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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Northeastern Minnesota Synod -- ELCA

Northeastern Minnesota Synod – ELCA Hires Joy Hensel for Mental Health and Wellness Ministries

September 8, 2022. Northeastern Minnesota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the governing body providing support to 130 ELCA churches in 13 counties, welcomes Joy Hensel as Synod Minister for Mental Health and Wellness. She has worked with the Synod as a mental health program consultant in a grant-funded role since 2019 and brings over 20 years of experience in ministry, mental health and addiction to the Northeastern Minnesota Synod.

“The statistics for those struggling with mental health across all age categories is staggering. This is true even inside the walls of the church,” says Bishop Amy Odgren. She goes on to state that, “The Northeastern Minnesota Synod has made a commitment to not only encourage and resource the spiritual health of congregations, but also toward the wellbeing of the physical, social, financial, and mental health of our faith communities. We are thrilled to have Joy join us as she shares her faith and expertise in this endeavor.” Hensel finds the NEMN Synod’s interest and investment in wellbeing inspiring and motivating. “I am grateful for the opportunity to merge my call to ministry with my call to mental health and wellness in this new position,” Joy commented. She will expand the work of the Youth Ministry and Mental Health Initiative by developing additional resources that will educate, equip, and support ministry leaders and congregations to address the mental health and wellness needs for all ages.



Hensel’s consulting work related to the [Youth Ministry and Mental Health Initiative](#) involved publishing [Mental Health Discussion Guides](#) and congregational kits. [Podcasts](#) on the topics of mental wellbeing, anxiety, depression, suicide prevention, suicide response and grief were produced and half-day workshops with mental health professionals offered. The Initiative’s focus on mental health and ministry, along with the quality of resources produced, caught the attention of many outside of our Synod. Hensel shared the fruits of the Initiative at events for SYMBOL, Lutheran Outdoor Ministry, the 2021 ELCA Youth Leadership Summit, the 2022 ELCA Youth

Ministry Extravaganza, Sacred Playgrounds, the Minneapolis Area Synod of the ELCA and several churches around the state and in the Northeastern Minnesota Synod.

Ms. Hensel holds a Master of Arts from Luther Seminary in Congregation and Community Care, Faith and Health Ministries and a Master of Arts in Addiction Studies from the Hazelden Betty Ford Graduate School of Addiction Studies. She is a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor for the State of Minnesota and Minnesota board-certified counselor. Hensel currently serves as a Mental Health First Aid instructor.

Ms. Hensel “looks forward to listening, partnering, and dreaming with congregations as they explore what it means to tend to mental health and wellness in their ministry setting.” In the coming months, she will seek funding to support the continued developing resources like podcasts, workshops, trainings, and curriculum for the Synod and beyond. Also, building a Synod team to continue to share resources and helpful tools on social media and the Synod website. “I am grateful for the opportunity to continue to listen, learn, collaborate, lead, watch, and experience the exciting work the Holy Spirit is up to in the Northeastern Minnesota Synod as the Synod Minister of Mental Health and Wellness. Thanks be to God!” (joy.hensel@nemnsynod.org).

1 Corinthians 16:14 (NRSV)
“Let all that you do be done in love.”

Resources from the NE MN Synod Mental Health Initiative can be found at www.nemnsynod.org/MentalHealth

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