



P O N D E R

*A new*

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SEPA SYNOD ASSEMBLY 2025

# Pastoral Leadership Transitions



# Our Pastor is Leaving. Who is God Calling Next?



# Current Status of SEPA Transitions

Average length of SEPA pastorate

+ About 5 years

Longest ongoing leadership transition

+ 63 months and counting



# Key Figures: The Supply of Rostered Ministers

<b>1,914</b>	ELCA Number of Ordinations 2015-2023
<b>3,773</b>	ELCA Number of Retirements 2015-2023
<b>-1,859</b>	ELCA Net Change (Ordinations minus Retirements)
<b>35</b>	SEPA Number of Ordinations 2015-2023
<b>79</b>	SEPA Number of Retirements 2015-2023
<b>-44</b>	SEPA Net Change (Ordinations minus Retirements)





6,013

Pastors serving congregations  
In the ELCA



8,464

Number of  
Congregations



141

SEPA  
Congregations



25

SEPA Congregations  
In Transition

# Key Figures: The Need in Our Churches

**141** Total SEPA Congregations

**25** SEPA Congregations in Transition

**2** Congregation ready to receive FT candidates

**9** Congregations ready to receive PT candidates

**2** Other congregations who might call a FT pastor when transition work is finished



An ESTIMATED


45%

of ELCA congregations cannot afford a full-time pastor in 2022\*

*\* Without stretching their budgets.*

*Because affordability is largely determined by a congregation's budget priorities, many do whatever it takes to call a pastor anyways.*





"If it's a vital congregation, I've got a pile of pastors that will interview there but if not, it's really hard. Just enough pastors taking part-time calls to maintain the myth that there are part-time pastors."

— Assistant to the Bishop, Region 6

# Statistics Summary

- + The status quo won't hold.  
New pastoral leadership models are necessary.
- + Fewer ordained pastors available to call and fewer congregations able to afford full-time pastors
- + Affordability and availability are the primary drivers to changes in congregational leadership models
- + Vitality practices must be infused into the transition process and encouraged in all SEPA congregations
- + Our communities need as many vibrant witnesses to the gospel as we can get
- + The Holy Spirit is always at work. Our future will look different and the gospel will be proclaimed





# So What Now? Ponder Anew.



# Transition Planning for a New Day

Individualized Transition Plans

+ A covenant between interim,  
dean, and congregation

Then Choose Your Path

- + Transformation
- + Partnership
- + Resurrection





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# Transformation

# Transformation

a deep process  
of spiritual renewal  
and growth



# Transformation

a noticeable shift  
in a congregation's  
sense of purpose.  
God is doing a new  
thing.



# Transformation

has practical  
implications  
What do we  
do next?



# Transformation

move toward  
becoming your  
best and most  
faithful self.





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# Partnership

# Partnership

## Shared Leadership

where two or more congregations remain wholly separate entities as they share pastoral leadership



# Partnership

## Shared Ministry

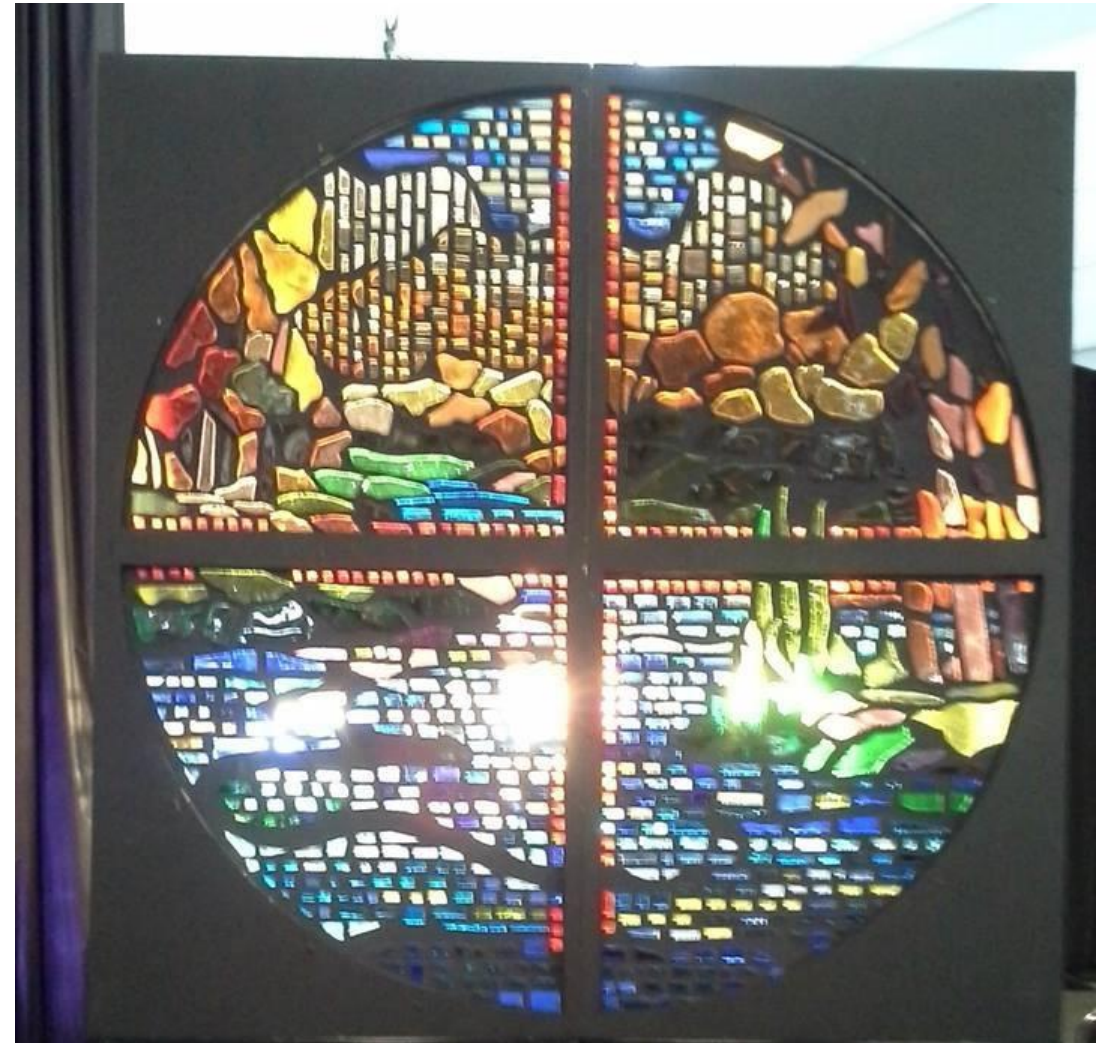
with two or more congregations sharing both the pastor and the mission



# Partnership

## Full Merger

when two or more congregations decide to become one unified congregation



# Partnership

We are never  
alone in the  
work of the  
Gospel.





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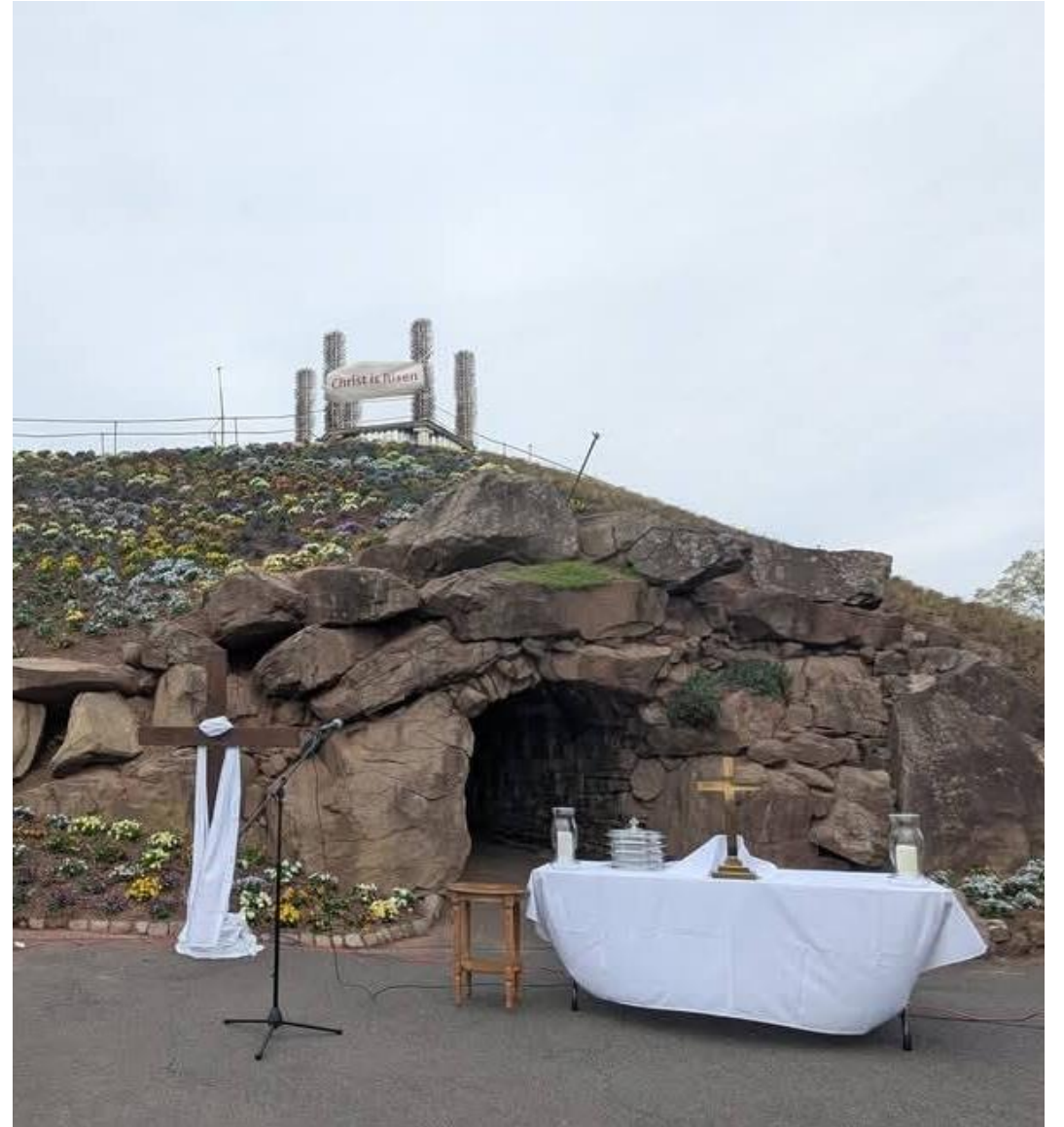
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# Resurrection

# Resurrection

Easter morning only happens because of Good Friday.

Resurrection is NOT congregational failure.



# Resurrection

How do we maintain  
a Lutheran witness?

+ What about our  
people?

+ What about our  
building?



# Resurrection

What will your congregation's legacy be?





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# Future Transitions

# Future Transitions

a Holistic,  
People-Centered  
Approach



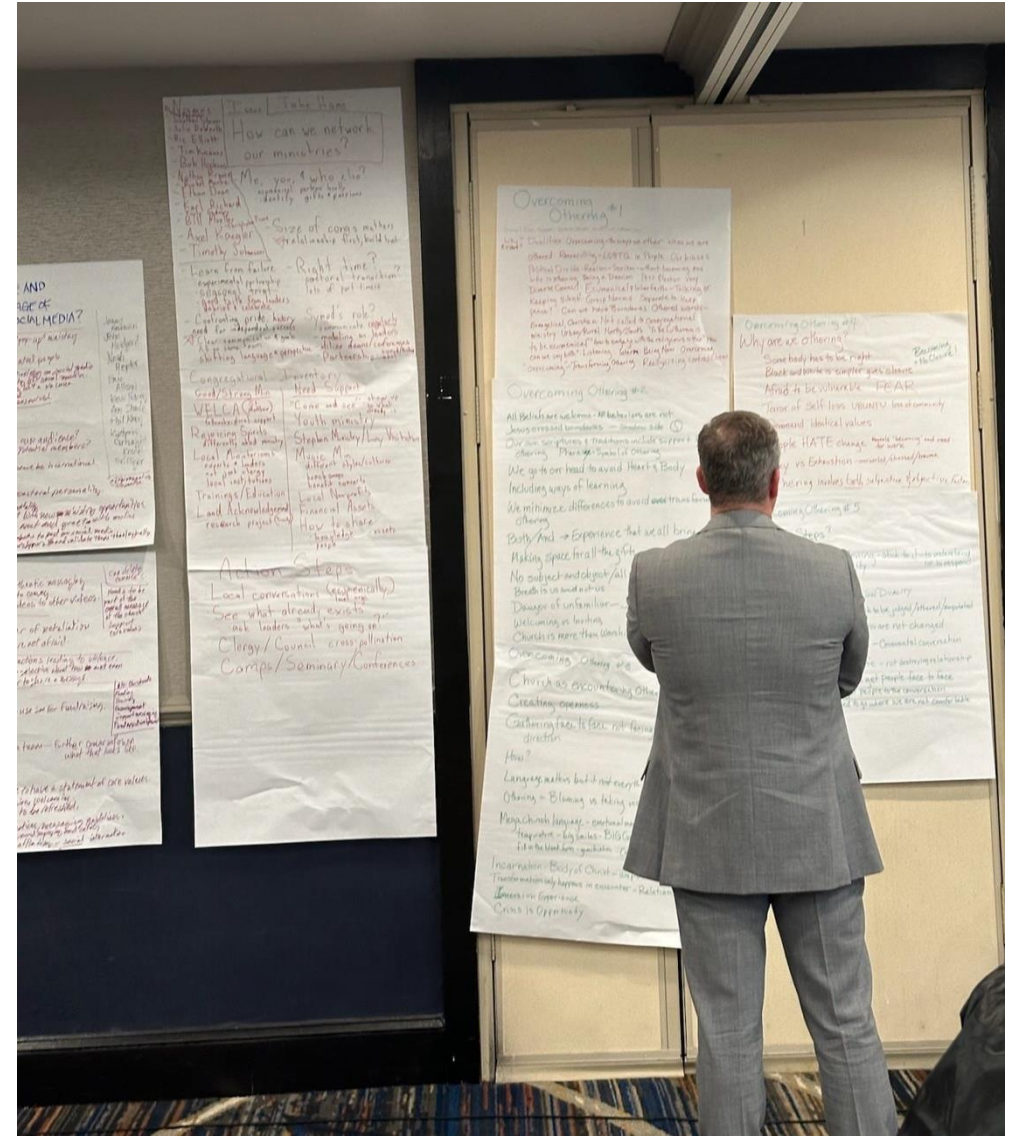
# Future Transitions

will Foster  
Adaptability  
and Flexibility



# Future Transitions

will Strengthen  
Leadership and  
Collaboration



# Future Transitions

Sets the stage  
for Long-Term  
Sustainability



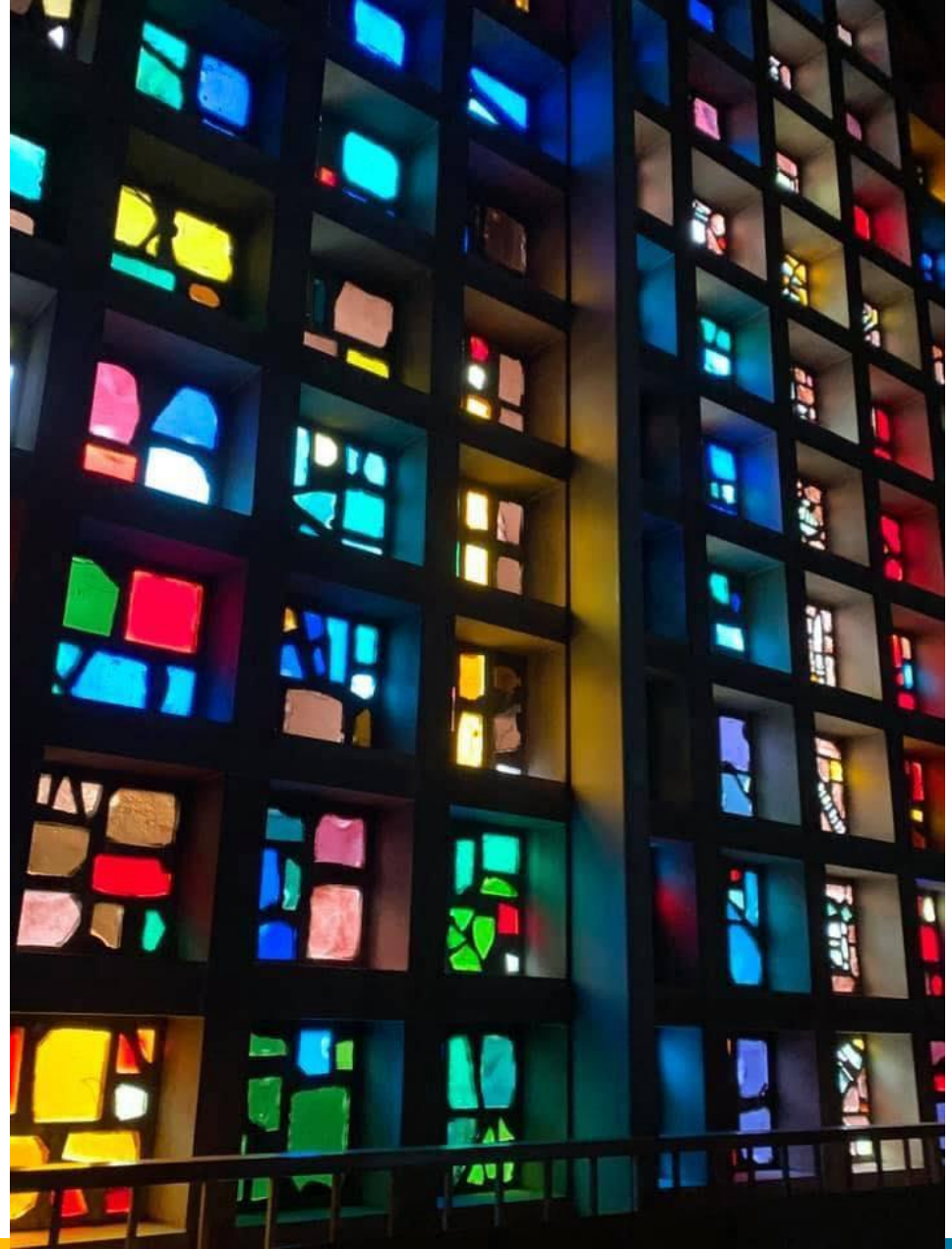
# Future Transitions

Incites Opportunities  
for Growth and  
Innovation



# Future Transitions

turn transitions  
into new  
beginnings



# For More Information

Email Pastor Karen Sease  
Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations  
[ksease@sepa.org](mailto:ksease@sepa.org)

Join us for an informational session  
Monday, July 14 at 7:00pm  
or Tuesday, July 15 at 12:00pm  
See upcoming MinistryLink emails for Registration

