

Northeastern Iowa Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Speaking for the Church

By Bishop Kevin Jones



In an age where almost every individual has the ability to make their thoughts and opinions publicly available, we find ourselves in need of revisiting agreements and assumptions about who is responsible for speaking on behalf of the Church.

In the ELCA there are some agreed upon protocols that serve as guides when addressing important issues. These protocols are meant to provide safeguards to minimize additional harm, to amplify the voices of those most affected, and to speak on the behalf of anyone who find themselves voiceless and unheard. The following are some of the guidelines that we use in the ELCA when making public statements.

The Presiding Bishop relies on a team of people to write, review, and edit public messages. If it pertains to an international matter, the Presiding Bishop waits to see what Lutheran partners in the affected region say first. A draft statement is shared with Lutheran partners closest to the issue (whether international or domestic) to get their feedback for clarity and to avoid misunderstandings or additional hurt. It is checked for alignment with scripture, Lutheran theology, and ELCA social teachings.

There are over thirty people who participate in the process before a message goes out. Sometimes it takes a week or more to prepare. The Presiding Bishop's messages often state a position or teaching on behalf of the Church and can also be pastoral in nature.

The Conference of Bishops (COB) rarely releases joint statements or letters. Getting 66 people to agree on specific language is always difficult, even when we agree on the substance of an issue. Historically, messages from the COB have been pastoral in nature rather than stating a position of the Church. Messages from the COB are drafted by one or more Synod bishops and presented to the Conference. After deliberation and edits, the bishops strive for full consensus on the content of the message. When that is not possible, a ballot vote can move the message forward if 75% of the entire COB votes in favor. A companion statement of dissent can be included as part of such a statement. (This procedure was updated at the spring 2026 COB meeting in March.)

Synod Bishops. The relational agreement held by bishops in the ELCA provides for the local bishop to speak to issues taking place in their Synod.

Speaking for the Church Continued...

Other Synod bishops can amplify that message by reposting or linking to what the local bishop has released. Checking in with ministry partners close to the issue is necessary to minimize potential harm to the ministry or to those they serve. If it is an issue that stretches beyond one Synod, then working with colleagues is important to provide a unified voice.

On occasion, a bishop might step out of their role and post something on their personal social media. When that happens, I worry that people miss the distinction and still see it as a message from "The Bishop." Serving as a bishop in the church I feel called to respond in a different way. Instead of publishing personal opinions, I prefer to raise awareness of the complexity of issues and strive to maintain personal relationships that demonstrate the love of God through Jesus Christ.

In this social media age, we are encouraged to respond to issues quickly and loudly, claiming our beliefs with conviction. Jesus, however, asked questions in response to those who demanded to know what he believed. He invited people to see something from another angle or find an answer inside themselves. He told stories with the power to shift perception that we still ponder today.

The ELCA has a whole host of tools to speak the love of God into the world. We are all called to give voice to that love in word and in action. Thank you for the ways you respond to that call.

Pastor & Church Highlights!



Pastor Jared McLey gave the message on Thursday, March 26 at the school worship for St. Paul's Lutheran School in Waverly. Pastor Jared attended St. Paul's when he was in elementary school. He also attended Wartburg College and Wartburg Seminary, both in NEIA, and now serves as a rostered minister in the Northeastern Iowa Synod. We are grateful for the ways the Holy Spirit has been and continues to be moving in his life!



Wednesday, March 25, Rev. Kristen Corr-Rod (Synod Director fo Evangelical Mission) got to preach at the rural Decorah congregations' joint midweek Lenten service. They have folks from 8 congregations come together for their Wednesday evening Lenten services. She also got to sing with the multi-congregation choir!



Walking Together from Lent into Easter: A Season of Mission and Stewardship

By Rev. Jennifer Thomas

As we journey from the reflective days of Lent into the joy of Easter, we are reminded that this season is not only about personal renewal but also about living out our shared mission as the body of Christ. Lent invites us to slow down, examine our hearts, and realign our lives with God's call—through prayer, fasting, and acts of generosity. Easter then bursts forth with the promise of new life, urging us to carry that renewed spirit into action.

For the Northeastern Iowa Synod, this is a time to strengthen our mission support—together funding ministries that reach far beyond our individual congregations. Your gifts help train leaders, support global companions, nurture youth in faith, and respond to urgent needs in our communities. Every contribution, no matter the size, becomes part of a greater story of hope and transformation.

Individual stewardship during this season is a tangible way to live out resurrection faith. Consider how your time, talents, and treasures can be offered in gratitude for God's abundant grace. Whether it's volunteering in your congregation, increasing your regular giving, or supporting a special mission project, each act of generosity is a seed planted for God's kin-dom.

As we move from the solemnity of the cross to the joy of the empty tomb, may we walk together in faith—renewed, generous, and committed to God's mission in the world. This Easter, let our stewardship be a living testimony to the risen Christ who makes all things new.



2026 C3 Conference: Abiding, Belonging, Creative, Collaborative, Congregations (A/B/C³)

Engaged members who attend the A/B/C³ will come away with a focused picture of what is actually happening in your context and ignite imaginations in your congregation for community ministry.



The 2026 Northeastern Iowa Synod C3 (Creative Collaborative Congregations) will assist your congregation in locating itself in the realities of our current context and provide resources that will assist in creating communities of belonging. Dr. Megen O'Toole from Iowa Shrink Smart (at ISU) will share demographic trends and ways in which contracting communities are working together to care for one another and make life better for all. We'll also spend time learning about current trends in ELCA congregations and how we in the Northeastern Iowa Synod are faring.

Our time together will conclude with worship and the recognition of the first cohort to complete the lay-training program.

What: Abiding, Belonging, Creative, Collaborative Congregations (A/B/C³)

When: 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM Saturday, June 6, 2026

Where: St. Paul's Lutheran Church and School

Address: 301 1st St. NW, Waverly, Iowa 50677

Who: ELCA congregation members and rostered leaders

Registration: Register today by going to <https://neiasynod.org/>

Cost is \$50. Payment needed at the time of registration. Registration deadline is May 22, 2026. No late registrations or walk ins due to the food order.

Shrink Smart was developed by the research team leading the Rural Shrink Smart Initiative, a National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded research project based at Iowa State University.

Whoever loves a brother or sister abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling. -1 John 2:10

What does it mean to belong to an ELCA congregation in Northeastern Iowa? The answer probably depends on which of the 138 congregations you belong to. Each one has a unique story, is uniquely called, uniquely gifted, and differently challenged.

But there are some things we share in common:

Almost 70% of Iowa's incorporated towns, villages, and counties are currently experiencing significant population decline. This affects people beyond our congregations, encompassing everyone in the community. As communities contract around us, how are we called to be places of abiding and belonging?

2026 C3 Conference Continued...

About the Presenter



Megen O'Toole

Megen O'Toole is a designer, facilitator, and assistant teaching professor of architecture at Iowa State University where she teaches studio and coordinates the interdisciplinary foundations program. Prior to teaching at the university, she taught facilitators how to lead others in their own looking at the Des Moines Art Center. This work in community development, program administration, and critical examination of methodology created a practice-oriented approach which she brought to the Rural Shrink Smart Initiative, a National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded research project at Iowa State University, where she is focused on the relational development of community.



Portico Updates



2025 FSA Claims Submission Reminder

Tying up receipts and loose ends? ELCA Health Plan members have until April 30 to submit 2025 claims for reimbursement from your health and/or dependent care flexible spending accounts (FSA). Submit 2025 claims to [Further](#) (and 2026 claims to HealthEquity). Not sure what qualifies as an eligible health care expense? [This guide can help.](#)

Quantum Health – Better Search. Better Care.

Starting April 1, ELCA Health Plan members may notice a refreshed experience on the Quantum Health Care Coordinators website and app – including an [enhanced provider search](#) designed to make finding high-quality care easier. Contact a Care Coordinator for help navigating care, resolving claims and billing issues, and confirming your provider or clinic are in-network.

I Spy Something Blooming ...

Spring is a great time to get active, try something new, and build habits that support your well-being. Breathing fresh air, looking for signs of growth, and praying for our planet is a great way to give thanks for creation. Want to go the extra mile? ELCA-Primary health benefit members can explore Burnalong classes designed to help your wellness goals bloom. Check out the [April calendar.](#)

Hungary 2026: Installation of Bishop Pál Keczkó

On February 28, 2026, Bishop Kevin participated in the installation of Bishop Pál Keczkó of the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary. Bishop Keczkó was elected in December to fill the position held by Bishop Tamás Fabiny in the Northern Diocese. Prior to his election, Bishop Keczkó served as a parish pastor and Deputy Bishop to Bishop Fabiny.

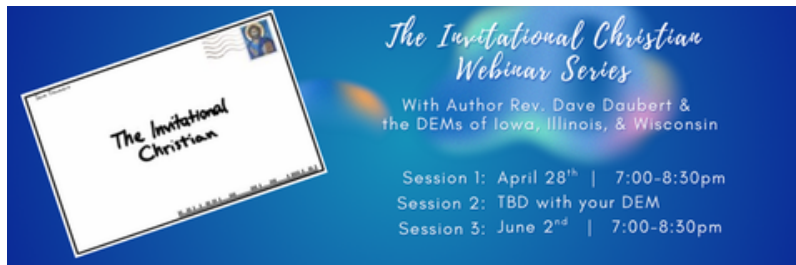
While in Budapest, Bishop Jones met with Bishop Keczkó, former Bishop Fabiny, and Bishop Ingeborg Midttómme of Norway (the Northern Diocese's other companion synod). There was a dinner reception for visiting bishops from Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Hungary, along with lay leaders in the ELCH and Pr. Rachel Eskesen who serves as the ELCA Desk to Europe. At the installation service there were representatives from the Hungarian government, ecumenical churches (Catholic, Orthodox, and Reformed) as well as various Lutheran partners that weren't present at the dinner. Bishop Kevin was invited to participate in the liturgy, the blessing of the new Bishop, and to bring a greeting during the service. During his greeting, Bishop Jones presented Bishop Keczkó with a wooden wall cross as a sign of our ongoing partnership. The back of the cross was inscribed with the words taken from Philippians 1:4-5: "Praying with joy for your partnership in the gospel."



Webinars & Retreats

The Invitational Christian Webinar Series

Join the Region 5 Directors for Evangelical Mission (DEMs) for an engaging webinar series exploring *The Invitational Christian* by Dave Daubert—a practical and hope-filled guide to sharing faith through authentic relationships.



With chapters on Why Should Anyone Come, Quality Matters, Knowing Our Story, and Address Their Fears, this book – and the three associated web sessions – will help us develop an action plan for our congregational contexts.

Cost: FREE – but please register at [The Invitational Christian Webinar Series](#)

A ZOOM link will be shared with those who are registered officially for the event.

Designed for congregations across Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin, this series will equip leaders and members alike to look at how the biblical story grounds our stories as God’s people. It will help people tell their stories and be better at listening to each other’s stories. Ultimately, the goal is to form deeper story communities where people share deeply and faith is nurtured. Through conversation, reflection, and real-life application, you’ll discover how small, intentional practices can open the door to deeper relationships and spiritual curiosity in your community.

Webinar Dates:

Session 1 with author Rev. Dave Daubert – April 28th | 7:00–8:30pm

Session 2 – Date TBD with your synod’s Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM)

Session 3 with author Rev. Dave Daubert – June 2nd | 7:00–8:30pm

Before the first webinar, we recommend that you buy your own copy of Dave Daubert’s book [The Invitational Christian](#).

You can order an individual copy at <https://books.by/day-8-strategies/the-invitational-christian>

For two or more copies to the same mailing address (save \$ with a discount), use this link:

<https://www.day8strategies.com/product/the-invitational-christian>

If you would like the book but finances are a concern, please contact Rev. Kristen Rod, DEM of NEIA Synod, at rodk@neiasynod.org

The 2027 ELCA Youth Gathering: Imagine More



Mark your calendars! The Gathering 2027 is in Minneapolis, Minnesota from June 28 – July 2, 2027. Planning webinars have currently started, but there are plenty more ahead! Below is a list of the upcoming webinars taking pace throughout the rest of 2026. You can register for the ones you are interested in attending, or view all of the webinars in 2026 and 2027 by going to:

<https://www.elca.org/gathering/gathering-2027/key-dates>.

April 13, 2026 Webinar: Budgeting Without Losing Your Mind

May 14, 2026: How to Decide if MYLE or the tAble Fits your group

June 22, 2026: Volunteering at the Gathering

July 16, 2026: A Leader's Guide to the Getting Ready Materials

August 17, 2026: What is SERVE?

September 24, 2026: Registration 101

October 13, 2026: What to Expect in Morning Worship

November 19, 2026: ENGAGE Programming Preview

December 14, 2026: Helping Your Group Navigate Community Life Well

Plan-It

The Northeastern Iowa Synod will host a “Plan-It” workshop on Saturday, May 2, to help ministers and faith formation leaders develop a calendar of events for their youth and family ministries.

Kelsey Blinn of Peer Ministry Leadership will lead this planning event from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Redeemer, Waverly. The event is a guided planning and sharing experience for those responsible for faith formation ministries.

Blinn will offer planning tools, templates and a system to help participants plan out a year of themes and events that will involve nearly every youth in their congregations. Everyone will have an opportunity to share ideas, organize ministry systems, gain time-saving tips and learn how to build a leadership-producing culture with an emphasis on self-care.

Youth leaders, faith formation directors, children's ministry directors, pastors, volunteers and the entire planning team are encouraged to attend. People should plan to bring laptops and a list of important dates to plan around, such as community and school events.

Register by April 24! The cost is \$20 per person and includes lunch. To learn more, about Peer Ministry Leadership, visit www.peerministry.org. For questions about the event, call Alison Pettit at the synod office at 319-352-1414.

Register: <https://neiasynod.org/2026/03/plan-it/>



give us one day,
we'll give you one year

Iowa First Call Theological Education Retreat

May 3–5, 2026

Iowa First Call Theological Education Retreat

“Practicing grounded presence in your first three years of ministry”

Where: Being New Spirituality Center @ Grace Lutheran Church 5201 Urbandale Ave Des Moines, Iowa

Hotel: Courtyard by Marriott 1520 NW 114th St. Clive, Iowa

Who: Rostered Ministers in their first three years of ordained ministry

Why: First Call Theological Education is a “requirement” in the ELCA and the three Iowa Synods can offer an engaging retreat when all first call rostered ministers are gathered.

During this year’s First Call Retreat, we will be tending a variety of spiritual practices—each one an invitation to slow down, sink in, and listen. Centering prayer, yoga, art, quiet time, and walking the labyrinth will be offered as ways of inhabiting our bodies and our days more fully. Certified Spiritual Directors will be available for those who desire a twenty-minute taste of spiritual direction—companionship for the journey rather than answers to be fixed.

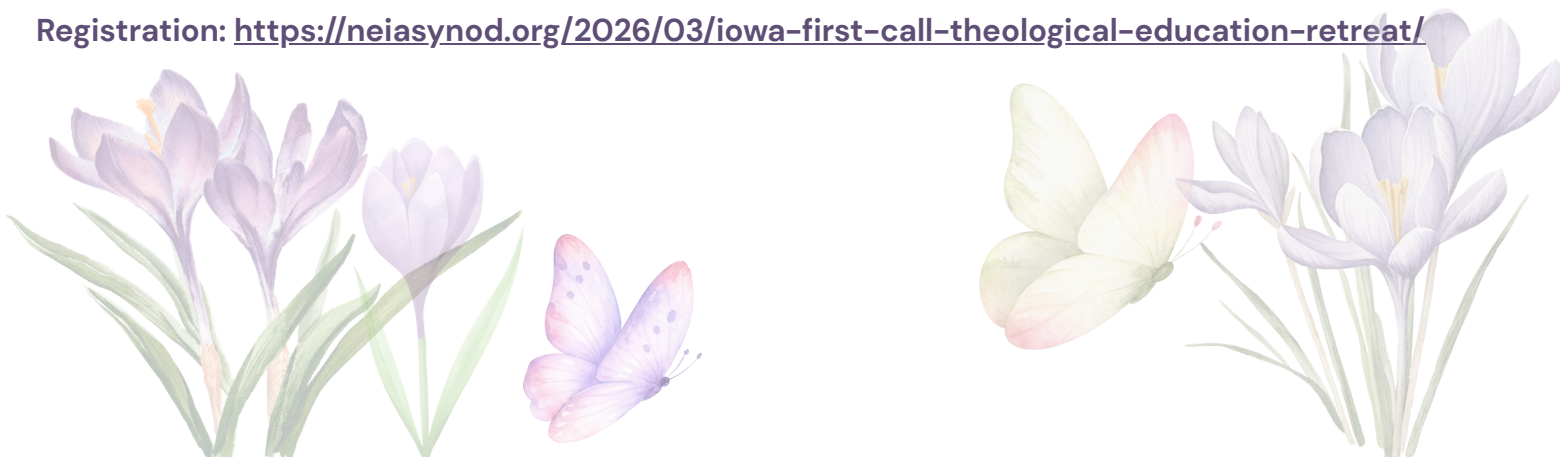
The center’s library, donated by Joyce Rupp and her sisters, will be open to us, as will the garden, for those who wish to spend time with a book or with their hands in the earth. We will share meals. We will worship. We will rest together. And in all of it, we will trust that what truly gives life knows how to meet us—patiently, gently, and at the depth where our roots are growing.

So, we ask that you bring your whole, beautiful, curious, open being to Des Moines this May. We also ask that you bring: comfy clothes, warm socks or slippers, your own coffee mug and water bottle, a bible, a journal, and if you have one, a yoga mat.

We ask that you register and send in any dietary restrictions ASAP.

A block of rooms have been reserved at the Courtyard West/Clive. King rooms are offered to us at a rate of \$89 plus tax per night, and double queen rooms at a rate of \$109 plus tax per night. Please make your reservation as soon as possible, as the cut off date is April 13.

Registration: <https://neiasynod.org/2026/03/iowa-first-call-theological-education-retreat/>



Racial Justice Network Update



Spring 2026

Nelson W. Trout became the first African American Bishop in the Lutheran Church in 1983 when he was elected Bishop of the South Pacific District of the American Lutheran Church. He was also awarded a doctor of divinity degree from Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa.

“When I suggest that the solution to our ever increasing racial problem be found in our ability to generate goodwill, I would not want such a suggestion to be discarded as the council of weakness. Granted, we do not normally think of such a quality of human experience as being in the same league with our military power, or with our scientific resources; yet, it is not to be discarded as utter sentimentality or some impotent form of effeminacy. I submit to you that human goodwill is the greatest power available to humanity.” – **Rev. Dr. Nelson Trout, Lutheran Quarterly, May 1968**

To learn more about Bishop Trout and inspire congregations with his life story, the Racial Justice Network created an [8 ½ x 11 handout](#) for congregational use and a [poster](#) which can be printed or requested on loan for display. To request the poster, email the [Racial Justice Network](#).

Juneteenth

With Juneteenth fast approaching, we encourage church leaders to seek out local and regional opportunities to honor and celebrate. For 30 years, community members in Waterloo, Iowa have held a Juneteenth celebration in Sullivan Park. This annual event is a celebration of African American culture through music, food, dancing, kid’s activities, and the history of Juneteenth. Watch social media for details as the 2026 celebration plans unfold.

If you know of other Juneteenth events, please email [Racial Justice Network](#) and we will work to spread the word!



Updates & Events

Northeastern Iowa Synod Outreach Fund

The Northeastern Iowa Synod Outreach Fund exists to empower and support innovative ministry initiatives. These initiatives should extend beyond existing organizational boundaries, engage new populations, foster deeper connections between congregations and their broader context, and equip people to live out their faith.

Application Timeline

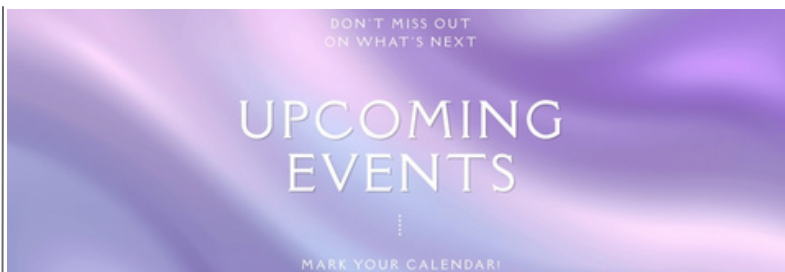
- There are three application cycles each year.
 - **Spring 2026** – Application Due March 1, 2026
 - **Summer 2026** – Application Due July 1, 2026
 - **Fall 2026** – Application Due Nov. 1, 2026
- Up to \$25,000 will be awarded during each cycle.
- Completed applications should be emailed to grants@NEIASynod.org. Applications submitted after the due date will be considered in the next cycle.

Types of Funding Available

- Project Support
- Matching Funds
- Events / Conferences
- Travel (eligible and ineligible expenses listed in attached application)
- Capital / Equipment Expenses (for innovative projects)

Learn More & Apply:

<https://neiasynod.org/download-category/cultivating-vitality/>



April 2026

- **April 9, 2026** – Global Church Together Network
 - Zoom @ 1:30 p.m.
- **April 9, 2026** – Racial Justice Advocacy Network
 - Zoom @ 3:00 p.m.
- **April 16, 2026** – Spring Day of Renewal
 - Redeemer Lutheran Church, Waverly, Iowa
 - Time: 9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

May 2026

- **May 2, 2026** – Plan-It
 - Redeemer Lutheran Church, Waverly, Iowa
 - Time: 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
- **May 3-5, 2026** – Iowa First Call Theological Education Retreat
 - Grace Lutheran Church, Des Moines, Iowa
 - Time: May 3 @ 8:00 a.m. – May 5 @ 5:00 p.m.
- **May 14, 2026** – Global Church Together Network
 - Zoom @ 1:30 p.m.
- **May 14, 2026** – Racial Justice Advocacy Network
 - Zoom @ 3:00 p.m.

June 2026

- **June 6, 2026** – A/B/C3 Conference
 - St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Waverly, Iowa
 - Time: 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
- **June 11, 2026** – Global Church Together Network
 - Zoom @ 1:30 p.m.
- **June 11, 2026** – Racial Justice Advocacy Network
 - Zoom @ 3:00 p.m.

Congregations

Interviewing

- **Allison, St. James**
- **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
- **Cedar Falls, Bethlehem**
- **Cedar Falls, St. John** (staff)
- **Clarion, First & Congregational UCC**
- **Dows, First** (part-time call)
- **Dysart, Zion**
- **Eldorado, St. Peter** (part-time call)
- **Janesville, Messiah** (part-time call)
- **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) (part-time call)
- **New Hampton, Trinity**, Rev. Sue Cira, contract
- **Ossian, Ossian** (part-time call)
- **Thornton, St. Paul** (part-time call)
- **Toeterville, St. Peter & Carpenter, Deer Creek**
- **Waterloo, Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd** (part-time call)

Self-Study

- **Decorah, Glenwood & Canoe Ridge**
- **Decorah, St. John's & Hauge** (part-time call)
- **Dubuque, St. John's**
- **Garnavillo, St. Paul & McGregor, First**, Rev. David Tielbar, interim
- **Hawkeye, Trinity** (part-time call)
- **Mason City, Our Saviour's & St. Paul**
- **Oelwein, Zion**
- **Sheffield, Zion-St. John**
- **Washburn, Redeemer** (part-time call)
- **Waterloo, St. Ansgar** (part-time call)
- **Waterloo, Trinity** (part-time call)
- **Waterloo, Zion** (part-time call)
- **Waukon, St. John**, Rev. Mark Oehlert, interim

Roster Changes

- **Rev. Brian Moeller**, transferred from Central/Southern Illinois Synod
- **Rev. Judith Johnson**, transferred from Western Iowa Synod
- **Rev. Robert Edwards**, deceased

Installation:

- **Rev. Brian Moeller**, Immanuel, Independence- April 22



Northeastern Iowa Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Prayers

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

March 1–7, 2026

- H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders
- Julie Nordstrom
- St. Sebald Lutheran Church, Strawberry Point
- Rev. Norm Bauer
- Rev. Dave Lenth
- Emanuel Lutheran Church, Strawberry Point
- Rev. Kent Mechler
- St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church, Sumner

March 8–14, 2026

- St. John Lutheran Church (Buck Creek), Sumner
- St. Peter Lutheran Church (Richfield), Sumner
- Rev. George Anderson
- Grace Lutheran Church, Tripoli
- St. John Lutheran Church (Buck Creek), Tripoli
- Rev. Bob Lehmann
- Rev. Ginny Olson

March 15–21, 2026

- Rev. Roger Buhr
- Rev. Kristen Briner–Wipperman
- Middle East Peace
- St. Paul Lutheran Church, Volga
- Ginny Tomlinson
- Rev. Maggie Falenschek
- Redeemer Lutheran Church, Washburn
- Rev. Eric Thiele

March 22–31, 2026

- Rev. Ron Roberts
- St. Ansgar Lutheran Church, Waterloo
- St. John Lutheran Church (Bennington), Waterloo
- Rev. Theodore Swanson
- Rev. Frank Johnson
- Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Waterloo
- Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Waterloo
- Rev. Dennis Bauer
- Rev. Tyler Hoey
- Rev. Allen Vik

April 1–7, 2026

- H. George Anderson Fund for Leaders
- Rev. Steve Jacobsen
- Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Waterloo
- Trinity American Lutheran Church, Waterloo
- Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Waterloo
- St. John Lutheran Church (Stapleton), Waucoma
- Jane Schumacher
- Martha Deines
- Rev. Reed Pedersen

April 8–14, 2026

- Rev. Amy Strydom
- St. John Lutheran Church, Waukon
- Redeemer Lutheran Church, Waverly
- Rev. Dan Gerrietts
- Rev. Marion Pruitt–Jefferson
- St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church & School, Waverly
- Rev. Jim Gardener

April 15–21, 2026

- St. Paul Lutheran Church, Wellsburg
- Zion Lutheran Church, West Union
- Middle East Peace
- Jane Hoppenworth
- Rev. Grant Woodley
- Rev. Kristin Lagen
- Rev. Jerome Godson
- Judy Wogsland Foreman

April 22–30, 2026

- Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry, ELCA, Chicago
- Rev. Jane Keel
- ELCA Churchwide Staff, Chicago
- Rev. Rik Engebretson
- Rev. Scott Duffus
- Northeastern Iowa Synod Council
- Bishop Scott Dalen & Western Iowa Synod Staff
- Bishop Amy Current & Southeastern Iowa Synod Staff
- Rev. Matt Agee
- Rev. Al Bidne