Silver Lake; **Albert Lea, Minn.**, Lunder (One in Christ Lutheran Parish)
- **Lake Mills**, Salem
- **Leland, Our Savior & Garner, Faith (Miller)\***

\*Part-time Call

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

- **New Hampton**, Trinity, Rev. Sue Cira, contract
- **Osage**, Our Savior's
- **Ossian**, Ossian
- **Thornton, St. Paul\***
- **Toeterville**, St. Peter & Carpenter, Deer Creek
- **Tripoli**, Grace
- **Waterloo, Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd\***
- **Waterloo, Our Savior's**, Lisa Ames-Kruse, SAM, contract\*

## SELF-STUDY

- **Cedar Falls**, Bethlehem
- **Clarion**, First
- **Decorah, St. John's & Hauge\***
- **Hawkeye, Trinity\***
- **Oelwein**, Zion
- **Washburn, Redeemer\***

## ROSTER CHANGES

- **Rev. Ernest Elzey**, deceased
- **Rev. James Mattson**, deceased
- **Rev. Theodore Swanson**, transferred from Grand Canyon Synod

## God's work. Our hands.



September 7, 2025

ELCA congregations will join together for the "God's work. Our hands." annual day of service on Sunday, Sept. 7. This year, congregations are encouraged to consider service opportunities with agencies that may be affected by reductions in federal funding.

Find worship resources, promotional items, a planning toolkit and more at [www.elca.org/our-work/congregations-and-synods/gods-work-our-hands-sunday](https://www.elca.org/our-work/congregations-and-synods/gods-work-our-hands-sunday).

# PRAYER CALENDAR

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

## JUNE 1-7, 2025

- **H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders**
- Rev. Roy Ott
- Rev. Gloria Friedrich
- Rev. Howard Wolfgram
- Rev. Wayne Ellingson
- Riverside Bible Camp, Story City
- Northeastern Iowa Synodical Women's Organization

## JUNE 8-14, 2025

- Jan Schumacher
- Rev. David Efflandt
- Rev. Kyle Barton
- Deacon Jackie Schilling
- Rev. Tom Martin
- Rev. Kim Wills
- Rev. Dan Hanson
- Rev. Melissa Bills

## JUNE 15-21, 2025

- **Middle East Peace**
- Rev. Edy Santos
- Rev. Jay Ilten
- Deacon Lisa Kammerer
- Hauge Lutheran Church, Decorah
- St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Decorah
- Washington Prairie Lutheran Church, Decorah

## JUNE 22-30, 2025

- Michelle Van Riper
- Rev. Joel Dahlen
- Rev. Michael Last
- Rev. Bob Hetrick
- Rev. Selvaraj Periannan
- Rev. Dennis Frank
- Burr Oak Lutheran Church, Decorah
- Decorah Lutheran Church, Decorah
- Hesper Lutheran Church, Decorah

## JULY 1-5, 2025

- **H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders**
- Rev. Clarence Baalson
- Rev. Gregory Friedrich
- Rev. Joelle Colville-Hanson
- Rev. Audrey Lukasak
- Rev. Jerry Laehn
- Rev. Alan Wicks
- Rev. Lance Kittleson
- Rev. Wayne Hagen

## JULY 6-12, 2025

- Rev. Kim Smith
- Rev. Charis Combs-Lay
- Rev. Linda Prestholt
- Rev. Patricia Mohr-Kelly
- Mary Rolland
- Rev. John D. Sorenson
- Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio
- Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque

## JULY 13-19, 2025

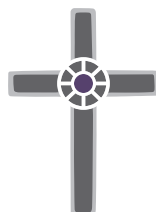
- **Middle East Peace**
- Judy Reiter
- Rev. John H. Sorenson
- Rev. Matthew Muters
- Rev. Isaiah Stansbery
- First Lutheran Church, Decorah
- Luther College Congregation, Decorah

## JULY 20-26, 2025

- Rev. Jason Davis
- Rev. Jeremy Wolfe
- Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Decorah
- St. John Lutheran Church (Maxfield), Denver
- St. Peter Lutheran Church, Denver
- First Lutheran Church, Dows
- St. John's Lutheran Church, Dubuque
- Luther College Congregation, Decorah

## JULY 27-31, 2025

- Rev. Susan Friedrich
- Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Dubuque
- St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Dubuque
- St. Peter Lutheran Church, Dubuque
- St. John Lutheran Church, Dundee







# Good News

May/ June 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 all Mary and Martha people. It's time to party!

A sharing party on June 14, 2025 @. Zion Lutheran Church in Oelwein is for everyone. There will be interest sessions from EWALU, LSI, Synod programs and Shepherd of the Hills in St. Olaf. and "new" circle sessions where you can talk with others about what is working and to share blessings for your congregations.



There is no business meeting this year. Instead, we look forward to lively discussion and fun. We are giving out educational scholarships again this year. Each church was emailed a registration form, flier, and scholarship form. These forms are also available on the WELCA webpage and the Facebook page.

I have been thinking of the basketful of blessings we are all given. It is shown in all the work you have been doing in LWR and other work you do for others. You are a Blessing!

*Sparkling with Jesus,  
Christine Schmitt*

## ***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* and one of the speakers will be Martha Ambarangu, who is a Pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and a New Testament PhD Candidate at the Lutheran School of Theology in

Chicago. Registration opens 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!!

## ***Discipleship Committee***

Christian discipleship is the process by which disciples grow in the Lord Jesus Christ and are equipped by the Holy Spirit to overcome the pressures and trials of this present life and become more and more Christlike. This process requires believers to respond to the Holy Spirit's prompt to examine their thoughts, words, and actions. I was recently prompted by the Holy Spirit to answer the call to go on a Wheels for the World mission outreach to Nepal. We took wheelchairs to adults and children who had a disability. In Nepal, a disability is considered a curse or punishment for a past sin. It was a humbling and rewarding experience to serve the people of Nepal in this way. Hinduism is the main religion in Nepal and Christianity is discouraged. It is the first time I traveled to a country where we couldn't give out Bibles. Despite that, the people were very open to hearing about Jesus and allowing us to pray with them. This trip was way out of my comfort zone, but I am so glad I answered the call to go. This trip reminded me that Jesus is with us always and will be right beside us wherever He calls us to share the Good News, whether it is with our neighbors here at home or across the ocean.

*Submitted by Karen Weltzin*



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

### ***Justice Committee***

Justice is equity and impartiality, mercy and compassion. Justice includes serving God in ways that brings healing and wholeness to the church, the society and the world. Justice is integral to the practice of faith. Micah 6:8 states, *What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?* In Jeremiah 31:15-17, Rachel wept. She did not shed just a few tears, she wept bitterly, uncontrollably, loud, nonstop and unforgettably. Rachel refused to be comforted for herself and her children. On the first Sunday in May, Rachel's Day is observed by Women of the ELCA. It is a time set aside to mourn the loss of our children and to renounce the forces of violence and fear. Much has been done to make us aware of gun violence, but it doesn't seem to be enough. In all 50 states, gun laws have expanded for gun owners making it legal for qualified individuals to carry guns—even automatic weapons. This means more children are exposed to gun violence and the trauma, physical, mental, and emotional harm and even death than ever before. Scripture can help us find common ground and we must always remember—when we ask for help in this chaotic world – that God is always listening when we ask.

*Submitted by Darlene Emery*

### ***Stewardship Committee***

As we move away from the Easter season, we are so thankful that Jesus was the one to save us from our sins. We move into spring, receiving the much-needed rain for the anticipated crops in the fields and gardens, and we are very thankful. We should be good stewards of all that we have received, just as we read in this poem by Catherine Pulsifer.

God gives us many blessings,  
Many we cannot see  
But if we didn't have them  
Oh, where would we be?

God gives us many blessings,  
Many we take for granted  
Everyday things like  
The garden that we planted.

God gives us many blessings,  
Which gratitude we should show  
His blessings are many  
Through which his love is shown.

*Submitted by Alice Greimann*

### ***Spring Gathering***

55 ladies attended the program hosted by the women of St. John Lutheran in Arlington. Claudine Zoughbi shared her faith journey with us, "Answering God's Calling", a testimony from a Palestine woman. Karen Martin from the Fayette County Food Shelf shared how many they have served in Fayette County. In 2004 they helped 523 people/families and in 2024, 2,408. Bring spring cleaning items to this location to help raise funds for their food shelf. The ladies from St. John presented our speakers with quilts that they made.

### **CALENDAR**

Jun 14 M & M Sharing Party @ Zion, Oelwein  
Jul 15 2026 Triennial Registration opens  
Oct 4 Cluster D Fall Gathering, Zion, West Union  
Oct 11 LWR In-Gathering, Albert Lea  
LWR In-Gathering, St John, Sumner  
Oct 25 Cluster B Fall Gathering, Zion, Oelwein  
Nov 1 Triennial Scholarship App Due

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

#### **Christine Schmitt, President**

641-220-5361, [candeschmitt2@gmail.com](mailto:candeschmitt2@gmail.com)

#### **Alice Greimann, Vice President**

641-456-2973, [algreimann@wbefrec.com](mailto:algreimann@wbefrec.com)

#### **Chris VanDeventer, Secretary**

515-320-2877, [cdvandeven@gmail.com](mailto:cdvandeven@gmail.com)

#### **Nancy Poppe, Treasurer**

641-257-8199, [popcan1952@gmail.com](mailto:popcan1952@gmail.com)  
2775 Durham Avenue, Nashua, IA 50658

*Checks payable to NE IA SWO, include Form A*

#### ***Good News*, Editor Diane Wills**

641-425-8628, [wills.dianes@gmail.com](mailto:wills.dianes@gmail.com)  
1399 Beeds Lake Drive, Hampton IA 50441

#### **Contact Women of the ELCA:**

<http://www.womenoftheelca.org/>  
773.380.2730 or 800.638.3522, ext. 2730

#### **2026 Triennial Gathering in Des Moines:**

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

#### **Contact NEIA Women of the ELCA:**

[neiasynod.org/women-of-the-ELCA-](http://neiasynod.org/women-of-the-ELCA-)