

The Southwestern Minnesota Synod ELCA Accompaniment with the Southeastern Diocese of ELCSA Annual Report



Introduction

Our partnership with the Southeastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA-SED) is more than a mere organizational agreement; it is a sacred journey of walking together. Built on a foundation of mutual respect rather than transactional aid, our companionship is guided by five core pillars: **Mutuality**, **Vulnerability**, **Inclusivity**, **Sustainability**, and **Mutual Empowerment**. As we celebrate the 50th Jubilee Anniversary of ELCSA, we remain committed to our shared mission to **Proclaim** and share the Gospel through word, sacrament, prayer and service, and we **Serve** those in need, and **Accompany** one another as companions in God's work. In a nutshell, accompaniment is about relationships where we are willing to walk with one another across the globe and have intentional visits on both continents.

Leadership and Gratitude

In November 2025, Bishop Dee Pederson expressed profound gratitude for the visionary leadership of Rev. Rebecca Sullivan and Peg Hatlestad, who are concluding their roles as Co-Chairs of the Synod Partnership Committee. Their dedication was instrumental in reactivating our global relationships following the pandemic, bringing knowledge and joy back to this vital ministry. *"Thank you, Pr. Rebecca and Peg, from the bottom of OUR hearts!"*

Rev. Janel Kuester has stepped into committee leadership at the request of Bishop Dee Pederson. The Synod is currently praying for a Co-Chair to join Rev. Janel in leading this committee. Interested individuals whose hearts are stirred for this ministry are encouraged to contact the Synod office.

2025 Synod Trip to South Africa

From December 7–22, 2025, a delegation from the SWMN Synod traveled to South Africa at the invitation of the ELCA and ELCSA. The group included Bishop Dee Pederson, Rev. Janel Kuester, Rev. Hollie Holt-Woehl, and Randall Holt-Woehl.

Key highlights from the journey included:

- Theological Dialogue: Joining leaders from six other ELCA Synods and their ELCSA companions to discuss lay theological education.

- Visiting the Southeastern Diocese Annual Youth League conference and worshipping with over 650 young people.
- Historical Learning: Visiting some of the earliest mission stations and congregations in the Southeastern Diocese.
- 50th Jubilee Celebrations: Participating in ELCSA's 50th Anniversary and Worship: Experiencing the profound joy, music, and dancing that characterize our companions' commitment to God's Word.

Moving Forward

Following the conversations held in South Africa, the committee has identified two primary areas of focus for the coming year:

1. Lay Ministry Development: We are working to identify and share training resources as requested by Bishop Myaka to strengthen local leadership.
2. Umphumulo Seminary Redevelopment: We remain dedicated to fundraising efforts for the redevelopment of the seminary, ensuring a strong foundation for future theological education.

Looking Ahead in 2026

The momentum of our companionship continues with two travel groups scheduled to visit South Africa this summer:

- July 2026: A group from First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Litchfield will participate in a Mission Study Trip. Their work will focus on hands-on support at Umphumulo Seminary and visiting their companion circuit.
- August 2026: A separate group from the Prairie Conference will journey to South Africa to deepen their local ties with their companion circuit.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Janel Kuester



Growing Together in Christ