



Western North Dakota Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

## Synod E-news

January 5, 2026

News & Events from the Western North Dakota Synod



EVENTS CALENDAR



MINISTRIES



TRANSITIONS



Rejoicing  Spirirts



502 N 4th St.  
Bismarck, ND 58501

# Rejoicing WORSHIP Spirirts

A worship service that provides people with intellectual and developmental disabilities with the opportunity to explore and experience faith.

2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF THE MONTH  
TRINITY LUTHERAN @ 2 PM  
Beginning January 11, 2026

*This innovative ministry works with congregations to provide a meaningful, inclusive worship service in a loving and supportive community for people with intellectual disabilities and the people who love and support them. People are free to be themselves while actively participating as contributing members in an inclusive faith community.*

*All are welcome*

Many congregations are restarting servant ministries since COVID, and synod-sponsored groups have been a great fit when individuals from different congregations prefer to gather together. If your congregation or other group is interested, there is an opportunity to engage and participate with volunteers supporting long-term recovery from the widespread damage caused by Hurricane Helene in the Carolinas.



**Hope.  
Healing.  
Renewal.**

 LDR Carolinas

A year after this natural disaster, some families are only now asking for help in their damaged homes. The region still needs volunteer teams to help with home repairs, debris removal, and community resilience projects in 2026 and beyond.

A group from our synod that has already deployed here...and are scheduled to return in summer 2026... is from Faith Lutheran Church of Bismarck. They have sent 16 volunteers who have helped with construction and land mitigation.

If you would like to learn more, you can fill out a [Group Interest Form](#) with a best-guess for group size, preferred dates, and any accessibility or skill considerations. Submit the form...even if details are incomplete...and a follow-up communication will be scheduled to align goals and answer questions. Teams are matched with ongoing projects that suit their skills and availability.

Most volunteer groups stay at ELCA [NovusWay](#) camps, Lutheridge or Lutherock, though some choose local AirBnBs or hotels. Volunteer housing is being added in Boone and a new site is being developed in Hendersonville to expand options. An overview of what is being done in the area can be found on [LDR Carolinas](#) website.

Sample itineraries, travel guidance, accessibility information, and tips for team preparation can be provided to make planning simple and accessible. Teams serving in North Carolina will work with Amy Phillips, WNC Response Coordinator. She can be reached at [amy@ldrcarolinas.org](mailto:amy@ldrcarolinas.org) or 704-633-4059. Teams serving in South Carolina will work with Kelli Fulmer, SC Response Coordinator. She can be reached at [kelli@ldrcarolinas.org](mailto:kelli@ldrcarolinas.org) or 803-271-5507.

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## Immersion Delegation to El Paso/Juarez

# opening borders ABRIENDO FRONTERAS

## El Paso, Texas - Juarez, Mexico April 10-17, 2026

Sponsored by the  
**Western North Dakota Synod**

Facilitator: Vicki Schmidt

You are invited to join this delegation to explore issues of immigration and hear the stories of those who live the daily struggle for survival along the border of Texas and Mexico.



**\$600 plus airfare**  
**Contact Vicki Schmidt for information and application forms:**  
**Veschmidt45@msn.com**

Learn more: [openingborders.com](http://openingborders.com)

Rostered leaders and congregational members are invited to join an upcoming delegation to the U.S. border **April 10-17, 2026** to learn firsthand the realities of immigration and how our policies affect those seeking safety and a new life in the United States.

This will be a challenging and meaningful experience, inviting honest questions and deep listening as we hear stories of trauma, resilience, and hope.

We will meet people of faith and organizations who accompany the most vulnerable and live out the Gospel's call to compassion and justice. If you feel drawn to learn, listen, and be transformed, we invite you to consider being part of this delegation.

Please [contact Vicki Schmidt, Border Immersion Facilitator](mailto:veschmidt45@msn.com) if you are interested in attending: [\(701\) 361-4517](tel:7013614517), or [veschmidt45@msn.com](mailto:veschmidt45@msn.com).

If you'd like to ask questions of a past delegate regarding prior experiences, contact Pastor Natasha Woitzel-Kolles: [natasha@gslcbismarck.com](mailto:natasha@gslcbismarck.com)



### The Western Whirlwind

Get the latest from the WND Synodical Women of the ELCA.

Did you know that "The Twelve Days of Christmas" was written as a catechism song for young Catholics? In this edition of the *Western Whirlwind*, you'll learn the hidden meanings in the song and a whole lot more!

[Read the December Western Whirlwind now](#)

### WELCA Triennial Gathering

*Early bird registration ENDS TODAY, January 5<sup>TH</sup>*

Register now for the **EARLY BIRD DISCOUNT**. Invite your daughters, granddaughters, sisters, and friends. Share the Gathering and remind them that they are **WORTHY!**

Register now for inspiration, service, learning, and dancing! Visit the website, [website, click 'Register here,'](#) book your hotel, and plan your Des Moines trip today.

Help us spread the word by sharing event details with your congregation and beyond. Everyone is invited!



july 16-19, 2026 ✦ des moines, iowa



## Nominate Young Musicians for LSM 2026

Standard Enrollment Deadline: March 1

[LSMacademy.org/nominate](https://LSMacademy.org/nominate)



## Nominate Young Musicians for LSM

Now is the time to nominate students for Lutheran Summer Music 2026. Enrollment is filling quickly, and we expect most remaining spots to be filled by the **March 1st Standard Enrollment deadline**.

At LSM, students connect advanced musical study with worship and the joy of Lutheran church music traditions. We welcome musicians of all instruments to study with nationally recognized faculty in a welcoming and supportive community.

Know a young musician (grades 8–12) who would thrive at LSM? Nominate them: [LSMacademy.org/nominate](https://LSMacademy.org/nominate)  
Questions? [admissions@luthersummertime.org](mailto:admissions@luthersummertime.org).

## WATCH THIS



### Have You Ever Heard a Whisper?

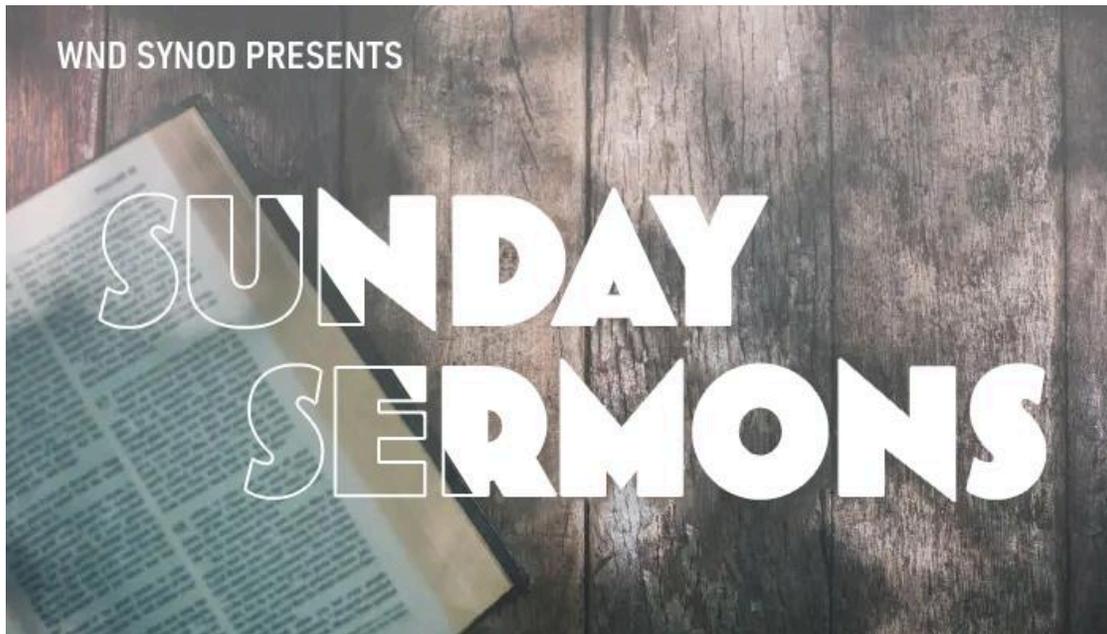
In his Christmas message to the church, Bishop Curry delivers a children's sermon, describing the night when Jesus was born.

## LISTEN TO THIS



## Messy Church & Fresh Expressions

What happens when faith is formed through creativity, curiosity, and hands-on participation rather than rows and sermons? In this episode, we unpack how intergenerational, creative, and hands-on spaces cultivate openness, curiosity, and connection... often in places far beyond a traditional sanctuary.



To help satisfy a growing need, DEM Tera Kossow has arranged for pastors of the WND Synod to provide one video sermon and manuscript to share each month.

The next monthly sermon will be for **Sunday, December 28th**. When videos and manuscripts have been produced, the links are activated for download on the [Congregations](#) page of the WND Synod website. You can find the complete list of sermon videos and manuscripts on that page.

The list of available sermons will be updated on this page as they become available. Check back often.



**CONCORDIA COLLEGE**  
MOORHEAD, MINNESOTA

The Parish Nurse Ministry Program of Concordia College in Moorhead, MN will be offering the Foundations of Faith Community Nursing course March 5, 12, and 19 (on-line via ZOOM) and April 9, 10, and 11 (in-person at First Lutheran Church, 619 N. Broadway, Fargo, ND, 58102). The deadline to register is February 5, 2026. The program is open to licensed RNs who are interested in personal growth and/or starting a health and healing ministry within a faith community.

The program cost of **\$450** includes the participant workbook, current practice standards for FCNs, and a binder of program specific materials. We are working on the application to offer 36.5 contact hours (ANCC).

Please visit the [Concordia Parish Nurse Ministry website](#) for detailed information, program resources and to complete your registration. For additional information, please email Dr. Jean Bokinskie, PhD, RN, PNM Program Director, at [bokinski@cord.edu](mailto:bokinski@cord.edu) or call/text 701-866-3063.



SYNOD STAFF  
**RACIAL JUSTICE  
LEARNING COHORT**

**WEDNESDAYS @ NOON (JAN 14-MAR 4)**

**\*EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION BY DEC 1**

**How do we lead sustainable racial justice efforts in the synod that “move the needle” and avoid the typical polarization, isolation, and fatigue that often come from this work?**

*INTRODUCING **AN 8 WEEK PROGRAM** DESIGNED TO CONNECT AND EQUIP LEADERS WITH TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO CATALYZE CHANGE IN THEIR SYNODS. PARTICIPANTS IN THIS COHORT WILL:*

- CONNECT** with other justice seekers who are willing to share best practices
- UNPACK** our own real issues as they arise in real time with real people
- EXPLORE** topics of Culture, Power, and Race (CPR) with a biblical lens
- LEARN** developmentally appropriate frameworks for leading social change
- IDENTIFY** goals and next steps for ourselves and our organizations



**David Scherer (AGAPE\*)** is a racial justice edutainer, author, and facilitator who has facilitated transformational experiences for individuals and organizations for the past 20+ years. Teaching Intercultural Development and Christian Public Leadership at Luther Seminary, David combines his academic frameworks and his experience in multiracial faith communities to lead communities toward God's justice. David is also a member of the Mpls synod's racial justice team.

**\*\*\*ALSO FEATURING OTHER SPECIAL GUESTS!!!\*\*\***



**[REGISTER: RJC FOR SYNOD LEADERS.EVENTBRITE.COM](https://www.eventbrite.com/rjcforsynodleaders)**

## Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS) Discernment Weekend

Are you wondering if seminary might be right for you? Consider joining PLTS visit and discernment weekend, *Signs Along the Way*, March 13<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> in Berkeley, California. This weekend is a great opportunity to connect with others in discernment, get to know PLTS faculty, and explore what it's like to be an online student in the MDiv, MA in Spirituality and Social Change, or Lutheran Year programs. This weekend is designed for folks interested in online seminary education. PLTS covers lodging and meals during the event and can offer travel assistance for those who need it. Visit [plts.edu/signs](https://plts.edu/signs) to learn more and sign up.



## Stephen Ministries Celebrates Anniversary, Launches National Tour

Since Stephen Ministries was founded in 1975, a wide range of ministry resources and training events have been developed, serving hundreds of thousands of individuals, and working with churches and organizations across the denominational spectrum, including many Lutheran congregations.

To mark this ministry milestone, earlier this year a nationwide tour was launched to mark Stephen Ministries' 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a variety of learning events. These events, which are open to anyone, feature presentations to equip and inspire participants for making their part of the world a more caring place. Topics covered include grief, supporting those with cancer, what Jesus teaches us about empathy, how congregations can help combat the mental health crisis, and more.

For additional information and resources, visit [Stephen Ministries online](https://stephenministries.org).

## EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

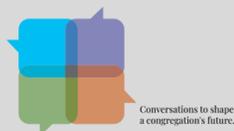


LUTHERAN FAITH COMMUNITY  
NURSE ASSOCIATION

### Lutheran Faith Nurses

A national search is on for Registered Nurses who are trained as Faith Community/Parish Nurses and who are interested in joining the Lutheran Faith Community Nurse Association. If you are or know a Faith Community/Parish Nurse, please consider joining this vital network. A search is also on for ELCA churches that are interested in beginning a Health Ministry Program.

[Learn more and join this association.](#)



DIALOG  
WORKS

### Conversations Shaping the Future

Here you will find practical tools to help leaders develop skills, confidence, and capacity for the future.

[Browse upcoming live courses.](#)



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

### Connect. Refresh. Renew.

Spirit in the Desert hosts programs and retreats for participants of all faiths to experience reconciliation, renewal and healing.

[Browse upcoming events.](#)



## Suicide Prevention Skills for Rural Ministries

Together with a cohort of other faith leaders, you will learn approaches and skills that equip you for prevention, intervention, and postvention (bereavement) tasks so you can effectively care for people struggling with thoughts of suicide or those impacted by suicide.

[Learn More and Register for this course](#)



## Welcoming the Stranger

Guided by our call to welcome the stranger, Global Refuge (*formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service*) has developed resources especially for you and your congregation.

- [Welcome the Stranger Worship Order](#): Everything you need to lead worship highlighting scripture, prayers, liturgy and hymns about seeking and providing refuge.
- [Journey to Welcome Educational Simulation Exercise](#): An educational and service-based activity which is a great fit for students, church youth groups and even adults.
- [Disinformation Toolkit](#): a toolkit for countering disinformation through common myths and facts as well as talking points and stories to share with community.
- [Fresh Change Service Project Opportunity](#): Pack bags to welcome our neighbors at the border and throughout the country with care and dignity.
- [Bulletin Inserts](#): Download bulletin inserts about our new name and what we do to share in your community.



Our [most recent Mission Support memo](#) introduces us to the community of Radford, VA, where Christ Lutheran closed to allow for Nineveh to open. Read about this new ministry that started its work with and among the people and organizations in Radford offering the community a safe haven and house of healing for all seeking the justice, mercy and compassion of the Spirit, especially people on the margins: those suffering from addiction and their families and friends, and those seeking an affirming and inclusive faith community in the New River Valley. Find out how to partner with our *ELCA Innovation team*, which works closely with synods, congregations and other ELCA ministry partners as they explore new and unique ways of doing ministry. In this time of Advent — a time of watchfulness, preparation and waiting for the light of Christ to come —we continue to be grateful for the ways we stay connected and for the Mission Support received that fosters these stories.

As always, you can get the [memo in pdf](#).

We cherish hearing about the inspiring stories in your synods, regions and congregations - feel free to reach out to Karen at [karen.kretschmann@elca.org](mailto:karen.kretschmann@elca.org).



**SAVE THE DATE**

# Called to One Another

CULTIVATING GOD'S KIN-DOM TOGETHER

A leadership summit for female-identifying and non-binary  
Rostered Ministers in Region 3 - ELCA

**Monday - Wednesday**

**Jan 12-14, 2026**

**Holiday Inn, Alexandria MN**

Gather for a time of honest conversation and exploration of what makes a "quality call" experience. Our time together will be shared in scripture study, small groups, experiential learning, and the belief that "the wisdom is already in the room."

Eight leaders will be selected from each of the 9 synods in Region 3 to participate. Application and more information coming soon!

*Funded in part by the Quality of Call Initiative for Women in Ministry of the ELCA.*



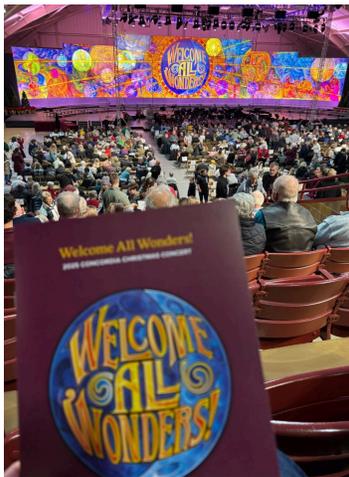
## WHERE'S THE STAFF?

Have you ever wondered, "What has the Synod Staff been up to lately?" The answer is...A LOT! Here are a few of places that have beckoned, recently.

In this season of Advent, waiting has not meant being idle for Bishop Craig Schweitzer. Upon returning from Santa Ana, El Salvador, after celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Cristo Rey Lutheran Church, our bishop has been going nonstop! From synod council meetings...to Christmas concerts...to parish-hopping around western North Dakota; he's had the pleasure of sharing in all the excitement and anticipation that an Advent season can bring on the prairie.

Assistant to the Bishop for Leadership, Candidacy, and Call, Brad Dokken, has been living life to its fullest while celebrating another trip around the sun. Brad made a quick Disney trip with his wife for his

birthday, making it back in time to take in a local theatre production of one of his Christmas favorites; all while spreading his brand of joy to the folks of western North Dakota.



# In Search Of...

Heart River in Mandan is still in need of quilts. If you, or members of your congregation, are interested in participating in this ministry, quilts may be left at the synod office.



## Employment Opportunities

If you or someone you know is being called to work as a congregational leader, [CLICK HERE](#) to check our website for job openings at some of our WND Synod Congregations.

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