



Global Church Together: Strengthening Bonds Across Continents

The Northeastern Iowa Synod continues to live into its calling as part of the global body of Christ through the Global Church Together Network, a vibrant expression of our Companion Synod relationships with churches in Namibia, Angola, and Hungary.

Upcoming Visits from Companion Synod Bishops

This fall, September 28 – October 10, we are honored to welcome several bishops from our companion churches:

Bishop Tamás Fabiny of the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary** will visit congregations and ministries across Northeastern Iowa, sharing insights from the Hungarian church's witness in a secularizing Europe and deepening our shared commitment to theological education and refugee support.

Bishops from **Namibia** and **Angola** will also be visiting, including leaders from the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN)**, the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN)**, and the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Angola (IELA)**. These visits follow the joyous installation of two new bishops in Namibia earlier this year, attended by NEIA pastors and leaders. The celebrations included vibrant worship, deep theological exchange, and heartfelt reconnections with Namibian leaders who studied or served in Iowa

through Wartburg Seminary and Ewalu Bible Camp.

These visits are more than ceremonial—they are opportunities to walk together in accompaniment, sharing stories, challenges, and prayers as we build mutual understanding and solidarity.

Worship Resources for Epiphany 2026: Glory Revealed

As we look ahead to the Season of Epiphany 2026, the Global Church Together Network will release a set of worship resources designed to help congregations celebrate the light of Christ revealed across cultures and continents. These resources, part of the "Glory Revealed" series, include:

Calls to worship and prayers that reflect global voices and themes of justice, reconciliation, and hope.

Liturgies that invite congregations to see Christ's light in unexpected places and people.

Reflections and benedictions written by leaders from around the world, including voices from Africa, Europe, and North America.

These materials will be available to congregations in late fall and are ideal for use through the Epiphany season.



Bishop Tamás Fabiny and Bishop Kevin Jones in 2024

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Meet the Mission Table: A Shared Ministry of Evangelism and Vitality

By Kristen Rod, Director for Evangelical Mission and Jen Thomas, Assistant to the Bishop for Shared Ministry and Development

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), we believe that the Church is not confined to buildings or boundaries—it is a living, breathing community of believers called into relationship with God and one another for the sake of the world. Our ecclesiology, our way of being the church in the world, is rooted in the understanding that we are the Body of Christ, called to live out our baptismal vocation together through Word, Sacrament, service, and justice. This shared calling is expressed through our interdependent structure: congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization working collaboratively to embody God's mission.

In this spirit of shared ministry, the Northeastern Iowa Synod has launched a new network—the **Mission Table**. This team, composed of both rostered and lay leaders, partners with the Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM) to support mission, outreach, congregational vitality, and evangelism across our synod. While some synods call similar groups "Outreach Committees" or "Evangelism Teams," many use the term "Mission Table," inspired by Pastor Stephen Bowman's book *The Mission Table: Renewing Congregation and Community*.

Bowman writes:

"Table is about relationships and community... Mission tables take shape when kitchen and altar tables merge with new and renewed tables in the community locally and globally—where new relationships of mutuality and reconciliation are formed for the life of the world."

This vision aligns beautifully with our Lutheran understanding of Church: a community gathered by grace, sent into the world to listen, serve, and proclaim the Gospel. The Mission Table embodies this by practicing the "three great listenings"—to God, to one another, and to our neighbors."

In August 2025, the DEMs and Mission Table members from Region 5 (Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan's Upper Peninsula) gathered at Wartburg Seminary for a retreat funded by the **God's Love Made Real Initiative** and an **Evangelism Grant** from the ELCA Churchwide offices. This retreat was a powerful example of our Church's collaborative spirit—synods learning from one another, sharing resources, and exploring new ways to engage in evangelism that is trauma-informed, culturally aware, and rooted in deep listening.

Participants experienced creative worship models like **Dinner Church** and **Messy Church**, and engaged in playful, Spirit-led activities designed to spark holy imagination. These experiences remind us that evangelism is not a formula—it's a faithful response to God's love, expressed in diverse and contextual ways.

As the NEIA Mission Table begins its work, it will focus on sharing these resources and learnings, supporting congregations in both traditional and innovative ministries. It will also oversee the distribution of grants from our synod's **Outreach Fund**, designed to support new ministries. We are grateful to be working with **Deacon Jessica Hacker**, Senior Director for Institutional Giving at Churchwide, to develop grant guidelines that reflect our shared commitment to mission.

This is how we live out our ecclesiology in the ELCA: not as isolated congregations, but as a connected Church, collaborating across expressions—local, synodical, and churchwide—to make God's love real in the world.

To learn more:

Visit elca.org/godslovemadereal

Explore evangelism resources at elca.org/evangelism

Contact Kristen Rod, Director for Evangelical Mission, at rodk@neiasynod.org

The Busy Season for the Synod Bishop & Staff

Late summer through early November is busy season for bishops and Synod staffs. For me that has meant Region 5 meetings, ordinations, congregational anniversaries, Board meetings for LSI and Wartburg College, and Conference of Bishops meetings, professional boundary training for synod clergy, and some planning "retreats" with my staff and Region 5 colleagues. This year I am adding the installation of the new Presiding Bishop and visits from five companion Synod Bishops from Hungary, Namibia, and Angola. When I am not in attendance in one of these places, I find that my mind is in a couple other places:

Reconsiderations of Bound Conscience

In August the Churchwide Assembly (CWA) passed editorial revisions to the 2009 Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust social statement. The revisions reflected updating wording and clarifications that brought the social statement into congruence with subsequent social teaching in the ELCA. Over 94% of the CWA voting members approved the changes.

Here in September, the Task Force turned our attention to the reconsideration of Bound Conscience as requested by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly. At our meeting we learned about personal conflict styles and preferences from the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. We renewed conversation about what each of us brings to this conversation. We met with three members of the Task Force that created the 2009 social statement and listened to their understanding of Bound Conscience

and why they included it. We heard a presentation by Rev. Dr. Timothy Wengert about the use of Bound Conscience by Martin Luther and other Reformers at the start of the Lutheran Church. We dwelled on the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids, wondered about grace, befuddled by those who would not share, and curious about the fear of not having enough leading to the response to, in so many words, "go get your own."

I came away from our meetings with cautious optimism. There is a sense that we are waiting for something new to emerge, something beyond and either/or choice. We are exploring ways to bring the whole church along with us but aren't sure how to do that.

Congregational Property

It has come to my attention that there are rumors pertaining to church property ownership in and the Synod's intent to take it away. These are false claims. I can assure you that the Northeastern Iowa Synod (and the ELCA) are not requiring or requesting congregations to hand over their property. The constitutional provisions to take over administration of congregational property are there for extreme cases when a congregation can no longer do so on their own. (For example: When a congregation has fewer members on the roll than the number their constitution requires for a quorum at a congregational meeting.) In these cases, it is the Synod Council that authorizes the administration of a congregation's property. I can also attest that the Synod staff are not interested in property management. In fact, we have informational resources and stand ready to assist

congregations in caring for their property the best they can in both active ministry and when a congregation reaches the end of their ministry.



Bishop Kevin Jones

To be fair, there are examples in the ELCA that lie outside of this example. In cases where the larger church has significantly invested in building and supporting a congregation, there may be reasons to protect or recoup that investment. Here in Northeastern Iowa, the vast majority of congregations were self-funded or supported by one or two other congregations when they began. It makes no sense to me to use money meant for ministry to enter into lengthy and costly legal battles over property ownership.

Finally, this is not something the bishop has the authority to do. The Synod Council has the authority to do this. These are lay people and pastors from among our congregations. They are your neighbors. They are responsible for what we hold and do together as a Synod. I can't imagine how hard it would be for them to approve the forceful takeover of property of a neighboring congregation.

We are called and gifted by the Holy Spirit to be loving, gracious, and supportive of one another. Let us not grow weary of doing good things so that all may know the love of Christ Jesus.

— Bishop Kevin Jones

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.

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.

Registration is open online and is due by October 16. For more information, visit neiasynod.org/2024/09/s-a-f-e-ministry-team or contact Pastor Steve Brackett.

Portico Benefit Service Selections Are Coming

Portico Benefit Services has new health plan options for 2026. Sponsoring employers will need to make their health benefit option election any time between October 1 - 14. This choice must be made in conversation with your rostered minister(s) and covered lay employees.

Employers should sign in to Portico EmployerLink to access the new Benefit Cost Estimator to review options. Sponsored employees should sign into myPortico for more information about the plan options.

Our Portico Regional Representative Jennifer Prinz is hosting two informational Zoom meetings on Thursday, October 2 at 6:00 PM or Monday October 6 at 4:00 PM. Contact Alison Pettit at pettita@neiasynod.org to register.

Sponsoring employers and sponsored employees can contact Quantum Health Coordinators at 877-851-5656 or the Portico Customer Care Center at 800-352-2876 for help in determining which plan is best for the sponsored employee(s).

NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD



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Send news items to webadmin@neiasynod.org.

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. To request a printed version, call the synod office.



neiasynod.org

Immanuel, Cresco Hosts Clothing Closet

submitted by the congregation

Immanuel Lutheran Church is in the small town of Cresco in Northeast Iowa. We aren't a large congregation but enjoy doing projects outside our church. We just concluded our 14th year of the Back to School Clothing Giveaway. This began as a small project which we held on a Saturday morning in August. It has now grown to a 3 day event with 250 to 300 area people showing up to select clothing. We began it as clothing for school aged children only, but we always received a lot of adult clothing. We soon realized that there were a lot of adults and grandparents that were in need of clothing and coats, also. Visitors can take as much as they need, with many leaving with boxes or large bags of clothing. Everything is free with no questions asked. We also have towels, sheets, blankets and bedspreads available from local motels.

Each year we begin in the spring by advertising with posters downtown or in surrounding communities along with the local radio station asking for gently used clothing, shoes and boots. We usually have 10 -12 women show up each Wednesday morning beginning in May to sort clothing. We hang up shirts and coats on racks we have acquired over the years, using our Sunday School rooms as closets. Each rack is labeled with a size and gender to make it easier in August. All shorts and jeans are folded to be laid on tables later.

The Sunday before our giveaway, church members help carry clothing to our basement. We then meet on Monday to unpack boxes and arrange the jeans on tables and the tops on racks.



Volunteers from Immanuel, Cresco

Since this project has grown over the years we now have all male clothing upstairs in our classrooms or in any other room available and all female clothing in the basement. A lot of labels and signs in English and Spanish are used to make it easier for visitors.

After closing on Saturday, workers select clothing and pack boxes for the elementary school, preschool, school daycare and nurse, school sports shirts for the high school "School Closet", two other surrounding schools for their clothes' closets, onesies for baby kits, foster children's parents, a homeless Veterans center and a Correctional Facility in nearby towns. We also contact a Mission along with Home Providers, Community Action, and our nursing homes. All the workers agreed that the time involved with this project is so worthwhile when seeing

the smiles on children's, parents' and older adults' faces.

Each year we see returning shoppers along with many new shoppers. Grandparents come to select clothing for their grandchildren whose families are going through tough times or who are raising their grandchildren. Many older adults also select needed clothing. We find our visitors very polite, respectful and thankful, including the children.

If your church is looking for a meaningful project, this involves no money- only your time. It affects so many in a positive way and sends them home knowing their children will have appropriate sized clothing for the coming year. We feel this is God's work through our hands.



Living Abundantly: A Fall Reflection on Generosity

By Rev. Jen Thomas, Assistant to the Bishop for Shared Ministry and Development

As the combines roll through golden fields and grain bins fill across Iowa and the Midwest, we are surrounded by signs of abundance. The harvest is a powerful reminder that God's provision is not just sufficient—it is overflowing. In this season, we see the fruit of labor, the rhythm of creation, and the generosity of a God who gives more than we can ask or imagine.

Mike Ward, in his book *Abundance: Creating a Culture of Generosity*, writes, "Abundance is not about having more—it's about trusting that what we have is enough." That trust is at the heart of Christian stewardship. It's not just about money or resources—it's about how we live, how we love, and how we share.

In the Northeastern Iowa Synod, I've seen that abundance in congregations who give generously to their communities,

"I came that they may
have life, and have it
abundantly."
— John 10:10

in leaders who offer their time and wisdom, and in ministries that stretch beyond what seems possible. Stewardship is not a spreadsheet—it's a spiritual practice. It's a way of life rooted in gratitude and hope.

This fall, I invite you to reflect on the abundance in your own life and congregation.

What harvests are you celebrating? What seeds are you planting for the future? And how might we walk together in cultivating a culture of generosity?



Rev. Jen Thomas

I'd love to connect with you—whether you're dreaming up a stewardship campaign, wondering how to talk about giving, or simply wanting to share a story of generosity. Let's explore together what it means to live abundantly.

You can reach me at thomasj@neiasynod.org or find me at upcoming synod events. Let's talk stewardship.

RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY NETWORK

National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools - September 30



This summer, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly passed a memorial acknowledging the church's role in the history of Indian Boarding Schools. For over 150 years, these schools separated Native children from their families, suppressed their languages and cultures, and inflicted lasting harm. Many were run by religious organizations, including ELCA predecessor denominations.

The ELCA's first step is raising awareness. On September 30, the National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools, we invite you to:

- Wear orange in solidarity
- Mark the day in worship
- Learn more through the ELCA's Truth Seeking and Truth Telling Initiative

EVENTS

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.
- 24-31 SYNOD OFFICE CLOSED**, Christmas Break

JANUARY 2026

- 1-4 SYNOD OFFICE CLOSED**, Christmas Break
- 8 GLOBAL CHURCH TOGETHER NETWORK**, Zoom, 1:30pm
- 8 RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY NETWORK**, Synod Office & Zoom, 3 p.m.

- 15 SYNOD COUNCIL**, Zoom, 9 a.m.
- 30-FEB 2 YOUTH MINISTRY NETWORK EXTRAVAGANZA**, St. Louis, MO

DC@PS?PW 0.04

- 2 TRANSITIONAL/INTERIM MINISTRY MTG.**, Zoom, 9:30 a.m.
- 6-7 CANDIDACY RETREAT**, Shalom Spirituality Center, Dubuque SPM

- 20-21 SWO WINTER RETREAT**
- 27-28 SWO WINTER RETREAT SNOW DATE**

CONGREGATIONS

ORDINATIONS

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

INSTALLATIONS

- 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
- Clarion**, First
- 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

- Allison**, St. James
- Cedar Falls**, Bethlehem
- Cedar Falls**, St. John, staff
- Decorah**, Glenwood & Canoe Ridge
- Decorah**, *St. John's & Hauge**
- Garnavillo**, St. Paul & McGregor, First
- Hawkeye**, *Trinity**
- Mason City**, Our Saviour's & St. Paul
- Oelwein**, Zion
- Washburn**, *Redeemer**
- Waukon**, St. John

ROSTER CHANGES

- Rev. Elizabeth Bell**, transferred to ELCIC
- Rev. Kristi Grieder**, transferred to Northern Illinois
- Rev. Cindy Krause**, retired
- Rev. Bryan Robertson**, retired
- Rev. Margaret Yackel-Juleen**, retired

Part-time Call

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

PRAYER CALENDAR

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

OCTOBER 1-4, 2025

H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders
Rev. Joel Becker
Rev. Jim Martin-Schramm
Deacon Pat Gjere
Rev. Jim Knudson

OCTOBER 5-11, 2025

Immanuel Lutheran Church,
Independence
Rev. Melinda McVey
Rev. Anita Nuetzman
Bethany Lutheran Church,
Iowa Falls
Messiah Lutheran Church,
Janesville
American Lutheran Church,
Jesup
Bethesda Lutheran Church,
Jewell

OCTOBER 12-18, 2025

Middle East Peace
Rev. Jeni Bohls
Bethany Lutheran Church,
Joice
Bethany Lutheran Church,
Kensett
Carol Hasvold
Rev. Mark Walker
Elk Creek Lutheran Church,
Kensett



OCTOBER 19-25, 2025

Zion Lutheran Church,
(Jubilee), La Porte City
American Lutheran Church,
La Porte City
Rev. Mark Anderson
Rev. Victoria Shepherd
Rev. Beth Olson
Rev. Greg Bjornstad
Winnebago Lutheran
Church, Lake Mills

OCTOBER 26-31, 2025

Rev. Larry Trachte
Salem Lutheran Church,
Lake Mills
Rev. Dena Gable
Our Savior's Lutheran
Church, Lansing
Rev. Bill Peters
Rev. Dennis Hugdahl

NOVEMBER 1-8, 2025

H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders

Rev. Leo Combs-Lay
Rev. Mike Blair
Our Savior Lutheran
Church, Leland
St. Paul Lutheran Church,
Lime Springs
Rev. Nichole Robson Ellen
Ward
Rev. Lisa Robison
Rev. Rebecca Baird
Rev. Jane Granzow

NOVEMBER 9-15, 2025

Rev. Jeff Jacobs
Rev. Ole Winter
Rev. Jenny Edinger
St. John Lutheran Church,
Luana
Bethlehem Lutheran
Church, Manly
Rev. Bob Edwards
St. James Lutheran Church,
Mason City

NOVEMBER 16-22, 2025

Middle East Peace

Rev. Corey Smith
Trinity Lutheran Church,
Mason City
Rev. Kate Johnson
Our Saviour's Lutheran
Church, Mason City
Rev. Mike Erickson
Rev. Gary Hatcher
St. Paul Lutheran Church,
Mason City

NOVEMBER 23-30, 2025

St. Paul Lutheran Church,
Maynard
First Evangelical Lutheran
Church, McGregor
St. Paul Lutheran Church,
Monona
St. John Lutheran Church,
Nashua
Trinity Lutheran Church, New
Hampton
St. Luke Lutheran Church, Nora
Springs
First Lutheran Church,
Northwood
Silver Lake Lutheran Church,
Northwood