

Rev. Dr. Sarah R. Cordray



Ordination Date: July 10, 2005

Education & Earned Degrees:

Doctor of Ministry, Congregational Mission and Leadership, 2012-2017, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN

Master of Divinity, 2001-2005, Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, IA

Elementary Education Major, 1989-1993, Luther College, Decorah, IA

Rockridge School District, 3rd grade teacher, 1994-1996, Taylor Ridge, IL

Hope Lutheran Church, Director of Youth and Family Ministries, 1996-2001, Fresno, CA

First Lutheran Church, Associate Pastor, 2005-2009, Aitkin, MN

Tri-County Lutheran Parish (4 congregations), pastor/lead of staff, 2009-2014, Chappell, Lodgepole, and Oshkosh, NE

Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, Senior Pastor, 2014-present, Syracuse, NE

Current & Previously Held Positions

Please tell us a bit about yourself.

Serving the Lord and walking with God's people to discover who they are and what their purpose is for God's kingdom is the passion God has given me. Serving in education, youth ministry, and congregations has given me opportunities to be a creative, focused leader who empowers groups to discern God's purpose. I carry a contagious enthusiasm that is lovingly direct and honest, as well as spirit-filled. Connecting with all ages and considering various opinions have led me in strengthening community by finding the middle ground centered in Christ. I have a keen sense of Lutheran theology and have the ability to relate it to today's world. Serving as a lead of staff has allowed me the opportunity to administer from areas of worship design to budget matters. Having strong organizational skills allow me to lead as one who is detailed with an eye on the big picture of mission and vision. Volunteering in the synod has also given me opportunities to serve on Synod Council twice, be a member of the Synod Vision team, serve as chairperson for the Synod Vision Oversight team, and serve as a team member and coach for the Vitality Initiative for Congregations.

Describe what brings you energy as you consider the role of Bishop and how this might be a best use of your gifts, skills, and passion.

The ability to formally work with multiple congregations in the process of revitalization, the process of rediscovering our middle ground centered in Jesus Christ, and addressing the ministry leader shortage through creative, adaptive processes bring me the most energy as I consider what my role as bishop would be. The use of skills in Congregational Mission and Leadership, which I have developed through education and practice both in congregations in the Panhandle and eastern Nebraska, can best be used in the process of revitalization as identity, neighbors, and purpose are discovered for churches in today's world. Leading a congregation through a pandemic, a divisive society, and conflict utilizes my gifts and skills of authentic work on the frontline for guiding us through a time of rediscovering our middle ground given in Christ. Addressing the ministry leader shortage through creative, adaptive processes allows me to offer my experiences of working in a variety of staff positions as clergy and a lay person, as well as training and supervising PMAs and interns. I sense the Holy Spirit moving me to share these gifts and skills with many.

As a candidate for Bishop, how would you describe God's call for the Nebraska Synod and your relation to this call?

As Nebraska is in the geographical middle of our country, the Nebraska Synod is called to be a model and teacher in our society and world of how such a diverse people with a wide spectrum of convictions can find middle ground through their faith in Jesus Christ. Already respected as a synod in the ELCA, we have a call to stay together and connected through the gifts of forgiveness and grace given through Jesus Christ. I also believe with such a middle ground discovered in Christ, we, the Nebraska Synod, are called to faithfully keep planting those seeds of faith even amid such challenges, pivot with the waters of change, and keep the main thing – the main thing. Pressures and tuggings of our society have caused so many to lose focus, but we, the Nebraska Synod, turn our eyes to God's call which centers and strengthens us to face today's and tomorrow's world with trust in God and each other. God still needs the church until Christ returns, and God calls me as such a leader to empower us to come to the middle ground where we are heard, nourished, and sent by the God who meets us in the center of the cross.

Reflect on the opportunities and challenges facing the Nebraska Synod in the next 6 years.

In an interview about church, "I think we got lost in trying to be all things to all people." Also said, "We need to return to the basics of who we are and what we are called to do." I believe we as the Nebraska Synod are not called to be all things to all people, but rather return to the basics of Jesus Christ and the way of his kingdom which he died to bring. In so doing, we are centered in God's identity and purpose to meet the challenges of leadership decline, loss of membership, and division amongst us, and within culture. Through the basics, we rediscover tools to live in a covenantal way of life in partnership and forgiveness. These basics draw us to our identity as the Priesthood of all believers to seek methods of empowerment. These basics remind us that God calls us through purpose to bring the good news to where people are as Christ did, which will cause examination of a culture of membership and methods of measurement for vitality. The basics of Christ teach us to live into God's mission and vision as we care for those Christ did while countering the kingdom of the world. We cannot be all things to all people, but we can return to the basics in who we are through him and our purpose together to find opportunity in such challenges