

## 2021 Nomination Biographies

### Synod Council

#### Beartooth Cluster Representative

**Allen Hansen                      Messiah Lutheran Church, Red Lodge, MT**

Allen has been a member of three Lutheran congregations in Montana: Pella, Sidney (17 years); Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Billings (5 years); and, currently, Messiah, Red Lodge (9 years). He is currently a Lay Pastoral Associate Candidate being recognized at the 2018 Synod Assembly, Congregation Council President, and a Biblical Storyteller. He believes that bringing scripture alive in worship connects worshipers with gospel and helps the preacher weave real grace and action into the sermon text. He is currently serving on the Corporate Assemblies for both Concordia College and Pacific Lutheran University.

Allen is retired from careers in the U.S. Navy and U.S. Merchant Marine and Merchant Marine education. His wife of 45 years, Suzi, is a retired activities coordinator for an active seniors' center in Massachusetts. Both are avid cyclists including an unsupported trip on a tandem from Montana to Massachusetts in 2011.

#### Russell Country Cluster Representative

**Rev. Scott Hedegaard      Redeemer Lutheran Church, Great Falls, MT**

Scott is a Montana native, raised in Savage. He has three children and six grandchildren. He has served three different calls in the Montana Synod – the American Lutheran Parish of Harlem, Hogeland, and Turner; First Lutheran Church in Glasgow; and currently Redeemer Lutheran Church in Great Falls. Scott will celebrate twenty-five years of ordination this summer. Synodwide, Scott has previously served on the Montana Synod Council, chaired the Synod Mission Table, and was an active member of the Montana Association of Churches. He loves the outdoors and is an avid hiker, backpacker, and fisherman. Scott will be united in marriage to the Reverend Barbara Gwynn this spring.

#### Five-Valleys Cluster Representative

**Celeste Pogachar              Faith Lutheran, Hamilton, MT.**

I am a retired public school music educator. I have been a member of Faith Lutheran Church since 1987. My volunteer work there has included serving on the church council in various positions, including convener (president), director of the children's choir and acolyte program, chairperson of Scandinavian dinner, representative to FLBC, mutual ministry committee, scholarship committee, and voting delegate to Montana Synod Assembly. I was a camp counselor for two summers at Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp.

I have been an LPA since 2013. Since 2011, I have been employed at Faith as their worship and music coordinator, where I plan worship, organize musicians, and train and schedule worship assistants. I direct our Vacation Bible School program. I serve on the board of Sapphire Lutheran Homes. My community involvement includes serving as past board president for CASA, and participating with the Bitterroot Community Band, Hamilton Players, and Bitterroot Valley Chorus.

#### Fort Peck Cluster Representative

**Pastor Doris Tollefson              Saco and Hinsdale Lutheran Churches**

I serve the Hinsdale and Saco Lutheran Churches as an ordained pastor. I didn't plan to have a second career after I retired from teaching after 30 years, but God had a different plan. I feel blessed to serve these two small churches. My husband Jim and I have been married 47 years and have two daughters, two sons-in-law, and six wonderful grandchildren. In my spare time, I like to read, feed and watch birds, and bake bread.

Northeast Cluster Representative

**Rev. Gretchen Wagner**                      **Trinity, Culbertson/First English, Bainville, MT**

Gretchen has been a member of the NE Cluster of MT Synod for approximately 5 years. She cares about the goings on of the Cluster and the greater area of Eastern Montana. She will bring a voice that cares for the realities of frontier, rural, and small-town ministry to the synod council. Rev. Wagner currently serves in Culbertson, MT. Prior to her current position she worked in the Aero! Business in Western Washington for a major manufacturer of Airplanes.

Bearpaw Cluster Representative

**Kevin Johnson**                      **First Lutheran Church, Havre, MT.**

My wife Lorraine and I have been married for 38 years and have three children and 4 grandchildren. I retired from MSU-Northern as a Professor in automotive/diesel technology after 35 years in 2015. I was President of the Academic Senate for 1 year and served on the financial aid committee several years as well as other faculty committees. I started farming in 1988 and plan on farming into the future. I have been a member of 1<sup>st</sup> Lutheran Church in Havre my entire life and have taught 5-6<sup>th</sup> grade Sunday school for the last 4 years. I am also in my 2<sup>nd</sup> term as Vice President for the church council.

Crazy Mountain Cluster Representative

**John Sheppard**                      **Christ the King Lutheran, Bozeman, MT.**

John is a lifelong Lutheran, having been baptized into Christ at Zion Lutheran Church, Pittsburgh (ALC) on October 8, 1961. He was raised in an LCA congregation in Sharon, PA (Christ Lutheran). He received his BS in computer science from Southern Methodist University and then attended the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg. After discerning that his call, at least at that time, was somewhere other than in ordained ministry, he entered industry, working for ARINC, Inc. in Annapolis, MD. While employed by ARINC, he received his MS and PhD in computer science from Johns Hopkins University and was actively engaged in lay ministry as a member and leader at Our Shepherd Lutheran Church in Severna Park, MD. After 20 years at ARINC, he spent a short time as a research professor at Johns Hopkins before moving to Bozeman in 2008 to become a professor of computer science at Montana State University. As a professor, he is currently mentoring and advising eight doctoral students and over 40 undergraduates. He serves the Bozeman community in a variety of ways. In addition to his work as an LPA while serving the residents at Bozeman Lodge senior living facility as worship leader and pastoral care provider, John serves as faculty advisor to Lutheran Campus Ministry at MSU, sings with the Bozeman Symphony Symphonic Choir and the Chamber Choir, and sings with the Bozeman Chord Rustlers barbershop chorus and in two barbershop quartets (Quaternions and MASS Effect).

Flathead Cluster Representative

**Pastor Peter Erickson**                      **Our Savior's Lutheran, Columbia Falls, MT.**

Peter has been a pastor in the Montana Synod since 1998. He has served on the boards of the Montana Associations of Christians, Lutheran Social Services of Montana, and Immanuel Lutheran Communities. He is an active participant in cluster and synod activities. Recently, Peter became a certified coach in the Montana Synod.

Peter Erickson was ordained in 1998, serving the Chester Lutheran Parish (Chester, MT) until 2007. He has since served Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Columbia Falls, MT. Peter is married to Tonja; they have three daughters. Peter received an undergraduate degree from St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN in 1994, and Master of Divinity degree from Lutheran Seminary in 1998. He is a proud member of the class of 1990 Missoula Sentinel Spartans.

## Southeast Cluster Representative

### **Lana Buerkle      Peace Lutheran, Plevna, MT.**

I was raised in Baker, MT. My husband and I have been married for 48 years and own a farm/ranch north of Plevna. We have 4 children and 12 grands-Yeah! Our son, Bradn, is an ELCA pastor serving in Russia.

I have been a Secretary to a lawyer, Extension Office, and American Lutheran Church in Baker. I have most recently been a full-time babysitter for 3 of my grandchildren.

I serve as pianist for our Church, Peace Lutheran and Sunday School teacher. I am also a LPA and have thoroughly enjoyed my studies for this program.

## **Synod Nominating Committee**

### **John Mundinger      Saint John's Lutheran Church, Helena, MT**

John is a former employee of Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks. He was an active member in previous Lutheran congregations and has been an active member of St. John's since transferring to that congregation in 2000. He served on the Church Council! , including three years as Council President.

John has also served in various capacities in the Montana Synod, including Synod Council, Consultation Committee, Candidacy Committee and on the Mission Table, as a Churchwide voting member and is a Lay Pastoral Associate.

### **Barb Arensmeyer      Trinity Lutheran Church, Choteau, MT**

Barb has been a life-long member of Trinity Lutheran Church, in Choteau Montana. It was here that she was confirmed, married and had each of her children baptized. She is and LPA in the Montana Synod and has provided pulpit supply twice monthly at Bethany Lutheran in Dutton, Fairfield Lutheran Parish and at Trinity Lutheran in Choteau. Barb has also served numerous times on the Montana Synod Congregational review team.

## **Synod Committee On Discipline**

### **Pastor Scott Thompson      Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Kalispell, MT.**

Scott has served on several committees and boards. He is currently on the Serious Juju board and the FLBC board, so he knows discipline and conflict. He also served on the Discipline committee in the Grand Canyon synod prior to moving to MT. Scott is a great communicator and is well respected among lay and clergy.

Scott graduated from Luther seminary in 1996. He has served parish ministry calls in Soap Lake, WA; Shepherd of the Hills, Fountain Hills, AZ; Holy Trinity Lutheran, Chandler, and now at Bethlehem Lutheran, Kalispell since 2017.

### **Pastor Marlow Carrels      Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Butte, MT.**

Pastor Marlow currently serves at Gold Hill Lutheran Church in Butte America. He formerly served Westby Lutheran Parish in Westby, MT. He has been around the world a time or two thanks to the Army and the travel bug. He is married to artist, author, and business owner Nikki and father to an awesome daughter with another inbound around late June! He is a graduate of Montana State University – Bozeman (English Literature), Wartburg Theological Seminary (Master of Divinity), and is currently working on his thesis project for a Master of Sacred Theology at the Institute of Lutheran Theology. He has four ministries of special interest: Veterans, the homeless population, the Theology of the Sword (pacifism!?), and Beer and Theology. He is a Stephen Minister, has sung opera professionally, an Army vet, and avid fisherman, hiker, camper, skier, museum goer, and bibliophile.

**Kyle Lefler    Bethlehem Lutheran, Kalispell, MT.**

Kyle moved to MT to work with Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp in a year-round position. In October 2020 she began work as an adventure guide at Chrysalis boarding School in Eureka, where she works with teenage girls in a therapeutic setting. Kyle also serves part-time as the Dir of Del and Fundraising for Emmaus Campus Ministry in Missoula. Kyle is passionate about creatin space where young people are empowered, advocated for and lifted up, and especially loves when those spaces collide with the beauty of God’s creation.

**Don Buerkle    American Lutheran Church, Baker, MT.**

Don is an LPA in the Montana Synod and has preached and led worship in his parish as well as surrounding congregations. He has been involved in many pastoral duties and understands the role of leader in the church. He has lived in Baker his entire life and attended College at MSU Northern. Not married, two daughters, one son, owned baker Body Shop (1981-2016) and currently owns and operates Baker Boyz Towing in Baker. He has been an LPA since 2018.

**Luke Kloker    Zion Lutheran Church, Fairview, MT.**

As a superintendent, he deals with discipline issues on a regular basis. Luke has his Master’s degree in administration, so has studied HR rules etc.    Luke served as our BB coach at FLBC for years. He is compassionate and caring. He is a gentle leader.

Luke was a principal for 12 years in MT before becoming a superintendent, which he has been for 7 years. He also serves on the Executive Board of the Montana High School Association.

**Churchwide Assembly Voting Members**

Position 1

**Dick Deschamps (Vice President of the Synod)**

Position 2

**Dane Castleberry    Saint Elizabeth Lutheran Church, Ekalaka, MT.**

Dane has been a member of Saint Elizabeth Lutheran Church since 1995. He, along with five of his family members were baptized April 12, 1998. His oldest daughter came home from a youth program and told them that she had picked her church and church family. They began attending and actively participating since that time. Dane is a Christian and practices his faith openly. He was involved in helping to build the Lutheran Church that stands on the North East side of Ekalaka. Dane serves as a lay pastor when Pastor Scott is gone.

or

**David Anderson    Nathanael Lutheran, Plentywood, MT.**

David was born in Minneapolis, Minn. in 1941 and moved to Washington, D.C. in 1965 as a Prince of Peace Volunteer (an ecumenical program of the LCMS) and joined the Community of Christ. A new ecumenical ministry of the American Lutheran Church. In 1967 He began work at United Press International and in 1974 began religion/social issues writer as well as a political analyst. In 1990 David joined Religion News Service and retired as editor-in-chief in 2004 on moving to Montana. He was also a senior consultant to the PBS news show Religion and Ethics Newsweekly. David is a licensed LPA.

### Position 3

**Meredith Johnson Hope Lutheran Church, Bozeman, MT**

Meredith Johnson grew up on a farm outside of Walnut Grove, MN and was active in the local Lutheran church. She attended Shetek Lutheran Bible Camp every summer and after high school went to Augustana College in Sioux Falls, SD where she was active in campus ministry and outreach programs. She spent two summers working at Shetek Lutheran Bible Camp and two summers working at Christikon Bible Camp before taking on her first teaching job at the Utah School for the Deaf. After two years of living in Logan, UT where she was active at the ELCA mission church, Prince of Peace, she moved to Seattle where she attended Central Lutheran. She and her husband Corey moved back to his hometown of Bozeman and his home church of Hope Lutheran in 2001. They have three children, Soren (18), Doretta (16), and Elsie (13). The family is active in the congregation through the youth group, youth worship band, and various committees. Meredith has been in charge of the Sunday School and Vacation Bible School for more years than she would like to count. (I think it's perhaps 10?). She is excited about the opportunity to represent the Montana Synod at the church wide assembly.

Or

**Margie Fiedler Bethlehem Lutheran, Kalispell, MT.**

Work Experience: ELCA Foundation, Planned Giving officer; Associate to the Bishop, EWA-ID Synod, ELCA; Assistant Marketing Director, Mission Investment Fund, ELCA; Executive Camp Director, Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, Ohio; Lutherhaven, Coeur d' Alene, ID; 2011-present, Executive Director Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp. Passionate about the environment, women's issues, and justice issues.

### Position 4

**Lorrie Vennes Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran, Townsend, MT.**

My husband Gail and I live south of Townsend. We raise registered Angus cattle and have two dogs, Jake a border collie and Lucy, my Scottish Terrier. We have two grown children, Denice (Tanner) and Tyler (Holley). We also have three wonderful granddaughters.

I am an accountant and work for the Montana Stockgrowers Association, Helena. I enjoy attending our granddaughters' activities, quilting, reading, and gardening.

I have been a Lutheran my entire life. My Roles in the church have been many. From Sunday School teacher and director, confirmation, and high school youth leader. I have also been a church treasurer and of course belong to church guilds and WELCA.

I became an LPA in 2013 and have been blessed over and over again with this ministry. I currently do church services once a month for American Lutheran Church, Livingston, my home church. I have also provided pulpit services at; St. John's Lutheran Church, Helena, Shepherd of the Valley Church, Townsend, and Hope Lutheran Church, Anaconda.

Or

**Carla Rustad American Lutheran Church, Baker, MT.**

Carla is an active member of her congregation. She has served on the endowment fund committee for several terms. She is currently ALCW (WELCA) president and a member of church council. Carla is a member of the committee to examine and amend the church constitution. She is also the treasurer for the southeast Cluster of the WELCA and has represented her congregation 3 times at the Synod Assembly.

Carla grew up on the Oregon coast and moved to Montana when she married her first husband in 1969. Her first husband passed away in 1978 leaving her to run the family ranch with her children and stepchildren. Carla is the mother of 4 and grandmother of 10 and step-grandmother of 7. She has 25 step-

great grandchildren and 1 great granddaughter. When Carla's youngest child graduated from high school and her son was ready to take over the family ranch, Carla went to Billings to pursue her education. She graduated from college in 1996. While in college, she worked for Northwest Bank (Wells Fargo) and in 1998 she transferred to Baker to run the Northwest Bank there. She met Keith Rustad in 2000 and they married in 2004. Carla retired from the Wells Fargo Bank in 2012. Throughout her life, Carla has been active in her church. Her relationship with God is the cornerstone of the life. Although she believes one worships in nature and home, she believes her church is a foundation in life and fellowship with other believers is important to support and strengthen faith.

#### Position 5

##### **Bishop Laurie Jungling**

#### Position 6

##### **Rev. Megan Hoewisch                      First Lutheran, Havre, MT.**

Pastor Megan Hoewisch was ordained and installed as First Lutheran of Havre's pastor in February 2020. Before that, she served as a vicar for a year at a Lutheran church in Durham, NC. She earned her Master of Divinity from Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia in 2018, where she met her Mennonite husband. Before seminary, Pr. Megan taught kindergarten in Seoul, South Korea for 3 years, which was a great way to see the world, even if it didn't make great use of her undergraduate degree in math. Though a native of San Jose, California, Pastor Megan loves exploring God's good earth and making a home wherever God has called her.

or

##### **Rev. Jessie Obrecht                      Bethel Lutheran Church, Great Falls, MT.**

Jessie Obrecht is a native of Havre, Montana. She graduated from Concordia College in 2012, served as a Young Adult in Global Mission in Malaysia in 2012/2013 and graduated from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in 2017. In June of 2017 she began serving as Pastor at Grace and St. Paul Lutheran Church in Fairfield, Montana and on the Fairfield Bench. She currently serves on the Board of Directors at Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp, as the Montana Synod ELCA World Hunger Coordinator, and as a representative on the Montana Synod Council. Pastor Jessie is passionate about the outdoors, the message of Jesus Christ, and connecting with folks to talk about faith, life, and the many adventures that we all encounter together.

#### Position 7

##### **Rev. Cheryl Muncy    Bethel Lutheran Church, Joplin, MT.**

- Served on church council for several terms, 3 as President
- LYO Leader for several years
- Adult Sunday/Bible Study leader for 3-4 years
- Active in WELCA – unit (served as Treasurer), cluster (served as chairperson and President of Cluster WELCA, and currently serving on the MT SWO Board.
- Served on Comprehensive Ministry Review teams (3)
- Served as Interim pastor at my former church
- Voting member to Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp several years. Also attended retreats.
- Have lead retreats for women
- Member of the Chester Ministerial Association (will become President in July)
- Was a board member of the Liberty County Performing Arts Council for many years
- Current member and officer of the Liberty County Chamber of Commerce
- Former member and officer of Chester Music Boosters Club
- Was active on the local, district and state levels of the VFW Aux. for 25+ years

or

**Rev. Darren Paulson Atonement Lutheran, Billings, MT.**

I was born and raised in Billings, MT and nurtured in the faith at Peace Lutheran Church. In 1989, I graduated from Concordia College – Moorhead, MN with a bachelor’s degree with a major in Sociology and minor in Religion. During my college years, I served 5 summers on the staff at Christikon Lutheran Bible Camp. Following college graduation, served in Lutheran Volunteer Corps in Milwaukee, WI at Guest House Day Center for homeless adults.

Formal ministry in a congregational setting began at Hope Lutheran Church in Bozeman, MT as Director of Youth and Family Ministry which helped affirm the sense of call into pastoral ministry. I attended and graduated from Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary in St. Paul, MN with internship in Avon, CT. Congregational calls included Faith Lutheran Church in Great Falls, MT as Associate Pastor; Hope Lutheran Church in Bozeman, MT as Associate Pastor; First Lutheran Church in Lake City, MN as Lead Pastor; and my current call at Atonement Lutheran Church in Billings, MT as Lead Pastor.

My family includes; wife, Trudi who is Executive Director of St. John’s United Family Services (formerly LSS-MT); daughter Madeline who works for the US Naval Shipyards in Bremerton, WA; son Noah who completed his freshman year at University of Montana studying neuro psych; and two dogs, Odin and Finn.

Position 8

**Colter Murphy**

Colter is passionate about the outdoors and youth, ministry. He served as a Young Adult in Global Mission in Cambodia from 2017-2018. In 2018 he started at Director of Youth and Service at Faith Lutheran Church in Chico, CA. On May 26, he begins his service as Children, Youth and Family Director at St. Paul Lutheran, Missoula. Colter is engaged to Stephanie and they have 1 cat, Josh

or

**Kyle Lefler Bethlehem Lutheran, Kalispell, MT.**

Kyle moved to MT to work with Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp in a year-round position. In October 2020 she began work as an adventure guide at Chrysalis boarding School in Eureka, where she works with teenage girls in a therapeutic setting. Kyle also serves part-time as the Dir of Del and Fundraising for Emmaus Campus Ministry in Missoula. Kyle is passionate about creatin space where young people are empowered, advocated for and lifted up, and especially loves when those spaces collide with the beauty of God’s creation.

Position 9

**Sally Weber Christ Lutheran Church, Libby, MT.**

My name is Sally Weber, and I am currently a senior at Libby High School in Libby, Montana. This fall I will be attending Montana State University in Bozeman, MT and I am pursuing a biological engineering degree, as well as minoring in biomedical engineering. Growing up in Libby has heavily influenced my love for the outdoors. In the summers, I frequently go camping, hiking, backpacking with my family. In the winters, I like to downhill and cross-country ski. My family and I have attended camp at Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp for several years now, and I consider this one of my favorite places to be. Being able to feel closer with God and connect with a variety of other people is a very special experience.

My career aspirations as a biomedical engineer was inspired by my interests in science and math, as well as a desire to help others. Originally, I wanted to become a pediatrician, but through my educational experiences in high school, I want to work towards a field in engineering that is similar to medicine.

In my free time, I enjoy volunteering through my church and other means in my community. In school, I participate in many extracurricular activities, including pep and jazz band, soccer, and tennis. I am also the senior class president as well as the band vice president. Music has been a huge part of my life and I am very passionate about sharing my music with others. I play several instruments, including the violin,

flute, bass guitar, baritone saxophone, guitar, and ukulele. However, the violin is my favorite instrument to play, and on several occasions, I have performed in band concerts, music festivals, and church services.

or

**Kristopher Schock Faith Lutheran, Ronan, MT.**

Kristopher was born on the Flathead Indian Reservation in St Ignatius and his mother is an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes. He studied in Switzerland and Austria after high school and graduated with degrees in German and Political Science from Montana State University. After graduation, he taught high school English for two years in Austria through the Fulbright Program.

Kristopher worked as a Consular Officer in the press and culture department at the Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany in Chicago and coordinated numerous visits of high-ranking German diplomats, including Chancellor Merkel's visit to Chicago during the 2012 NATO Summit. He also worked at Patagonia's retail store in Chicago and managed its environmental grants program.

Kristopher has worked for the past 5 years as a Workforce Consultant with the State of Montana at the Polson Job Service. He and his wife Erin live in Polson.