



## 150 Years as the Nebraska Synod: Built of Living Stones Congregational Resource

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”  
Ephesians 2:19-22

“Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus.” -1 Peter 2:4-5

150<sup>th</sup>  
  
NEBRASKA SYNOD ELCA

The official founding date of the Nebraska Synod is Sept. 1st, 1871. You and your congregation are invited to join in celebrating this anniversary on Sunday August 29th, 2021 OR a Sunday of your choosing in September OR on Reformation Sunday in October. Just be sure to send us your photos and a summary of how you marked the occasion together! Send your information to [communications@nebraskasynod.org](mailto:communications@nebraskasynod.org).

To help you get started on your plans, this resource contains prayers, worship resources, a history of the Nebraska Synod, and conversation starters to help you talk about your own congregation's history. We are also hoping that your congregation will be inspired to write down their own stories, dig out copies of your congregation's most interesting records, and send them to our Synod Archives.





**Worship Resources-** Thematic texts: Ephesians 1: 19-22  
1 Peter 2: 1-9

Hymns: "Built on a Rock" ELW #652  
"We've Come This Far by Faith". ELW #633  
"God Our Help in Ages Past". ELW #632

**Prayer** (could be used as a Prayer of the Day, as part of the Intercessory Prayers, or as an additional collect in worship): "Heavenly Father we bring our praise and thanks for your steadfast love that you have shown to Your church. Especially on this occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Nebraska Synod we give you thanks for guidance in the past. Through the Holy Spirit you called and gathered your people into this church and through that same Spirit you enlightened them, opening their eyes to ministries in this Synod that have blessed so many. We thank you for bishops and presidents that led us and were there with us and for us in times of celebration and dark days of turmoil. We give you thanks for those in our Synod that challenged us to open our eyes for the sake of social justice and peace.

Now we pray your continued guidance in the future. As you led the people of Israel by a pillar of cloud and fire lead us. May the fires of compassion and justice burn within our hearts. May the evangelical zeal of the apostles consume us. May our baptism and the promised coming of your Son give us the hope we need to meet any challenges trusting always in the Jesus who has claimed us and made us his own. We bring our prayers before you in the name of your dear Son, our Savior. Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." (written by Pr. Don Hunzeker)

Sermon Manuscript and Video: By Bishop Brian Maas

**Eucharistic Prayer for Church Anniversaries/Reformation Sunday (Evangelical Lutheran Worship)**

**OPTION L: A Prayer for Church Anniversaries**

This prayer is based on the readings appointed for Reformation Day: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 3:19-28; and John 8:31-36. Passages in italics are especially appropriate for giving thanks at the Reformation. These may be adapted for other church anniversary occasions.

O God before time, O God at the end,  
we delight in the splendor of your universe.

Daily we laud your continuing creation,  
We glorify you, now and forever.

We glorify you, now and forever.

O God of the covenant, O God of the church,  
we hear you speaking to centuries of your people.

We come as your children to this table,  
and we give thanks for your presence

among Lutheran congregations around the world...here in the Nebraska Synod and  
with our Global Companion Synods in Argentina and Uruguay and in Tanzania.

We praise you, now and forever.

We praise you, now and forever.

You gave us Mary and Magdalene, Peter and Paul,

The founders of this congregation, the founders of this Nebraska Synod, the founders of our serving  
arms, and the diverse people of all backgrounds who are living stones of our church together

—let us call out more names—

countless other renewing and reforming servants of your church here in North America... Antonio Montesinos, Bartolome de las Casas, Chief Seattle, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Henry Muhlenberg, Elizabeth Fedde, Jehu Jones, Daniel Payne, Martin Luther King Jr...(more names may be added)

We bless you, now and forever.

We bless you, now and forever.

You came as Jesus, our wisdom, our guide,  
embodying forgiveness, granting us grace, setting us free,  
dying for sin, and alive for the life of the world.

We worship you, now and forever.

**We worship you, now and forever.**

In the night in which he was betrayed,  
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;  
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:  
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,  
and gave it for all to drink, saying:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood,  
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering his death, we cry out Amen.

**Amen.**

Celebrating his resurrection, we shout Amen.

**Amen.**

Trusting his presence in every time and place, we plead Amen.

**Amen.**

Come, Holy Spirit, and make here the body of Christ.

Breathe onto this food, that it bring us your life.

Empower your Reformation people throughout the world  
to preach and teach, baptize and feed,  
pray and sing, listen and advocate, comfort and heal.

By your Spirit,

preserve what is faithful;

reform what we treasure;

create in us what is vital and new.

We honor you, now and forever.

**We honor you, now and forever.**

O God before time, O God at the end,

Father, Son, and Spirit,

we laud you,

Covenant Lord, our Redeemer, the Strength of truth.

Glory and praise, blessing and worship,

honor and power and might be to you, our God,

forever and ever.

**Amen.**

**LORD'S PRAYER**

## STORY-TELLING RESOURCES (may be re-printed in newsletters, bulletins, etc):

### 150 Years as the Nebraska Synod: Built of Living Stones A (very) Short History

The very first Lutherans in the Territory of Nebraska were among the waves of homesteaders of the 1840s and 50s who the U.S. government settled here on indigenous land. But these lay Lutherans preceded the church; no Lutheran churches or pastors were here in Nebraska until the missionary Pastor Henry Kuhns arrived in the late 1850s to organize the Lutheran settlers he found already living here. Preaching points slowly became congregations and the church members eventually constructed their own church buildings.

The Nebraska Synod as a governing body was first established in 1871 as a conference of the larger General Synod, the Lutheran denomination on the east coast dating back to the colonial period. However, throughout the 19th and 20th century, there were many different and evolving denominations of Lutherans in America (many represented within the Nebraska state border), divided along lines of national origin and language. In addition, these Lutherans held different convictions on doctrine, worship practices, and spirituality which resulted in yet more denominational splits. The congregations of the Nebraska Synod, ELCA today are descended from many of these antecedent Lutheran bodies.

Beginning in the late 19th century, the various ethnic Lutheran denominations established academic and social welfare institutions here in Nebraska. The (English and German speaking) General Synod founded Midland College and Western Theological Seminary which eventually located to Fremont. The (German speaking) Midwest Synod (formerly German Nebraska Conference) founded Martin Luther Seminary in Lincoln. The Swedish Augustana Synod founded Luther College in Wahoo and the Immanuel Deaconess Institute in Omaha as well as Bethphage Mission in Axtell. The "Inner Mission" Danes founded Trinity Seminary/Dana College as well as a Danish language printing press in Blair Nebraska. This is by no means an exhaustive list of Lutheran institutions; but these historic examples of Lutheran energy for education and social services are still in evidence today in our ongoing support for the Nebraska Synod serving arms and the larger work of the ELCA.

The early 20th century for Lutherans in Nebraska proved to be a deeply painful and challenging time. When the United States entered WWI, the government launched an anti-German propaganda campaign. As a result, German-speaking people, and indeed, many other non-English speaking people, were persecuted by the government as well as harassed by their neighbors. This pressured Lutheran congregations in Nebraska to quickly move towards English-only worship services and religious education. In addition, as younger generations of Lutherans became "Americanized" the previous divisions between Lutheran bodies seemed less formidable by degrees. As a result, Lutheran denominations started merging.

By the 1970s the three Lutheran bodies that would eventually join together to form the ELCA were the Lutheran Church in America, The American Lutheran Church, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (having separated earlier from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod). The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was born in 1988. At that time, there were about 276 congregations in the new Nebraska Synod, ELCA. Its first bishop was Dennis Anderson.

-written by Rev. Kristen Van Stee

## Footnote:

- The term “Synod” was used (very confusingly) by different Lutheran bodies in different ways at different times: a synod might refer to a separate denomination and sometimes to refer to a subsidiary body within a denomination. This remains true today as the ELCA calls the subsidiary bodies within it “synods” while the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is its own separate denomination.

## Sources for Further Reading:

“Story of the Midwest Synod: U.L.C.A 1890-1950”

“Partners in Mission: The Lutheran Church in American in Nebraska 1962-1987”

“Nebraska Conference History (1931)”

“The Lutherans: Student Edition” by L. DeAne Lagerquist

“Lutherans in America: A New History” Mark Granquist

## Your Congregation’s Story

When was the last time you looked through your old church records? Are there stories about your congregation that mean something to you and your neighbors? What ministries of the synod have been dearest to your congregation throughout the years?

The 150th Synod Anniversary Team is hoping that your congregation will feel encouraged to sit down over coffee begin telling your church’s stories again. Just as the people in Scripture name their ancestors, re-tell the stories of faith, and give God thanks for God’s ongoing work of salvation among them, we are hoping your congregation will be able to do the same.

Here are some conversation prompts to get you started:

**150 Years of Story-Telling. (written by Pr. Linda Walz)**

When was your congregation founded? By whom?

Is there a story that gets told (and retold) as part of the history of the congregation?

What were the challenges for your congregation early on? What are the challenges now?

Who were/are the people who are seen as “stalwarts” of the congregation? And why?

What conflict(s) in the congregation has helped to shape who you are today?

What significant milestones has the congregation celebrated?

Who is the oldest in your community? Who is the youngest? Who has been a member the longest?  
Who has been a member the shortest?

What gets you excited to think about going forward in your faith community?

Tell us why you love your faith community?

Where do you see signs of the Holy Spirit at work in your church over the years?

## Send your Stories to the Synod Archives!

The Nebraska Synod has its own historical archives and is interested in your congregation's story of faith and ministry. Here are a few things we would love to receive from you:

- Labeled photos of people engaged in ministry or significant milestones in the life of the congregation
- Oral histories- written down or audio files that describe important local history stories of your congregation OR that describe your congregation's work with the synod and serving arms
- Records that tell the story of ministry in your congregation

Send your congregation's stories to Synod Archivist Ian Hartfield to [i.hartfield@sheridanlutheran.org](mailto:i.hartfield@sheridanlutheran.org).

We are less interested in:

- Photos or descriptions of buildings (we are a church of LIVING stones!)
- Financial records or committee minutes or worship bulletins unless they tell a significant story of ministry and faith of your church
- Commemorative plates/mugs/ornaments/etc...

Hymn-writing Contest: Feeling inspired? You are invited to write your own hymn on the occasion of our Synod's 150th Anniversary. It could be either:

- New words set to a new tune of your own composition
- New words set to an old hymn tune

Be creative in the hymn's theme and scope! Winning entries will be distributed to congregations to sing for their annual meeting Sunday as well as the 2022 Synod Assembly.

Monetary prizes will be awarded to the winners!!!

Submit your entries to Pr. Kristen Van Stee, Assistant to the Bishop, by December 1st, 2021 to [kristen@nebraskasynod.org](mailto:kristen@nebraskasynod.org).