

## Lay School Report

Greetings!

The Lay School board would like to begin by thanking everyone who has supported our efforts through monetary gifts and prayer and by sending your members as students. We particularly want to thank Immanuel-Trinity Lutheran in Fond du Lac who gifted the lay school \$10,000. We were able to continue to enhance the technology needed for our hybrid learning setup. What a blessing! The Lay School has been changing at what feels like the speed of light to meet the changing needs in our synod, and we feel blessed that so many are finding these efforts helpful.

For those who are unaware, the East Central Synod of Wisconsin Lay School exists to provide an avenue of learning for people just like you. Our students come to deepen their knowledge about the Bible, faith, history, theology, spirituality, and so much more. They build relationships through fellowship, worship, and learning, and they explore how they can best use the gifts they have been given as followers of Christ and members of the church.

Our course offerings are separated into two categories: 1. core classes and 2. continuing education classes. There are 8 total core classes taught on a two year rotational basis, and the continuing education classes differ each year.

This year, our core students took Intro to Theology, Old Testament, Liturgy and Life, and Faith and Spirituality. Our continuing education students had three course options: one class (Experiencing the Bible with Fresh Ears) studied Rachel Held Evans' book *Inspired*, another class looked at the Bible Stories Jesus Knew (developing a deeper understanding of the Old Testament), and another class studied the ELCA social statements and messages with Cindy Crane from the Lutheran Office of Public Policy. It was a year of rich study and discussion!

Next year's offerings:

- *Core Classes*- New Testament, Church History, Lutheran Confessions, and Faith and Spirituality.
- *Continuing Education Classes*- Lay Preaching, Extraordinary Care in Ordinary Times ("pastoral care" for lay people), a class on the changing landscape of the church called *The Transfigured Church: Faithful Congregations in a New Land*, and a Bible class called *The Poetic and the Prophetic: A Quest through the Psalms and Revelation*. More details/course descriptions can be found at our table at Assembly and on our website.

We currently have two in person locations from which to attend classes: Saint Andrew in Rib Mountain and Christ the King in Combined Locks. Learning happens in a hybrid manner (a mix of in person and virtual). For many years the western side of the synod has been a heavy focus for the Lay School, and we are making a concerted effort to change and focus on the entire synod by inviting instructors and students from the eastern side of the synod as well. Learning in a

hybrid manner certainly brings with it challenges, but they are outweighed by the reach it has provided the Lay School in terms of inclusion.

This year, we had 27 students taking core classes. Thirteen of them just completed all eight courses and attended their celebration service. Many of them are now taking on leadership roles of various kinds in their churches. Our continuing education classes had a much lower attendance due to several factors, but we are praying that next year's classes will be better attended. Due to our need as a lay school to operate within the black financially, we might need to institute a "class minimum" for our continuing education classes to ensure that happens. Any churches with faith enrichment funds or endowment monies that would like to support our work would be welcome.

In February, I was invited to attend a meeting with 13 other synods to discuss an "Education Exchange". Synods in Wisconsin, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, and the Dakotas came together to continue addressing the changing needs in our synods and the larger church. I was there to represent both the Lay School and the SAM committee (see the SAM report for further details). Right now, we are creating a clearinghouse of locations/courses for each synod, as well as their willingness and capacity for accepting learners from outside their synod.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pastor Jen Hoffman