

Rev. Jen Nagel

(She/her)



Current Position: Lead Pastor, University Lutheran Church of Hope, Minneapolis

Date and Year of Ordination: Ordained by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries January 19, 2008, Received onto the ELCA's Roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament October 26, 2010

Previous Calls and Positions:

- University Lutheran Church of Hope, Minneapolis, Lead Pastor (2015-present);
- Salem English Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Pastor/Interim Pastor/Pastoral Ministry (2003-15)
- Holden Village, Teaching Staff Coordinator (2011)
- Central Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minister for Community Resources (2001-03)
- Hennepin County Medical Center, Minneapolis, Intermittent Chaplain, Chaplain Resident (2000-02)
- Wilderness Canoe Base, edge of BWCA, Pastor in Residence, Program Director, Canoe Guide, Retreat Host (1991-99)
- Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Chicago, Youth Minister, Contextual Ed Student (1996-98)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, Africa, ELCA Global Mission Volunteer (1998-99)
- Camp Amnicon, South Range, WI, Canoe Guide (1992-93)

Education and Earned Degrees:

- University of Chicago-Divinity School, M.Div., 1998
 - Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Certificate of Studies, 1999, including ELCA internship at Lord of Light Lutheran Church and Lutheran Campus Ministry-University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, 1999-2000
 - Concordia College, Moorhead, MN, B.A. (Religion, Classics), 1994
 - University of St. Andrews-St. Mary's School of Divinity, St. Andrews, Scotland, 1992-93
 - New Ulm Public High School, New Ulm, MN, 1990
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Describe your process of discerning this potential call to serve as our next bishop:

Over the years, I've been nudged by colleagues and moved to consider serving in this role in this synod or another. My reaction has been a healthy mix of trepidation, intrigue, and trust—trust in the process, trust in the Spirit, trust in my gifts. In past years, it simply wasn't the right time for our family to entertain such a call, for our children were younger and their needs were significant. Now, with the blessing of my spouse, Jane, I have let my name continue forward because this makes space for the Holy Spirit. I enter the process with a variety of emotions: I love the congregation I serve deeply, and, at the same time, I am committed to faithful discernment and open to this new possibility. Informally and formally, with church members, pastors, deacons, bishops, and in prayer, I've been asking questions like: What is God up to? What is needed (generally in the church and from your bishop)? What gifts do you see in me to meet these needs?

What is your vision for the Minneapolis Area Synod?

I envision a synod that understands our strength as being Christ's church together in this particular area of God's creation that spans farms, towns, exurbs, suburbs, and cities, all with rich gifts, needs and perspectives: rooted in the gospel promises of scripture and the sacraments; vital and relevant to these current times as a society and a changing church; sensitive to the hunger, loneliness and weariness we and our world often face; nimble to act for and with justice; prophetic in practice; steady in the face of anxiety and conflict; welcoming of hard conversations and able to facilitate them; telling the truth about the mighty deeds of God; honest, repentant, and reparative about our complicity in oppression; clear in identity; transparent about boundaries; witnessing to the joy and the pain; tethered always to one another, for we are not alone in this ministry, but kin and co-conspirators (literally breathing together in the Spirit)

What do you see as principal challenges and opportunities to this synod in the next six years, and how would you approach them?

As Lutherans, we understand our identity as both reformed and reforming. For a dozen years I served Salem English Lutheran Church in south Minneapolis, a community in transformation facing the realities of a smaller congregation in a changing neighborhood with a building that had become a barrier and burden. Over the years we explored options, let go of portions of our property, advocated for the building of affordable housing, gave thanks for the past, clung to the core of our congregation's identity, and together with two ecumenical partners created SpringHouse Ministry Center. This experience with the faithful people of Salem opened me to a trust in the Holy Spirit like never before. The challenges of this time are legion. We won't come out the same people or the same church, and yet I am convinced that the Holy Spirit is at work in us, through us, sometimes in spite of us. The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church will bring forward recommendations in 2025. I wonder how we can better partner with St. Paul Area Synod for a stronger witness. I notice the asset-based energy surrounding the Faith Practices and Neighboring Practices program, the ministry of chaplains, LSS, Lutheran Campus Ministry, and others who are setting the table for the future in dynamic ways. Healthy and supported rostered ministers and candidates for ministry are the strength of our synod. Building a team committed to pastoral care for church leaders and for congregations is part of the synod's calling. A capacity to enter the Holy Experiment, adaptive change, emotional intelligence, theological imagination, inspired stewardship, and a clear sense of Lutheran identity are key in these complexities.

What has prepared you to be effective in creating belonging among various cultural groups?

I am committed to walking together, supporting, and leading in the work of racial equity and cultural belonging in our synod and beyond. My experiences as an LGBTQ+ leader in the church and as a parent in a transracial family have honed my sensitivity to some of the varied ways I can participate in creating culture change—sometimes I need to be the leader, sometimes I need to make space for other leaders, always I need to listen closely, partner, and believe the experiences of others. The intersections of our identities are at once tender and powerful. Strategic work takes emotional energy and often falls heaviest on those who are already tapped in so many ways. Structural change (attention to processes, barriers, accessibility) links closely with creating an environment where people feel heard, where gifts are uplifted, where difference is okay and welcome, where we can communicate in a healthy manner when we don't live up to expectations, and where there is trust and grace.

Describe up to five recent or past synod, churchwide activities or community-related activities that have significantly impacted you. How do these experiences inform your vision for serving as our next bishop?

Synod leadership and learning. I have served in a variety of roles including Central Conference Dean, Synod Council and Executive Committee, Boundaries Task Force, the Unite Table and Partnership Table, as a clergy coach, and as a voting member and visitor at church wide assemblies. Over the years, I trained as an interim pastor and as a redevelopment pastor. Community organizing, systems-thinking, and spiritual practices ground what I do and how I do it.

Supervisor, mentor and teaching pastor. I supervise a staff, have been an internship supervisor, and have welcomed dozens of contextual education students. This keeps me in conversation about the skills of ministry, the formation of pastoral identity, and the lived experience of new waves of leaders.

Movements for change. When I entered professional ministry as an out candidate in the year 2000, the ELCA was still discerning the role of LGBTQ+ leaders like me. I found a calling to be part of changing the church from the inside, and, in turn, this movement has changed me. It was empowering, clarifying, Spirit-led, deeply moving, and still shapes how I seek to listen and act at the intersections of race, gender identity, ability, power, and the ways we bring our God-blessed whole selves and experience to faithful community.

Ecumenical relationships. I am deeply committed to ecumenical and interfaith relationships and have led these in a variety of settings: currently partnering with neighboring congregations around sanctuary, immigration, and other local ministry; helping to create SpringHouse Ministry Center; serving on the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC); and being part of the ELCA's ecumenical and interfaith work. From the very local to the international, across lines of practice, culture, and theology, relationships are created, understanding widens, and together we give voice and body to shared values.

In what ways have you applied new learnings to your current context?

My learnings and their application come from many directions, sometimes with significant intentionality, sometimes bubbling up unexpectedly. I play different roles in these learnings and what I do with the learnings: synthesizing, leading, collaborating, supporting. Here are a few: I'm part of a Center for Leadership and Neighborhood Engagement "Embodied Anti Racism Clergy Practice Group". As a white bodied leader, it's a space for risking to be more in touch with my body in racialized situations, and picks up on efforts at Hope to lean into a more embodied way of worshiping, engaging our bodies, not simply our brains. I'm leaning into Amy Jill Levine's writing about anti-Semitism, Javier Zamora's memoir of migration called Solito, the breadth of images and the process of creating expansive worship language, the ideas of Wild Church, and adaptive change models. These and other recent learnings are fodder for conversation, prayer, and action.

What specific leadership skills and spiritual gifts have you used in developing lay and clergy leaders that you would bring as bishop of this synod?

These are some of the gifts I've come to understand in myself, and skills and gifts that others have reflected back to me: abiding trust in the Holy Spirit; faithfulness to the promises of Jesus that move us from death to life; trustworthiness; wisdom; love of preaching and teaching; creativity; willingness to take risks and invite engagement from groups/congregations; calm, non-anxious presence in the midst of tension; willingness to stir up tension when needed; patience and tenacity with processes; organization and ability to prioritize; group facilitation and leadership; deep sense of integrity; healthy skepticism; vulnerability; openness to conversation; humor; listening skills and a love of people; spiritual practices that sustain me; collaboration; confidentiality; sense of the details and the big picture; drawing in varied voices and building consensus; creating a skilled, capable, and compassionate team; capacity to consult, seek help, and do honest self-reflection
