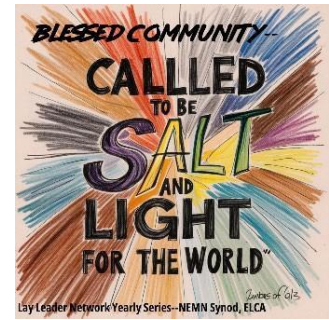


NE MN SYNOD LAY LEADER NETWORK SYLLABUS (2025-2026)

“Blessed Community – Called to be Salt and Light for the World”



YEARLY SERIES

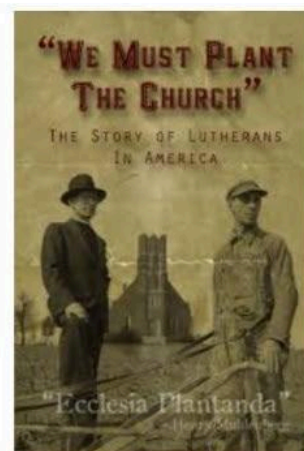
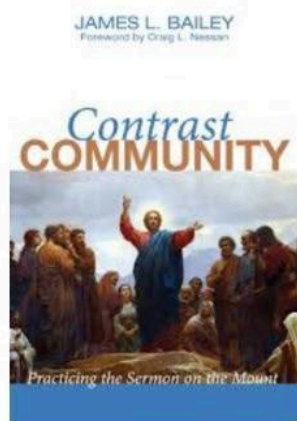
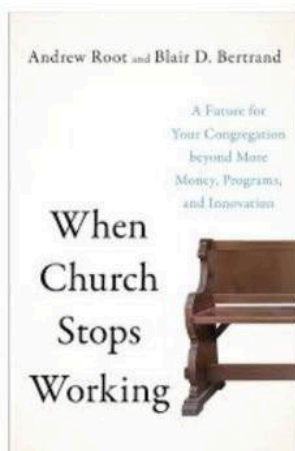
The yearly series focuses on four objectives throughout the year:

(1) dwelling in the Word through scripture, (2) understanding our context and culture for ministry, (3) exploration of the Lutheran theological tradition and history, and (4) developing and honing missional leadership awareness and skills.

This year (2025-2026) we will explore the theme, “Blessed Community - Called to be Salt and Light for the World.” We will dwell in the gospel of Matthew together and utilize Jim Bailey’s book, *Contrast Community: Practicing the Sermon on the Mount* as a basis for discussion and follow-on exercises. We will gain a deeper appreciation for some of the challenges in our culture in North America and how we might lead into that culture utilizing Andrew Root’s new book for focused conversation, *When Church Stops Working: A Future for Your Congregation beyond More Money, Programs, and Innovation*. Finally, we will view the series, “We Must Plant the Church: The Story of Lutherans in America” as we plunge into the history of our tradition in North America.

We encourage people to team up as you register with others from your congregation, because this year there will be follow-on *team conversations* in between the sessions. These team conversations will focus on selected podcasts/video sessions from the *Enter the Bible* online site produced by Luther Seminary and follow-on conversation guides from our readings/video presented during the sessions.

Registration is open - <https://nemnsynod.org/lay-leader-network/>



FACULTY

This year, providing instruction for the Yearly Series are the Rev. Dr. Mark Skinner, senior pastor for Bethlehem Lutheran in Brainerd and the Rev. Laura Berdahl, chaplain at Aspirus St. Luke's Hospital.

Mark started in youth ministry thirty-three years ago and was then ordained. He is an Army veteran who has served as faculty for Lay Leader Network the past nine years. Mark is a gifted presenter and teacher combining God's missional story at work in the nuances of this secular age. He is a wood-turner and former mechanical engineer who loves spending time in the Colorado mountains or on the lakes in Minnesota with his family and friends.

Rev. Laura Berdahl, staff chaplain at Aspirus St Luke's in Duluth, served 27 years in several parishes prior to following God's call into chaplaincy. Her ministry experience has spanned several contexts with people of all ages and backgrounds where she closely witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit at work. In her free time, Laura loves singing, hanging out with family members, and enjoying a good book with her cats on her lap.

FORMAT FOR SATURDAY YEARLY SERIES SESSIONS

9:00 am	Gather/introductions/meditation and prayer
9:15 am	Engaging the Gospel of Matthew/ <i>Contrast Community</i> presentation and discussion
11:00 am	"We Must Plant the Church" presentation and discussion
12:15 pm	Lunch
1:00 pm	<i>When Church Stops Working</i> presentation and discussion
2:15 pm	Roundtable team discussion
3:00 pm	Wrap-up, evaluation and departure by 3:30 pm

BIBLIOGRAPHY

**Root, Andrew and Bertrand, Blair D.: *When Church Stops Working: A Future for Your Congregation beyond More Money, Programs, and Innovation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2023.

**Bailey, James L. *Contrast Community: Practicing the Sermon on the Mount*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013.

"Enter the Bible." (enterthebible.org) produced and maintained by Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, MN. "We Must Plant the Church: The Story of Lutherans in America," 2015 Select Learning.

** participants will need to purchase these books or online versions.

STAND-ALONE WORKSHOPS

Additionally, new this year, participants will have the opportunity to participate in four different Lay Leader Network workshops for *no* additional cost. Those workshops include:

Exploring Spiritual Direction and Contemplative Practice. This two-hour exploratory workshop will center on what spiritual direction is and trying out some contemplative practices that makes up spiritual direction in Christian communities around the globe. There will be an opportunity to learn about joining a spiritual direction group, if desired. Dr. Monica Bruning, NEMN Synod Communication Director and intern at [Christos Center for Spiritual Formation](#) will lead the session. We will meet at Grace Lutheran- Hermantown on Tuesday, September 30 from 6:30-8:30 pm. The workshop will also be broadcast via Zoom for individuals or at satellite church sites (TBD). The workshop is open to all--\$10 charge for non- Yearly Series participants.

Bible 101 and Pie. This is a two-hour introductory workshop of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation highlighting major themes and historical events. Come and meet some new friends and enjoy some delicious homemade pie with Pastor Mark Skinner. We will gather at Bethlehem Lutheran in Brainerd on Thursday, November 6th from 6:30-8:30 pm. The workshop will also be broadcast via Zoom for individuals or at satellite church sites (TBD). The workshop is open to all--\$10 charge for non-Yearly Series participants.

Who is *Marty* Luther? This is a two-hour introduction to Martin Luther, his history and basic teachings for the church and the world in which God so dearly loves. This is a great review for life-long Lutherans or for people that are brand new to the Lutheran tradition. Come and enjoy some homemade German black forest cake with Pastor Mark Skinner at Lord of Life Lutheran in Baxter on Thursday, January 8th from 6:30- 8:30 pm. The workshop will also be broadcast via Zoom for individuals or at satellite church sites (TBD). The workshop is open to all--\$10 charge for non-Yearly Series participants.

Paul as Leader. This is a two-hour in-depth workshop exploring "Paul as Leader" presented by Father George Martin on Thursday, March 12 from 6:30-8:30 pm at Bethlehem Lutheran in Brainerd. George Martin is retired Episcopal priest, church planter, and interim ministry specialist. (Even a Lutheran pastor once!) Knowing so many people in his pastoral ministry with their questions, doubts, and interest in Paul he wanted to know more about Paul's letters and his story. His book is, *Paul Found in His Letters*, Claremont, CA: Claremount Press, 2022. We will have copies of his book on hand for sale or you can purchase via Amazon as well. The workshop will also be broadcast via Zoom for individuals or at satellite church sites (TBD).

The workshops are open to all with a \$10 per event charge for non-Yearly Series participants.

Scan the code at right to register!



HOST AND SATELLITE SITES

- Brainerd/Baxter – Bethlehem Lutheran-Brainerd 418 8th Ave, Brainerd. Host: Pr. Mark Skinner 218-829-3330 pastormark@belcnet.net Workshops Nov. 6 and Jan 8
 - Lord of Life Lutheran Church 6190 Fairview Rd. N Baxter. Host: Anne Laechel 218-828-9374 Anne.Laechel@gmail.com September 30 and March 12
- Grand Rapids – St. Andrew's Lutheran Church 501 NW 16th St. Host: Pr. David Anderson 218-326-8508 pastor@StAndrewsGrandRapidsMN.org
- Hermantown – Grace Lutheran Church 5454 Miller Trunk Hwy Hosts: Tom Martin twopines@aol.com and Monica Bruning monica.bruning@nemnsynod.org 218-724-4424
- International Falls – First Lutheran Church 123 Wayside Lane. Host: Pr Christie Manisto 218-283-2208 pastorchristieflc@gmail.com
- Iron Range region - Iron – Faith United Lutheran Church 8964 Hwy 37 Host: Melanie Weston 218-410-6530 melvinjazz27@gmail.com
- Lutsen - Lutsen Lutheran Church 5307 MN 61 Host: Pastor Tom Murray 218-370-9491 lutchurch@boreal.org
- Milaca/Mora area – Zion Lutheran Church Milaca 245 Central Ave. Host: Christine Nelson 320-983-6420 Christine@ingenuitymarketing Workshops Nov 6 and Mar 12
 - Grace Lutheran Church Mora 301 Forest Ave. Host: Kelly Kehr 320-336-8028 - kellykehr@gmail.com Workshops Sept 30 and Jan 8

FULL EVENT SCHEDULE

- Sep. 13, 2025 Yearly Series Session 1 at Bethlehem Lutheran, Brainerd (in-person) or
Sep. 27, 2025 Grace Lutheran Church, Hermantown (in-person)
- *Sep. 30, 2025 *"Exploring Spiritual Direction/Contemplative Practice" workshop 6:30-8:30 pm at
Grace Lutheran, Hermantown (Zoom option available)*
- *Nov. 6, 2025 *"Bible 101 and Pie" workshop 6:30-8:30 pm at Bethlehem Lutheran, Brainerd
(Satellite Site and Zoom option available)*
In-between session assignment #1
- Nov. 15, 2025 Yearly Series Session 2 through Zoom
- *Jan. 8, 2026 *"Who is Marty Luther?" workshop 6:30-8:30 pm at Lord of Life Lutheran, Baxter
(Satellite Site and Zoom option available)*
In-between session assignment #2
- Feb. 7, 2026 Yearly Series Session 3 through Zoom
- *Feb. 28, 2026 *LLN February Seminar at Bethlehem, Brainerd*
- *Mar. 12, 2026 *"Paul as Leader" workshop 6:30-8:30 pm at Bethlehem Lutheran, Brainerd (Satellite
Site and Zoom option available)*
In-between session assignment #3
- Apr. 18, 2026 Yearly Series Session 4 at Bethlehem Lutheran, Brainerd (in-person) or
May 2, 2026 Grace Lutheran Church, Hermantown (in-person)
- * *Optional workshops.*

Register Today!

<https://nemnsynod.org/lay-leader-network/>

