

We have exciting news to share - we have found an interim pastor! **Pastor Jon Barsness** will be joining our congregations on May 1, 2024. Pastor Jon is from St Bonifacius, MN. He and his family will be moving into the Hope Parsonage and he is ready to hit the ground running to serve our congregations.

Pastor Jon has a degree in Ministry Leadership, a Master's degree in Ministry and Organizational Leadership, and is currently pursuing his Master's Degree in Divinity. Pastor Jon and his wife, Anna, have a son Ethan, who will be graduating from high school this spring. Pastor Jon established a ministry called Strive To Abide, and through this work, he has been leading and developing curriculum, teaching, and preaching at events for about four years.

Through the call process, the Synod reminded us that we may have to "grow our own" due to a shortage of available pastors, and that, essentially, is what we are doing. Pastor Jon is ordained through the National Association of Christian Ministers. He is technically coming to us as a lay minister because he is not yet ordained through the ELCA. However, he will be serving as a full-time pastor to our parishes. Jon grew up in the ELCA church, is very familiar with the teachings of the Lutheran Church and is working toward his ELCA ordination.

Once he has taken the required classes, which will take approximately 2 months, he will seamlessly transition into being our interim pastor. It is the hope of the call committee that he will be treated as an interim from the beginning as he will be serving us in that role. Once Jon completes his second master's degree, we will be able to officially call him as our Pastor. We anticipate that time frame to be about 2 years.

As was discussed previously, the interim pastoral agreement with Pastor Jon will be between Hope Lutheran and St Paul's Lutheran. There will also be a Pastoral contract with Bethany-Elim. As we begin this transition to sharing one pastor with three congregations, we ask for your patience and support. It is vitally important that we all approach this with an open-mind, a flexible attitude and that we are willing to do some give and take.

Going forward, things may not be exactly as they have been. There are going to be some changes. First and foremost, there are simply not enough pastors to serve the number of congregations. Secondly, the financial benefits of sharing a pastor provide us with a more realistic and attainable budget. As the call committee worked with the other congregations, it is evident that we share the same love of God, that we want our congregations to be able to move forward with a pastor, and we are willing to work together to make this partnership successful.

Once Pastor Jon has had an opportunity to learn about the needs of each congregation, we will be establishing a service schedule. Please be patient, flexible and willing to try new things. The hope is that we are building a faith community, and if a service time does not work for you in your congregation on a given week, you will feel welcome to attend another service that fits your schedule. We will communicate updates with you as we work through the process, so please watch for updates through email, bulletins, on the website and newsletters.

This is an exciting time for all of our congregations and the call committee feels that Pastor Jon is an excellent choice for our faith community. He is passionate about sharing the Bible, teaching and working with members of all ages. We know that each of you will give him and his family a warm welcome! May God bless each of us as we move forward!

The Executive boards of St Paul's, Hope and Bethany-Elim Lutheran Churches