



For a video summary of this month's headlines, click the video below.



A Word from the Bishop

A friend told me that in pandemic, “days last forever and months fly by.” How did it get to be February? In this shortest month that nonetheless calls us to secular focus on Valentine’s Day, cultural focus on Black History Month, and our laser-like focus on Ash Wednesday and Lent among so many others, it’s all the more important to find the spot in each day and each week for sabbath renewal—for simply breathing deeply. Please read the opportunities below not as more busyness for you to engage in, but for opportunities intended to enrich your congregation’s ministry and your own growth in discipleship without you having to reinvent the wheel; to give you more moments to breathe. Blessings and thanks as you are growing disciples, walking together, and serving God’s world.



Vitality Initiative for Congregations

In keeping with the mission of the Nebraska Synod, we are excited to be launching the *Vitality Initiative for Congregations* designed to bring, by way of discovery and discernment, a process that will challenge congregations and the synod to assess vitality, discern vocation and engage in community with risk-taking, innovative experiments.

Every congregation experiences vitality differently, because each is a unique body in a specific context – and this truth is the key to vitality. In congregations, as in individuals, God grants the gifts, the relationships, the moments and the tasks – the mission – of vocation.

“Vocation” literally means calling. Prior to Martin Luther, vocation typically referred to a special calling to religious life, such as a pastor, deacon or parish ministry associate. Luther defined vocation as nothing less than the focus of the Christian life. God works in and through vocation by calling us to work in the various areas of our lives as faithful disciples living out our faith. As God calls and equips individuals for their vocations in the world, so God has gifted and equipped congregations for their unique vocations in their communities.

This is an eighteen-month intense adventure of discovery, learning, listening and discernment with monthly online learning session followed by assignments to be completed before the next session. Cohorts will gather in person periodically to share stories, assess learning and network. The coach will walk with the congregation for an additional six months, supporting the leadership team and

congregation as they engage in their community experiments and build new relationships.

The application and resources to assist the congregation in creating their leadership team and assessing vitality will be available by March 1. **Applications deadline is June 1, 2021.** Selections for the fall 2021 cohort will be announced by June 20.

For more information contact [Deacon Sunni Richardson](#), Director for Leadership Development. Read more at the [Nebraska Synod website](#).



Black History Month

February is Black History Month, a time to remember and give thanks for the contributions of generations of African Americans to the history of our nation and to the life of the church. It's a good time to be lifting up those saints and their civic and religious contributions throughout the month. It's an especially good time to invite people to a period of reflection, study and conversation. For a host of resources to share, visit the [Racial Awareness, Reconciliation and Engagement \(RARE\) page](#) on the synod website.

Synod Ambassadors Wanted

The Nebraska Synod is looking for one or two people from each congregation in the state to serve as Synod Ambassadors. One role of an Ambassador is

to **connect** people in your congregation to what's going on in the larger church. Who do you know that likes to tell stories and share resources? Another role of an Ambassador is to **invite** people in your congregation to discern their vocation--or God's call--in their lives. Who do you already know that's good at paying attention to the gifts others have? Depending on your particular setting, there might be one person who could serve as both a connector and an inviter, or there might be two people whose gifts would suit one of those roles well and they could be a team. Ambassadors won't be alone in this work! Nebraska Synod staff and members of the Synod's Sow the Seeds team will walk with them on this journey. On March 4, 2021, from 7-8pm Central/6-7pm Mountain, there will be a free, online Ambassador orientation session. If you are willing to serve as a Nebraska Synod Ambassador, please complete the online form at this link: <http://bit.ly/2KAwVMW>.

Hope in the Wilderness

A Seeking the Spirit Within Winter Retreat, presented online
February 20, 2021 9:00AM- 4:00PM

For more information and to register at: stswwinterretreat.weebly.com or contact Rev. Patrick Sipes at sgtmuddy@gmail.com or call First Lutheran, North Platte at (308) 532-0250 Ext. 203.

To read the Seeking the Spirit Within devotionals, [click here](#).



Lenten Resources 2021

The Nebraska Synod continues to lift up voices from across the synod in sharing the Good News of God during this pandemic time. This continues during Lent as part of a five-week series on “**The Gifts of Discipleship.**” Included in this resource are theme scripture passages, discussion questions, an optional outline for mid-week Lenten worship during this pandemic time, and five different preachers whose sermons will be made available in video and manuscript forms at least a week prior to their scheduled date. It is intended that this series would be utilized as an option for worship and faith formation opportunities during the week particularly for the five Lenten Wednesdays (February 24-March 24) between Ash Wednesday and Holy Week, but can be adapted and used in any way that is helpful and meaningful in your ministry context. Check this out, as this is yet another way that as a synod we're walking together, growing disciples, and serving God's world. These resources are available [at this link.](#)

Cross+Generational Ministry Webinar

Are you looking for faith formation ideas that will be meaningful to people of a variety of ages? Would you like to encourage people from children to elders and everyone in between to be in faithful conversations and community together? Please join Deacon Kristin Johnson, Pastor Breen Sipes and Lisa Kramme, Director for Faith Formation with the Nebraska Synod, for the next Lunch with Lisa webinar on February 18 from 12-1pm Central/11am-12pm Mountain. Pastor Breen and Deacon Kristin will share “how to” ideas

on the topic of cross+generational ministry for congregations of all sizes. This will be helpful for those just starting to explore cross+generational ministry as well as those who would like to enhance existing ministries that intentionally bring all ages together. The presenters will focus on ideas for both face-to-face and virtual settings. Feel free to bring your lunch and your imagination to the conversation. To register for this free webinar and receive a link to join, click [here](#).

Resources

Resources for Congregations and Leaders can be [found here](#).

Links to Forms and Pulpit Supply can be [found here](#).

[Parish Paper](#)

[Nebraska Synod. Blog_and Facebook](#)

Can't find what you're looking for on the synod website, search the [website directory](#).

[Interim Ministry Network Continuing Ed & Events](#)

[Lombard Mennonite Peace Center Trainings](#)

[Eucharistic Practices During the Pandemic](#)

[Considerations for Electronic Meetings](#)

[4G Network Videos & Resources](#)

[Portico Health Plan and Benefit Updates](#)

[Season of Hope Lenten Resources](#)

[ELCA Lenten Resources](#)



2021 Reports

It is the start of a new year and that means it's time to complete and file your annual Rostered Minister Report to the Bishop. Online links are provided below. **Please submit your report by March 1.**

[Those under call use this link](#)

[Retired/Not Under Call use this link](#)

All questions with an asterisk require a response. You may receive a copy of your report by clicking the button at the end of the report. To submit, be sure to click the SUBMIT button.

Thank-you for the ministry you do and for taking the time to complete your 2021 Report. If you have an urgent matter to be addressed, please email [Bishop Maas](#).

Annual Meetings

As your congregations gather for their annual meetings, the Nebraska Synod staff would like to invite you to share [this video](#) with your members as part of your time together. We would like to thank you for being a part of the church and for your partnership as we Grow Disciples, Walk Together, and Serve God's World.

ELCA Annual Report Covers

The 2020 ELCA annual report covers are now available in 2 different versions for

Events

2021 Assembly Online

In order to help keep people safe and healthy amid the continued global pandemic, the 2021 Nebraska Synod Assembly will be held exclusively online on Saturday, June 5. The event will be a one day remote gathering to do the business of the church, worship, and engage in learning and fellowship together. By being a one day event, it provides the opportunity for congregations to include delegates who might not otherwise be able to participate in other years because they will not have to use a day of vacation or travel. More information and registration materials will be coming soon.

Keep informed by following the Nebraska Synod [Facebook page](#) and [website](#).

Nebraska Synod Events:

Jan 2021- Apr 2021: [MSG Pen Pal Connections](#)

Feb 20, 2021- [Hope in the Wilderness](#) (Seeking the Spirit Within Retreat)

May 3-7, 2021- Nebraska Synod Mission Trip

Jun 5, 2021- [Synod Assembly Online](#)

[NLOM Events](#)

February 28-March 2 – Tanzania Quilt Retreat

March 21-23 CJH UFO (UnFinished Objects) crafting Retreat

April 10 – Heart of Camp Gala

June TBD – Heart of the Hills Benefit Dinner

July 18 – 21 CJH UFO (unfinished Objects) crafting Retreat

July 31 – Quilt Auction

2022 ELCA Youth Gathering-

The [ELCA Youth Gathering](#) will be held July 24-28, 2022, in Minneapolis. There will be two pre-events, the [Multicultural Youth Leadership Event](#) (MYLE) and [the tAble](#), scheduled for July 21-24, 2022. If you have questions, please contact the Nebraska Synod Gathering Coordinator [Amy Wagner](#).

Other Events (You're Invited):

Please visit the [Nebraska Synod Website Calendar](#) and select the month/year for which you would like to search the event calendar.

[The NEXUS Institute Completes Fourth Summer of Programming](#)

[The Nexus Institute 2021](#)



We Want to Hear Your Good News

The Nebraska Synod is looking for stories of Good News, Congregations at work- serving their communities, and more to share across the synod. Please share your story by sending a summary and any photos to communications@nebraskasynod.org.

To Help Support the Nebraska Synod Ministries, click on [Give Now](#).

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