

FALL 2026

ZION LUTHERAN NEWSLETTER



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Eastern North Dakota Synod Assembly 2026

Members of the Eastern North Dakota Synod gathered this June for the annual Synod Assembly, centered on the theme “Waters of Promise, Waters of Life.” Rooted in the gift of baptism, the assembly invited participants to reflect on how baptism shapes and renews us throughout our entire lives of faith.

Harwood Zion Lutheran Church was represented at the assembly by Pastor Robert Franek and Jeanette Haugen, who joined others from across the synod in worship, learning, and decision-making.

Worship was a meaningful and central part of the assembly experience.

- The Friday evening service featured a moving sermon by Bishop Bill Tesch of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod, offering powerful reflection and encouragement rooted in the baptismal theme.
- The Sunday morning service included a thought-provoking sermon by Bishop Regina Hassanally from the Southeastern Minnesota Synod, sending participants out with renewed perspective and faith.

Two Bible study sessions were also held, providing opportunities to engage more deeply with Scripture and the theme of lifelong baptismal identity.

The primary focus of this year’s assembly was the bishop election process. Through prayerful discernment and multiple rounds of voting, members carefully considered the future leadership of the synod.

At the conclusion of this process, Bishop Tessa Moon Leiseth was re-elected, affirming her continued leadership and the synod’s confidence in her guidance for the years ahead.

Sharing Our Gifts at Zion

Volunteers play an important role in the worship and fellowship life of Zion! We will soon email sign-up opportunities for several volunteer roles, including:

- Ushers and greeters
- Scripture readers
- Acolytes and technology assistants for confirmation youth
- Fellowship servers

Whether you have volunteered before or would like to try something new, we invite you to consider sharing your time and talents. Please watch your email for additional information and sign-up details.

Mustard Seeds: The Kingdom of Heaven Among Us

I have always enjoyed puzzling over the parables of Jesus. In my youth I remember being excited to hear a sermon on one of these pithy and often earthly stories so that I could understand what Jesus meant by telling it. When I got to seminary and learned tools for making sense of scripture, I believed I would gain a new clarity when reading these perplexing stories Jesus told. And in my own studies now as a preacher of these parables myself, I continue to search for what these stories mean.

The sermons I heard in my youth gave an insight that was illuminating in that moment, but when I read the story again new questions came. Seminary studies helped me learn the limits of what these stories are saying, but at the same time, since they are the living word of God and the Spirit continues to speak through them, they are always saying something new. In my studies for a sermon some years ago, I learned again why I love these stories so much.

The New Testament scholar C. H. Dodd once wrote that parables are stories designed to tease our mind into active thought. That's it! I found this teasing, this wondering, this puzzling over the story of all things playful.

Matthew gathered up several of Jesus' parables and put them together in chapter 13 of his gospel. Some stories from this chapter are longer like the parable of the sower and the parable of the wheat and the tares. Others are quite short like, the mustard seed, the yeast in the dough, the treasure in the field, and the merchant in search of fine pearls. Nevertheless, all say something about the kingdom of heaven, which has come near in Jesus. Jesus is not talking about some far away place in another dimension of time, but the reality coming to be and already present in him.

These parables show us that the reality of God's reign on earth can be elucidated in the ordinary realities of daily life: sowing seeds, baking bread, fishing with a giant net. The kingdom of heaven is like all these ordinary things, not fully, but each one says something about the life God desires for us and for all and that has come to us in Jesus by the love and grace and mercy of God.

Sometimes I say to myself mustard seeds as a way to remind myself that the kingdom of heaven is not measured by the metrics of our world but comes to life in ways we don't always notice and with purposes beyond our imagination. Mustard seeds a shorthand for me for all the hidden and unexpected ways the kingdom of heaven is coming near all around us. Seeds sown, yeast hidden, a net tossed in the sea, the kingdom of heaven is like all these and so much more.

To what will you compare the kingdom of heaven? A merchant? A pearl? A treasure hidden in a field? What story shall we tell today that will tease our minds, playfully, into active thought about the kingdom of heaven breaking in all around us, even amid the weeds which grow alongside the good seed, until the harvest when the Good Lord sorts the wheat from the tares, the things that bring life from the things that take it from us?

Peace in this season of hidden growth and surprising wonders,
Pr. Robert

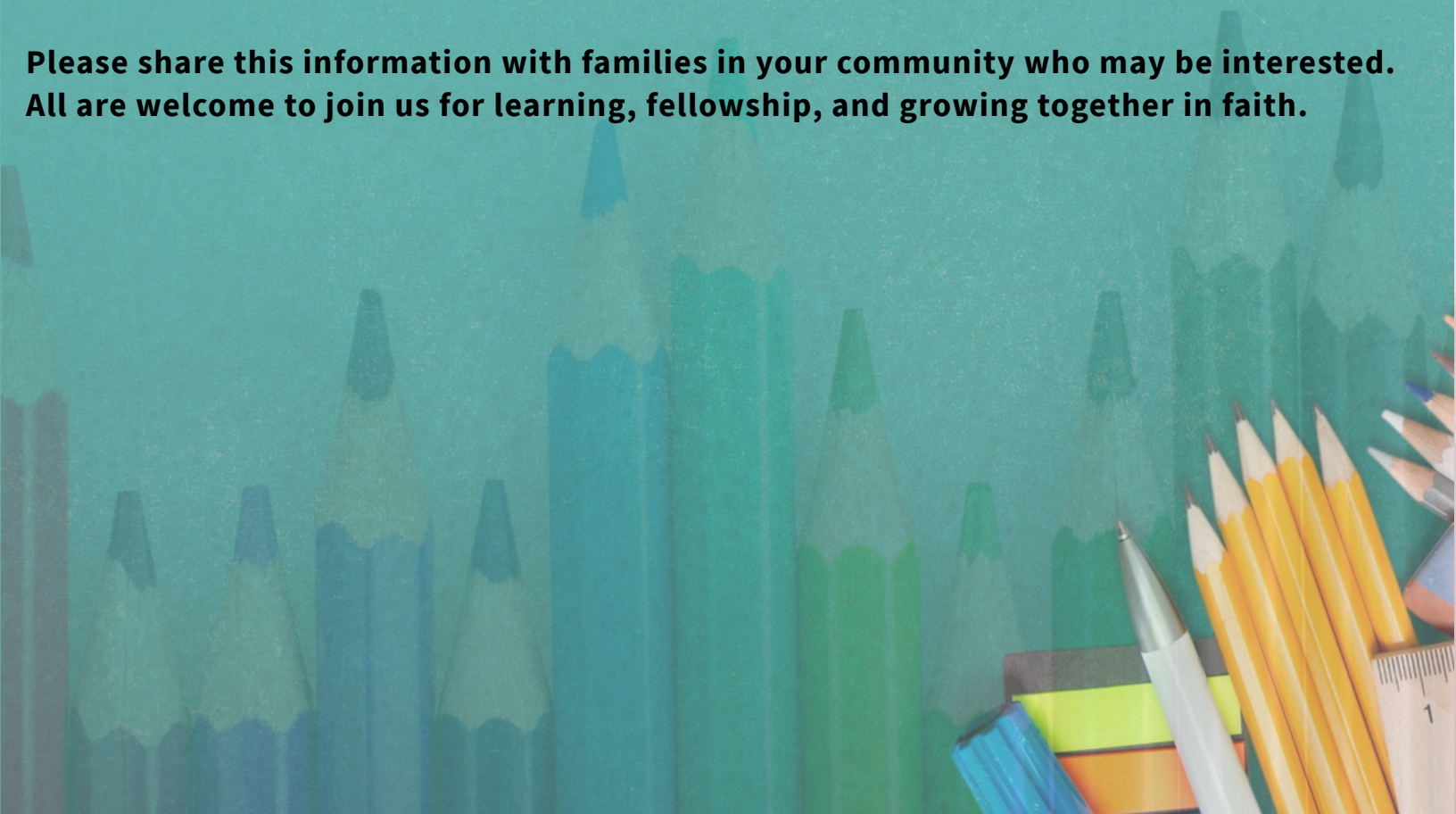
Growing in Faith: Important Information for Families

As summer draws to a close and families return to school-year routines, we look forward to welcoming children and youth back to Sunday School and confirmation. The months ahead will bring many opportunities to learn, grow in faith, reconnect with friends, and share in the life of our church.

Please mark your calendars for these important upcoming dates for children and families:

- **September 13th-following Sunday Worship**-Rally Sunday-Join us to register your children for Sunday School and to meet your teachers, followed with a meal for all
 - Following Rally Sunday, Sunday School will resume it's normal schedule, following church service.
- **October 7th-6:30pm**-Parent/Student Meeting for all confirmation students, if you cannot attend but would still like to participate in confirmation, please email Heather Brandt at heathr0282@gmail.com
- **October 14th**-Confirmation begins at 6:30pm in Bethany Hall for all 6th, 7th, and 8th graders.

Please share this information with families in your community who may be interested. All are welcome to join us for learning, fellowship, and growing together in faith.



Pastoral Transition Update

We are pleased to share that Pastor Robert has signed a new contract to continue serving our congregation during this time of transition. We are grateful for his continued leadership and ministry; however, the congregation is still working toward a permanent pastoral solution. Thank you for the input you provided that guided the church profile process.

The Call Committee will help guide the search and discernment process. Please keep Pastor Robert, the Call Committee, and our congregation in your prayers as we seek God's guidance for the future of our church.

Growing Together

Exciting improvements are happening at Harwood Zion:

- New kitchen cabinets are installed to support fellowship and meals
- We've received new pews from the Lutheran Church in Wendell, MN, enhancing our worship space

We are making technology updates, including:

- A church website: <https://www.harwoodzionlutheran.org/>
- New email addresses for church leaders: @harwoodzionlutheran.org

These updates reflect our commitment to growing as a welcoming, connected church community.

Vacation



Vacation Bible School was held July 13 and 14, bringing our children and community together for two wonderful days of worship, music, learning, and fun! Counselors from Red Willow joined us and helped make the experience especially meaningful and memorable.

A heartfelt thank-you to all the volunteers who generously shared their time and talents. This special event would not have been possible without you!



A New Season Begins

As summer draws to a close and a new school year begins, we pray for God's guidance and protection over our students, teachers, school staff, and families. May this season bring opportunities for learning, growth, friendship, and faith.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to our summer congregation members. Your presence, fellowship, and participation have been a wonderful blessing to our church, and we hope you will carry the warmth of our church family with you wherever the coming seasons take you.

As we return to fall routines, we look forward to welcoming children and families back for Sunday School, confirmation, worship, and fellowship. We invite everyone to take part in the many opportunities ahead to reconnect and grow together in faith.

Please reach out to
Jeanette@harwoodzionlutheran.org
with any questions.

Calendar

September 9

- 7:30pm Sunday School
Teacher Interest Meeting

September 13

- 9am Worship
- 10am Potluck and Rally
Sunday activities

September 20

- 9am Worship and Sunday
School

September 27

- 9am Worship and Sunday
School

October 4

- 9am Worship and Sunday
School

October 7

- 6:30pm-Parents and
Students Confirmation
meeting

October 11

- 9am Worship and Sunday
School

October 14

- 6:30pm-7:30pm
Confirmation starts

October 18

- 9am Worship and Sunday
School

October 21

- 6:30pm-7:30pm
Confirmation