



# THE BRIDGE

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION FOR CONGREGATIONS OF THE SOUTHEASTERN MINNESOTA  
SYNOD OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA



## OUR CULTURE OF CALL

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Lutheran Christians understand God's call to public ministry leadership in the church to involve two essential dimensions: internal and external. The internal dimension of God's call involves a person's own discernment that "God is calling me to this." The external dimension of God's call involves the discernment of others regarding that person—"God is calling you to this."

Raising up leaders for the church requires that the whole church participate in the external dimension of God's call. Some of the most common stories people tell when they begin to prepare for ministry leadership in the church are stories about other people encouraging them to do so. "Have you ever thought about seminary?" "You would make a good minister." "I can see you as a leader in the church." Those sorts of promptings from ministry leaders and other church members, from family and friends, are common to the stories of people who become ministers of Word and Sacrament or Word and Service in the church.

Evidence suggests that our shared participation in the external dimension of God's call to ministry leadership is becoming less vigorous than it has been in the past, even the recent past. For example, over the twelve-year period from the 2004-2005 academic year to the current academic year (2015-2016) the total enrollment of students in Master of Divinity degree programs (the preparatory degree for pastors) at the eight seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has decreased from 1,252 to 735, or 41%. No single factor by itself accounts for that decrease, but it is reasonable to believe that one contributing factor is a neglected commitment to identify people with demonstrated gifts for ministry leadership and to encourage such people to step forward in preparation for leadership.

The ELCA's Model Constitution for Congregations stipulates that one of the responsibilities of congregation councils is to "seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the ministry of the Gospel." Integral to this report, therefore, are these questions to all who will read it:

- How vigorously does your congregation attend to its responsibility to "seek out and encourage" gifted people to prepare for leadership as ministers of Word and Sacrament or Word and Service?
- How many members of your congregation have been or are enrolled in seminary to prepare for such leadership?
- Who are the people in your congregation that you can envision as effective ministry leaders?

The members of your synod who serve on your synod's candidacy committee work with the people who come forward from your congregations, your outdoor ministries, your campus ministries and other contexts of discernment and call to prepare for public ministry leadership in the ELCA. Your candidacy committees accompany those people in formation for leadership, helping them further to discern both their gifts and their growth areas pertaining to leadership, guiding them in their seminary programs, assessing their learning in field experience, and, when they are ready, approving them for ministry leadership in the ELCA under congregational call.

To learn more about the work of your synod's candidacy committee and the people currently preparing for ministry leadership under the care of your synod's candidacy committee, speak with any member of the committee, Bishop Delzer, Rev. Susan Miller, or Cheryse Brenno-Sloan. The work that we do together in the formation of leaders for the ELCA is made possible by the mission support your congregation gives to the synod and by the mission support your synod shares with the larger ELCA.