

Women of the Nebraska Synod

In honor of the 50th anniversary of women's ordination coming up in 2020, the Nebraska Synod would like to highlight women in ministry. One of the newest rostered ministers to Nebraska is the Rev. Amanda Day Hefner. Rev. Hefner is the pastor of St. John's Lutheran in Schuyler, Neb.

Originally from Coleridge, Neb., she attended and graduated from Nebraska Wesleyan University and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC). Rev. Hefner is fluent in Spanish and specializes in bilingual ministry development. She has been active in ministry, education and activism with immigrants and refugees in Nebraska, Illinois, New Mexico and Texas.

If you stop by St. John's in Schuyler, you will easily get to know their friendly and welcoming new pastor. She is happy to share her call story and what exciting new things they are working on in their congregation. But for those who don't have the opportunity to visit with Rev. Hefner, here is a small sample of her story.

Growing up in a more conservative community and experiencing the loss of her mother at an early age, Rev. Hefner had never thought about going into church leadership. Though she had always enjoyed attending and singing in church, her first real connection with it came from her participation in camp at Carol Joy Holling in eighth grade. But the idea of rostered ministry for her was still too far away.

As she entered her undergraduate years at Nebraska Wesleyan, she felt that connection to the church fading. She found herself questioning many things about her life and exploring her spirituality. It was during these years that she ended up going back to camp at Carol Joy Holling to work. Again, camp reignited that deep connection to the church for her. She discovered that even though she saw herself broken, she could use those wounds to help others.



The Rev. Amanda Day Hefner at her ordination.

After college, Rev. Hefner traveled outside of the U.S. and once again was searching for a way to reconnect to her spirituality. It wasn't until she moved back to Nebraska that she made her way back to the Lutheran church. Her move to Lincoln brought her directly to Grace Lutheran Church. In her own words, she described it as "the place where I experienced grace for the first time in a really powerful way." It was in her experience at Grace that she felt reaffirmed in the sense that God could use and heal all of her brokenness. She learned that just because she felt broken didn't mean she didn't belong in the church; instead she realized that was exactly where she belonged. It was at Grace where Rev. Mike Ostrom became the first person to sow the seed of pursuing a call to church leadership.

Once the seed was planted, the idea was one that stayed with her. And from then on, doors leading to a call to ministry continued to open for her. Others soon began to encourage the idea as well and that's when she knew that this was where her life was headed. The process of preparing for seminary seemed to flow naturally for her. After graduating from LSTC and completing all requirements, Rev. Hefner was ordained Aug. 30, 2018, at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Coleridge.

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Since accepting the call to serve as pastor of St. John's, she has both faced challenges and exciting new opportunities. Several of the challenges are with working to develop the ministry and working with outreach in the community. She welcomes these kinds of challenges for the good of the congregation. As many women in ministry do, she also encounters some gender-specific challenges: the lack of clergy clothing options for women; the clearly missing Rev. before her name in meeting minutes. To Rev. Hefner these seem small compared to some of the situations her fellow female clergy members face, but it still speaks to the impression that rostered women are often not taken as seriously as their male counterparts.

In speaking with Rev. Hefner, you will quickly see that she prefers to focus on the new and exciting opportunities happening with St. John's. She describes the congregation as being in a time of resurrection. The members are excited and ready for possible new ministries. The evangelism and social ministry committee has been involved with taking care packages to area college students and food to homebound members and the ill. They have begun creating sunshine baskets for members of the community, where they fill baskets with necessities and gifts that are all yellow and give them to anyone needing a bit of joy in their lives.

The congregation has also rolled out a Christian education program that was greatly needed. They are currently planning activities and service projects for their youth group. And, most exciting of all, Rev. Hefner has performed two baptisms this summer (her very first baptisms since her ordination), which have sparked interest in Sunday school and confirmation classes. These all fill Rev. Hefner with hope and joy for the future of the congregation.

She has started seeing new community members coming through the congregation with the inception of their food pantry. This has led to other community groups inquiring about using the congregation space for their events and gatherings. She is working with the church council on redevelopment and



The sanctuary at St. John's Lutheran Church, Schuyler.

stewardship efforts, as well as on defining who they are as a congregation and how the community sees them. Rev. Hefner's hope is that they will be seen in the community "as the congregation who says yes." She also hopes to create a sense of welcome for the multicultural and multilingual populations in the area. "The idea is to bring together people around shared values ... we are excited to see where things go, and they are excited to do something new and they're open to change. It's a fun place to be." **L**

For the entire interview with Rev. Amanda Day Hefner visit nebraskasynod.org. For information about the Nebraska Women of the ELCA go to nswowebmaster.wixsite.com/welca.

Nebraska Synod staff on the road

Nebraska Synod staff members are excited to share that they are going on the road across the state. Starting in fall 2019 and ending in winter 2021, the Nebraska Synod Road Show will travel to eight locations.

The first scheduled stop was American Lutheran Church in Adams; the next event will be held at St. John's United in Alliance, Oct. 19-20.

Each road show will feature a full Saturday of workshops, fellowship, listening, engagement, lunch and conversations.

Workshop topics may include gifts of word and service ministry, ways to live out our baptismal promises, healthy boundaries for leaders, healthy communication, spiritual practices, raising up and equipping leaders, shared ministry, stewardship, story sharing, racism awareness, council training, financial training, discipleship leaders and transforming your ministry.

On Sundays, staff members and attending Synod Council members will visit area congregations to participate in worship and learn more about the congregations and their communities.

Those interested in attending an event may bring up to six people from their congregation. We ask that your group include your rostered minister(s), your congregation council president and/or vice president, a youth and/or young adult



representative, and two or three other interested members and leaders.

Please have one person in your congregation register your whole group. Registration for the Alliance event is live and can be found on the synod website at nebraskasynod.org (go to the Events tab and select "Event Directory," then "The Nebraska Synod Road Show.")

For future events, please continue to check this page for details and registration links.

Staff members look forward to each day of learning, inspiration, listening and sharing. They hope you will join them in this time of fellowship, worship and community. If you have questions about any of the road show events, please contact office@nebraskasynod.org. ☒



The entire Journey to Chicago group.

Selah: Journey to Chicago

“It’s like you’re moving a small town around Chicago,” observed Jan Boden, a workshop leader from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC). She was right! Every day from July 7-12, 277 high school youth and adult leaders boarded five coach buses to take part in the Journey to Chicago.

The Nebraska Synod Journey is a youth ministry event that is held every summer there isn’t an ELCA Youth Gathering. This year’s Journey to Chicago found participants doing service learning activities, worshipping in the LSTC chapel and enjoying what the city of Chicago has to offer.

Participants were housed at a hostel in downtown Chicago and launched from there to locations in the metro area to serve. One day over 150 Journey participants assisted with a Special Olympics tennis tournament, keeping score, presenting medals and forming a human tunnel where athletes shared high-fives. Other participants sorted hundreds of books for Bernie’s Book Bank, an organization that has distributed over 15,000,000 books to children in need since 2009. Some served at boys and girls clubs; others cleaned and repaired an abandoned church that is reopening as a gathering space for its community.

One afternoon of the Journey was spent at LSTC, where Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton spent an hour answering questions and sharing stories of the ELCA and its partners around the world. They also attended workshops led by seminary professors, Chicago-

area pastors and staff from the ELCA churchwide organization. During free time, participants explored downtown museums, the Washington Library, Millennium Park and the fireworks off Navy Pier.

While the schedule was full, the theme for the Journey was “Selah,” a word found in the book of Psalms, perhaps as a reminder to pause during the reading or singing of the psalm. Participants focused on Psalm 46 throughout the week, noting the word “Selah” when it occurred. Throughout the week all were reminded to stop, breathe deeply and reflect on God’s presence in their lives. So, beyond the serving, learning and exploring, other highlights of the Journey included quiet conversations, listening to one another’s joys and challenges, and simply being present with God and with neighbors. **L**



For service-learning, youth volunteer at the Special Olympics tennis tournament.

To learn more about the Journey or find out how you or young people from your congregation can be involved, check out the Faith Formation pages of the synod’s website at **nebraskasynod.org**.