



**Southwestern Minnesota Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

## **We are Church Together – Sharing Our Gifts and Supporting One Another**

*+ Bishop Jon Anderson and Pr. Kimberly Swanson-Buffie*

Across your synod, pastors and congregational leaders are stepping up to support sister congregations regularly in times of transition and crisis. I asked Pastor Kimberly to share her story of recently stepping in to support a sister synod and also a congregation that she knew and loved because they hosted her on her internship. I am thankful that we are seeing the fruit of this offering of time by our youngest congregation, House of Grace, and their mission developer.

*+ Pr. Kimberly*

It had become obvious to me that there was some trouble brewing for Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church (SOJ) in Buffalo. Hints here and there in the community, Facebook posts, things people said or did not say, worry and concern when encountering people in the grocery store and Target.

So when Pastor Luke Schmidt, associate pastor at Zion Lutheran church in Buffalo (the other ELCA congregation in this town), approached me and asked me if I had heard what was going on and how their congregation did not want to see any more people jump ship from SOJ out of fears of the church being closed, I was not surprised. After all, I had paid attention to the news about the financial woes and of the pastor leaving to take another call because I care. What did surprise me was his next statement "Kimberly you are the one who can help them-you know them, they trust you." That series of statements began to tug at my heart and it got me thinking.

Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church was familiar to me as I was their pastoral intern from 2009 into 2010 under the supervision of the mission developer Pastor Josh Nelson. I knew them and loved them dearly and the last thing I wanted to see happen, especially as a mission developer myself, was to see a church close its doors. I certainly had the desire but knew I didn't have unlimited time and resources. Already bi-vocational, pastor and chiropractor, the idea of taking on another church seemed an impossibility, if I did it all on my own.

A plan was put into place combining the ideas and efforts of Pastor Ted Vanderpan, Pastor Luke Schmidt, our mission start congregation, House of Grace in Montrose; with the collaboration and orchestration of the Minneapolis and Southwestern MN synods. We would create a position of a part-time bridge pastor hoping and praying that it would work for a time. Enough time was needed for Spirit of Joy to get back on their feet financially and to feel confident again that they could be loved and valued as a viable church. Without the need for lengthy introductions or trust building we immediately got to work exploring a plan to create a sense of ease in the congregation. Moreover, the Vision Team, what they call their council of leaders, needed to stop having to spend all their time fretting about finances and get back to what they were called to do as casting the vision for the church.

In just a few weeks, we were able to establish a plan, to stabilize the finances and the mood of the people and begin to enter into the conversation of God's specific call of SOJ and how that call fit into God's greater mission for the sake of the world. Together with the help of God we could not only stop the bleeding but also grow a deeper relationship with God and one another.

Well, God did not disappoint.

Within three weeks' time the church was back in the black. The dominating conversation about fear and worry faded and soon the Vision Team was able to have fun again exploring all the gifts God had given them to use toward building the Kingdom here on earth. It was satisfying to hear them having fun and enjoying being a team once again.

Eight months later Spirit of Joy is wonderfully positioned to call a full time pastor and are very close to extending a call to a very qualified candidate to help lead among them. They have now placed several thousands of dollars into the MIF fund which had run dry and they have moved from a budget that reflected zero dollars in benevolence for 2015 to one that is 5% of their total budget for 2016.

Through God's faithfulness and provision Spirit of Joy is a stronger and more trusting congregation than it was in the last few years. They now have a sense of their unique spiritual gifts that God has given them that will move them out into the world serving in word and deed in Jesus' name.

Feeling that my work and service is complete with Spirit of Joy I recently put in my letter of leave for March 1st. I am confident that the work that God has begun in them will continue until the day of Jesus Christ. Going forward with House of Grace and the plans for a ministry center, I am well positioned to give more time and focus to that ministry and know that I will now have two additional congregations in Zion and Spirit of Joy to partner with seeing to its success. I have seen that through God's plan we are one example of how God has broken down walls that separate us as churches moving us from competitors to companions fulfilling the great mission of the ELCA that "We are Church Together."

Thanks be to God!