

A Call to Prayer

from the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

*Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;
therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*

Luke 10:2

"As the Conference of Bishops, we call our worshiping communities to pray for raising up leaders for this church. We ask that the petitions of every worship service include a plea that new lay leaders, deacons and pastors be identified, invited, encouraged and supported in responding to God's call to ministry." [adopted March 4, 2017]

At its March 2017 meeting, the ELCA Conference of Bishops claimed identifying, inviting, equipping, and supporting leaders and cultivating vital faith communities as two of the highest priorities for our work together. Active attention to these two priorities is essential for the church's faithful participation in God's mission of hope, healing, and reconciliation in changing, challenging times.

This call to prayer also aligns with Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's leadership initiative, announced in November 2016, which intends to inspire ELCA leaders to seek out and encourage gifted people in their congregations, communities and networks to consider a call to the ministry of the gospel, supported by growing levels of scholarships for seminary tuition.

The harvest is, indeed, plentiful. We need more laborers, lay and rostered, to provide the ministry and leadership that will, by grace and in the power of the Spirit, assist the church in moving forward faithfully and energetically into God's unfolding future.

Will you join us in prayer every time your worshiping community gets together, and in your own personal and family prayers, asking the Lord of the harvest to raise up and send out laborers into the harvest? And will you consider becoming an answer to that prayer by inviting someone who seems to have the appropriate gifts to consider becoming a pastor or deacon, or by prayerfully considering that call yourself?

Here are a few prayers to consider using, provided by members of the Conference of Bishops:

Christ Jesus, head of the church, raise up from among the baptized pastors to preach your word and administer your sacraments; deacons to serve all people and bear your gospel to the world; and congregational leaders to bring vision and vitality to your people. Grant us the grace to identify those in our midst you are calling, courage to name their gifts, and opportunities to gently nurture and support their discernment. God of mercy. Receive our prayer.

O God, you make your love known in Jesus Christ. We thank you for loving your church so much that you send the Holy Spirit into the hearts of children, women, and men so that they know themselves called to be pastors and deacons and leaders for congregations and the church. Bless your church with an abundance of leaders. And as we are bold to believe that you will raise up pastors, deacons, and leaders from this congregation, ready our hearts to nurture their faith, celebrate their call, and support their preparation for ministry. God of mercy. Receive our prayer.

O God, you so love the world that you sent Jesus, and our world so needs your love. With the whole Church we implore you to call forth pastors, deacons, and congregational leaders to lead us in bearing Christ to all the world so that the world may know your love. We pray especially for those in this faith community the Holy Spirit may be nudging to public ministry in the church and Christ-like service in the world. God of mercy. Receive our prayer.

Lord Jesus, we pray for congregations in the call process and for the pastor you will send them. We pray for those outside the church who will come to know Jesus through ministry in his name and for the deacon you will send to serve them. We pray for our congregation's future and for the leaders you will call forward to guide us. Embolden us to invite those in whom we experience gifts for these ministries to prayerfully consider your calling, and give us generous spirits to support them. God of mercy. Receive our prayer.

We give you thanks, O God, for the children in our midst – especially those in elementary and middle school. We pray that as they grow, they will hear your voice calling them into your service – in the church, in the world, for the sake of their neighbors. Help them to imagine being pastors and deacons, church council leaders, Sunday school teachers, mentors and community leaders. Give them courage to say yes to your call, O God. We pray in gratitude and boldness in Jesus' name. Amen.

Rev. Dr. William O. Gafkjen, Bishop
Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA
Chair, ELCA Conference of Bishops