



South Dakota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

October/Fall 2025 Newsletter Inserts

From the Bishop's Desk

The Harvest Is Plentiful - and Shared

Dear Siblings in Christ,

The harvest is plentiful this fall, and so is my gratitude for this synod's faithfulness. Across our fields and towns, combines hum through the night, cattle prices are strong, yet grain markets remind us that plenty and pressure often live side by side. Rural life has always been that way — a mix of abundance and uncertainty, joy and challenge.

The same is true in the Church. Mission Support is how we hold one another steady through the swings of each season. It's how your congregation helps another find a pastor, sends kids to camp, trains leaders, and extends Christ's mercy in every corner of South Dakota.

When we share our gifts, we remind one another that we don't do ministry alone. We do it *together* — bound by the Spirit, sustained by grace, and strengthened by the generosity of those who believe the Gospel is worth sharing.

For those who share Mission Support/benevolence, I want to thank you sincerely. Your generosity sustains ministry across the synod and the wider Church. I invite you to consider a small step forward this year prayerfully — perhaps a 1–3% increase. Even a modest rise, shared across many, multiplies the impact we can have together.

For those congregations that have not yet found a way to participate, I invite you to think creatively. Maybe it's a once-a-year Mission Sunday offering, a set annual amount, or a small percentage of your income that reflects your gratitude. However you choose to give, know this: your gift connects your congregation to something larger — the shared ministry of the whole Body of Christ in South Dakota.

Let's rejoice in sharing our fruits — not because we have to, but because it's what the Church has

always done in times of plenty and need. Together, we make visible the abundance of God's grace.

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

Thinking about Discernment and Call

How do we think and speak about “call” as baptized people of God, particularly from a Lutheran lens? Throughout the last year in the synod newsletters, we have been focusing on discernment. Simply put, discernment is “perceiving the will and way of God in the church and in your life (*What Shall I Say? Discerning God's Call to Ministry*, p. 5).” One resource a person (like YOU!) can utilize is titled, *Called to Lead*, written by the Rev. Paul Baglyous.

On pages 15-16, Pr. Baglyous invites the reader to reflect on what it means to hear the Good News:

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

Spend some time in the questions below in self-reflection, journaling, or with a friend or mentor. To work your way through *Called to Lead*, sign up for FREE through PASQUE, the SD Synod on-line learning community, at (www.sdsynodlearns.org).

YOUR STORY OF HEARING AND BELIEVING

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

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

What has been your most memorable occasion of hearing the good news? How would you describe the way your faith was influenced on that occasion? What helped you to believe what you heard on that occasion?

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

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

3 Big Questions

On the day this is written, I hit a milestone in my life: my son turned 13. That might seem more like a milestone for him than me; however, it means my **youngest** is now a teenager. Yep, all of my children are teens. This isn't as scary as it might sound; instead, it is another opportunity to live into my vocation as a parent.

To mark the occasion, I decided to re-read a book that I first read when my daughter was turning this age, *3 Big Questions that Change Every Teenager*. This isn't a parenting book; instead, it is a youth ministry book from the Fuller Youth Ministry Institute that sums up a research project and reflects on all the questions they heard being asked by teenagers.

While no two students would ask the same questions the same way, the researchers grouped themes to determine the big 3.

Who am I?

Where do I fit?

What difference can I make?

I would contend that even adults ask these questions, but the point is that at the unique age and stage of teenagers, their world is oriented around these discoveries. As a parent, I'm curious about how my kids answer and navigate these questions, and how their responses have changed over time. As a pastor, I'm curious how our churches are a part of the conversation for *each* young person. As communities of faith, we have an essential ingredient in each answer.

And it's not just young people who ask these questions. Our congregations as a whole can do the same. Who are we as a church? Where do we fit into our community? How is God calling us to make a difference?

For anyone looking to understand young people better and how the church might play a larger role in their lives, I invite you to read *3 Big Questions* as well, and then ask the young people of your congregation how they might respond.

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

Rural Ministry News

Coming this Advent! A new Bible Study for all congregations and individuals of our South Dakota Synod with Rev. Dr. Anna Madsen will be debuting soon. We will be workshoping this devotional with our Synod Authorized Ministers and Rural Ministry Ambassadors in early November and sharing it with everyone via Pasque in the coming weeks. Look for it at sdsynodlearns.org in mid-November!

Pastor Joel Pakan
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Ready to Play? Join the 2026 Holy Playground Cohort!

Something joyful is stirring across the South Dakota Synod. Congregations are discovering fresh ways to worship—where all generations, especially our youngest children, don't just *watch* worship happen... they *belong* in it.

The **Holy Playground Initiative** invites your congregation to join a year-long journey of imagination, discovery, and play as part of the **2026 Cohort**. Together with 20–30 congregations from across the synod, you'll explore what it means to worship intergenerationally—where children's laughter, elders' wisdom, and the Spirit's creativity all find space at the same table.

Each congregation will walk through a guided process that includes a January kickoff, in-person learning in April, and time to experiment locally with new ideas. Topics include design thinking, belonging, trauma-sensitive ministry, and engaging young children in meaningful worship.

Cohort congregations will also have access to grant funding to bring their Holy Playground “experiments” to life—projects that nurture joy, hospitality, and belonging for all ages.

If your congregation is ready to dream, try, and play in holy ways, now's the time to jump in!

Applications are open now through December 15, 2025

Early-bird applicants (by October 31) receive a \$500 photo + story bonus!
Learn more and apply at
sdsynod.org/holyplayground

Pastor Renae Boehmer
Director for the Holy Playground Initiative
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Meet the Synod's New Missionaries in Nicaragua

We're pleased to share that two new young adults will be serving as missionaries from our Synod in Nicaragua: Anghy Aragon and Celeste Evora. You may have met Anghy while she was living in South Dakota this past year, visiting lots of communities and congregations around the Synod. Hopefully, we can arrange for Celeste to visit sometime in the near future!

Read more about Anghy and Celeste at sdsynod.org/companionsynods. We invite you to pray for Anghy, Celeste, and the people of ILFE, the Lutheran Church in Nicaragua. If you'd like to support the work of our missionaries you can either send a check to the Synod office with “ILFE missionaries” in the memo line or donate online at sdsynod.org/donate (select “Companion Synods” in the drop-down menu and put “ILFE missionaries” in the memo box).