

Seeking the Spirit Within yields fruit

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Seeking the Spirit Within: The Nebraska Synod Institute for Spiritual Direction Formation is yielding fruit:

- Seven groups of adults are meeting in locations across the state as they participate in our new spiritual formation program called Drinking from the Well.
- The fifth group of our spiritual direction formation program is working toward its certification day in June 2018.
- Certified spiritual directors are working with congregations in the call process.
- The number of rostered ministers, parish ministry associates, vicars and laypeople who are meeting with spiritual directors is increasing.
- More congregations are choosing to offer faith formation small groups for adults using the curricula of "Companions in Christ" and/or "Faith Builders."
- Certified spiritual directors are facilitating open devotional times for the Nebraska Synod Council meetings and are leading participants at synod assemblies in prayer for opening and closing each business session, as well as prior to voting.
- Certified spiritual directors are facilitating workshops, as well as presenting and leading retreats for congregations and/or ministry clusters.

- The opportunity to experience guided spiritual retreats has become an expectation rather than merely a hope.



Deacon Connie Stover is director of Seeking the Spirit Within.

Guided retreats to be hosted by Seeking the Spirit Within in 2018 include:

- **"Preparing the Way!"**

Bishop Brian Maas will lead us in exploring the scriptural basis for the day, and certified spiritual directors will facilitate a variety of small group sessions on faith practices. We will enjoy good food, spirit-filled conversation and worship together.

Reserve the date: Saturday, March 10.

Location: St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Grand Island.

- **Discernment Retreat: Discerning God's Call to Spiritual Direction**

You will explore the ministry of spiritual direction, learn what certification requires, experience elements common to spiritual direction, and understand the vision and needs of the Nebraska Synod for spiritual formation.

Reserve the dates: April 30-May 1.

Location: St. Benedict Retreat Center near Schuyler.

For more information on the mission and ministry of Seeking the Spirit Within, contact Connie Stover, director, at conniestover@nebraskasynod.org. ☒

Sow the Seeds looks to the masters

Sow the Seeds, the Nebraska Synod's response to the shortage of pastors, deacons and parish ministry associates (PMAs), is looking to experts on raising up and supporting new ministers. Praise God, those experts are within our synod.

Team members are spreading out across Nebraska to learn from congregations known for the large number of people they send into the ministry. American Lutheran Church in Gothenburg, Trinity Lutheran Church in Hildreth, Our Savior Lutheran Church in Wayne and First Lutheran Church in Lincoln have been asked to share the secrets of their effectiveness with our synod. Other "sending" congregations and their ideas are always being sought.

Where else do new ministers come from? Campus ministry participants and church camp summer staff hear the call to ministry in strong ways, and we'll be learning from them as well.

Where else do ministers come from? They come from the seeds you plant through kind or appreciative words for something well done at church and from the holy moment of conversation when you ask, "Have you ever considered being a pastor, deacon or PMA?"



The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago hands out information to those who are interested in attending seminary.

"If you see something, say something" is a phrase we've become used to for security reasons. But it's also a perfect way to start a conversation with somebody in whom you see gifts for ministry. Tell them you think they could be a good pastor, deacon or PMA. And then ask your pastor, deacon or PMA to talk with them too.

Let's sow the seeds that lead to another bountiful harvest and make the clergy shortage a thing of the past. **L**

AMMPARO strategy: ELCA accompanies migrant minors

The word *amparo* in Spanish means the protection of a living creature from suffering or damage. The ELCA's AMMPARO strategy (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities) was envisioned after witnessing the plight of children who are forced to flee their communities because of complex and interrelated reasons, including chronic violence, poverty, environmental displacement, and lack of opportunities in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.

In a holistic, whole-church response that connects international and U.S. outcomes, the ELCA has developed the AMMPARO strategy based on the following commitments:

- Uphold and guarantee basic human rights and safety of migrant children and their families.
- Address the root causes of migration in countries from Central America's Northern Triangle and Mexico and the treatment of migrants in transit.
- Work toward just and humane policies affecting migrants in and outside the U.S.
- Engage as a church body with all of its companions, affiliates and partners to respond to the migration situation and its causes and to advocate for migrant children and their families.



Presenters discuss the AMMPARO program at a 2017 Nebraska Synod Assembly workshop.

This effort has already made a demonstrated reduction in the number of youth and children seeking to migrate to the U.S. as a result of improved conditions in their own countries, and continues to positively impact lives and communities.

The Nebraska and Western Iowa synods are partnering together to work for justice and love our neighbors in engaging this strategy in some specific ways. One of those strategies includes being the church in the courtroom through being trained to be a Guardian Angel for migrant minors and their families. Another is for your congregation to become a Welcoming Congregation. You can learn more at elca.org/ampparo or contact rebecca@nebraskasynod.org for more information. [L](#)

What is a parish ministry associate, anyway?

A parish ministry associate (PMA) is somebody who loves to make Jesus real for others, keeps learning and shares the joy of the gospel. PMAs are a lot like you and your neighbors—they are raising families, are grandparents, are already working outside the home, love their Lord and their congregation, are interested in doing some ministry but would like some training.

Over two to five years, PMA students complete 36 credit hours of coursework in Bible, theology, preaching, history, pastoral care and spirituality. This can be done by using distance learning, independent study or small groups in their area. Most students are thrilled to write a paper for each course instead of taking a test. All students need self-discipline for getting through their courses while caring for their household and family.

When students have finished their courses and are approved for ministry, most serve as dedicated and skilled volunteers in their home congregation, always in partnership with their pastor. Many also make themselves available for pulpit supply in their area. Some PMAs work alongside a pastor on a church staff and are focused on specific areas of ministry. Those who are willing can be assigned by our bishop to serve a congregation that is in between pastors or can't call a pastor for a variety of reasons. These assigned PMAs are authorized to preside at baptisms and communion



Janet Anderson receives her certification as a parish ministry associate at the 2017 Nebraska Synod Assembly.

in that congregation. They also can seek training and approval to conduct funerals and, starting this year, can solemnize a marriage without an ordained pastor being present.

A PMA is a Nebraska Synod Lutheran who has discerned the call to deeper learning and service—and then acted on it. If you are hearing that call, your sisters and brothers in our synod encourage you to consider becoming a PMA and joining a community of more than 60 lay ministers and students across Nebraska.

Learn more about the PMA program on our synod website by searching for “For Those In Discernment” (nebraskasynod.org) or by contacting the Rev. Steve Meysing, program director (steve@nebraskasynod.org). 卐