THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE of SOUTH DAKOTA

Rooted and Rising: Diocesan Monthly Update

Faith in Action • Love Without Limits • Disciples in Action

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SECOND-QUARTER REPORT · SPRING 2026

Faith in Action, Love Without Limits

Stories from Across the Diocese of South Dakota

Across the Diocese of South Dakota, the first three months of 2026 were marked not by spectacle but by the steady ministry of faithful people doing Christ's work in their neighborhoods. Fifteen congregations stretching from the Black Hills to Standing Rock, from Spearfish to Sioux Falls, responded to this quarter's check-in, and what they shared paints a remarkable picture of a diocese rooted in love, leaning on one another, and finding that God's presence often shines most brightly in the smallest acts of care.

Rooted in Love, Open to All

Again and again, respondents named love as the defining word of this season. The Rev. Evelyn Weaver of St. James, Belle Fourche, answered in a single word what her congregation is becoming in Christ: "love." At St. Paul's, Brookings, the Rev. Ramona Hayes described a congregation imagined as a tree — reflected in their new tagline, **"Rooted in Love, Open to All."** The Rev. Mike Newago of Christ Church, Yankton, offered a tender image of his parish becoming "a mother hen who is supporting, protecting, and feeding her chicks."

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> *With God all things are possible. That's the faithfulness I am encountering all over the Diocese.*
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> — The Rev. Dr. Lauren R. Stanley, Canon to the Ordinary

Love Without Limits

Some of the most moving reports came in response to the question: *Where have you seen love without limits — a moment of pure grace, compassion, or hope?*

At Calvary Cathedral in Sioux Falls, the Very Rev. Ward Simpson reported that "a newer member at our church

took communion and is getting baptized after being judged at their previous church for being LGBTQ+." The Cathedral's Foyer groups — small dining circles of six to eight members — are helping new families feel at home, and the downtown congregation rallied food, services, and donations during the recent government shutdown to sustain neighbors caught by the gap in SNAP benefits.

At St. Andrew's in Rapid City, Debbie Renner and Deacon Marty Garwood described parishioners who take turns driving a long-time member from memory care so she can still be part of Sunday worship. At Trinity Church in Watertown, the Rev. Larry Ort wrote of providing emergency short-term housing and welcoming "the recent attendance of a young person for whom we have been praying." In Madison, Michele Keppen of Grace Episcopal Church shared how members jump-started a young woman's car, put air in her tire, and offered to drive her to counseling when she is ready, while neighbors rotated through the hospital to visit a parishioner in short, faithful shifts.

And at West Hills Village in Rapid City, Deacon Tom Regan described how seniors "quietly attend to one another's needs, listening without judgment, offering comfort in grief, sharing joy in good days, and walking beside one another in sickness and in health."

Sharing Christ's Light in the Community

Outreach this quarter looked like clothing closets, sock ministries, food pantries, and shared meals. Trinity, Watertown, runs a Blessing Box that has begun drawing donations from community members themselves, along with a sock ministry and free clothing distribution. St. Luke, Hot Springs, continues to open its hall to Native American neighbors and deliver meals to the homebound; parishioners there are still talking about the return of Lessons and Carols in December and Bishop Jonathan's Easter sermon.

In Sturgis, St. Thomas joined five or six area churches for the Good Friday Cross Walk — a wooden cross carried from church to church through the cold and snow. In Brookings, St. Paul's held a community-wide Service of Lament in January following the murder of Alex Pretti — what the Rev. Ramona Hayes described as "a holiness and peace in this gathering of our community." At St. Andrew's, Rapid City, the parish hall hosts an NA group and the local school, and parishioners have shown up at area demonstrations "as a witness for God's justice and mercy."

Grace, Madison, marked a particularly joyful moment hosting a St. Patrick's Day service featuring the Contae Lach Irish band. Michele Keppen shared this note from a Presbyterian/Lutheran visitor: "We had a wonderful time at the Episcopal Church today!! James and the Contae Lach band were such an asset! I don't know when I have ever come home from church saying it was a fun time!!!"

At St. Mary's & Our Blessed Redeemer in Flandreau, Margo Zephier and Elizabetta James described a congregation leaning into justice-oriented hospitality, opening its space to recovery groups, hosting ICE observer training, and supporting immigrants and workers. At St. James, Enemy Swim (Sisseton Mission), Robin Bowen offered a simple and powerful summary of her congregation's witness: "No one goes without food, water, or prayer."

Faithfulness as the Word of the Quarter

If one theme bound these reports together, it was faithfulness — the kind that shows up again and again when no one is watching. At Christ Church, Milbank, the Rev. Larry Ort put it plainly: "We are still here, and we are enjoying our fellowship with Trinity-Watertown." At Trinity, Pierre, the Rev. Mercy Hobbs gave thanks for "leadership happening without me as the rector asking them to do it." Adults are stepping up to lead Bible study and confirmation classes — "planting seeds and watching them take root and grow."

Canon Lauren Stanley's wide-ranging travelogue offered a diocesan view of this same faithfulness: evangelism at St. John's, Deadwood; determination across the Sisseton Mission; Easter worship celebrated in the new building at Parmelee on the Rosebud West; steady Sunday attendance and community feeding at St. James, Mobridge; and "faithfulness and hard work" from Deacon Marty Garwood in the Covenant Partnership of St. Andrew's and St. Matthew's in Rapid City. "Not everything is working out as planned or hoped for," she wrote, "but the people are still trying, still staying faithful."

At St. Andrew's, Rapid City, that faithfulness has a scriptural anchor. After two years without a priest, the congregation is preparing to welcome one again. "We're

not looking for someone to fix us," as Debbie Renner and Marty Garwood put it, "just someone who'll work with us and join the holy work already happening here."

Sacraments and the Wider Life of the Diocese

Baptisms in the responding congregations were relatively few this quarter. Christ Church, Yankton, celebrated one baptism, and Trinity, Watertown, received one new member during Bishop Jonathan's visit. St. Mary's in Flandreau noted two boys joyfully awaiting baptism as soon as their mother has recovered from lung cancer surgery. Canon Lauren Stanley estimated she has celebrated "about three dozen" baptisms across the congregations she visits, a reminder that the life of the Spirit moves across this diocese in ways no single tally can capture.

A Light That Is Not Finished Yet

Taken together, these reports offer a portrait of the Diocese of South Dakota that is steady, resilient, and quietly extraordinary. The people of South Dakota's Episcopal congregations are feeding the hungry, welcoming the weary, walking with the grieving, and showing up, week after week, to let the light of Christ shine in ways both visible and hidden.

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> *Their lives tell the story: God has been good, God has been present, and God is not finished with us yet.*
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> — Deacon Tom Regan, West Hills Village

With gratitude to this quarter's respondents: *Deacon Tom Regan (All Angels, Spearfish / West Hills Village) · The Rev. Evelyn Weaver (St. James, Belle Fourche) · The Rev. Mercy Hobbs (Trinity, Pierre) · Michele Keppen (Grace, Madison) · The Rev. Larry Ort (Trinity, Watertown, and Christ Church, Milbank) · Barbara Ditmanson (St. Luke, Hot Springs) · The Rev. Dr. Lauren R. Stanley (Canon to the Ordinary) · The Rev. Mike Newago (Christ Church, Yankton) · The Rev. Ramona Hayes (St. Paul's, Brookings) · Sarah Nelson and Jill Westendorf (St. Thomas, Sturgis) · Margo Zephier and Elizabetta James (St. Mary's & Our Blessed Redeemer, Flandreau) · Robin Bowen (St. James, Enemy Swim) · The Very Rev. Ward Simpson (Calvary Cathedral, Sioux Falls) · Debbie Renner and the Rev. Marty Garwood, Deacon (St. Andrew's, Rapid City).*

SAVE THE DATE

Come to the Niobrara Convocation

June 25–28, 2026 · St. Michael's, Batesland · Pine Ridge Episcopal Mission

Every summer, from every direction, the people come — from the Black Hills and the river valleys, from Standing Rock and Cheyenne River, from Rosebud and Pine Ridge, from Sioux Falls and Sisseton, from Nebraska and beyond — drawn together by a tradition older than statehood and a faith that has taken deep root in this land. This June, we invite you to join them.

The 2026 Niobrara Convocation will gather **June 25 through 28 at St. Michael's, Batesland,** in the Pine Ridge Episcopal Mission, and all are warmly welcome. Whether you have attended for decades or are coming for the very first time, you will find a circle wide enough to hold you. Directions to St. Michael's, Batesland.

A Tradition Rooted in Sacred Gathering

The Niobrara Convocation is one of the most important events of the Episcopal Church's missionary life in the United States, and among the oldest continuous Christian gatherings in the West. The first Convocation was held October 5–6, 1870, at Santee, Nebraska, when Bishop Clarkson of Nebraska and Dakota called clergy across the Dakota field together to form an Indian Missionary Convocation.

Over more than a century and a half, the Convocation has been honored by visits from Presiding Bishops, government officials, and even President Calvin Coolidge. But its deepest gift has always been its people: Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota Episcopalians and their neighbors, camped together, singing, praying, and feasting in a rhythm that connects Christian worship to an ancient pattern of summer gathering.

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> *The Niobrara Convocation served the same social function as the old Sun Dance, when friends and relatives came together in the summer from all directions.*
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> — Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, *That They May Have Life*

What to Expect

The Convocation weaves worship, fellowship, music, meals, and the business of the Niobrara Council into four unhurried days on the land. Expect prayer, hymn-singing, shared meals, reunions with old friends, and the quiet joy of being together. Bring your voice, your curiosity, and a willingness to simply be present.

What to Bring

As part of our commitment to creation care, some plates and water bottles will be provided, but we would be grateful if attendees would bring a camping chair, their own cutlery and plates, and a reusable water bottle. Also, please bring necrology lists and baptism lists for each mission/church.

Where to Stay

Camping is available on-site at Wakpamni Lake Community Corporation (WLCC), with additional camping offered at Pilgrim's Rest in Martin. Verified site numbers will be published as soon as available. For those who prefer a room, the following motels are holding blocks for Convocation attendees — when you call, ask for the "South Dakota Episcopal Diocese" rate:

Crossroads Motel — Martin, SD · (605) 685-1070 · $140 single / $150 double

Western Sands Motel — 107 US-20, Gordon, NE · (308) 282-1795 · $70 single / $80 double

Jefco Inn — 308 S Cornell St, Gordon, NE · (308) 282-2935 · $85 single / $96 double

❖ SEND A GIFT TO THE 2026 HOSPITALITY FUND

For more than 150 years, the Convocation has thrived because this diocese has opened its hands to feed, shelter, and welcome one another. Every gift helps cover meals, supplies, and hosting.

Make checks payable to:

2026 Niobrara Convocation PREM

Mail to:

Niobrara Convocation 2026

Pine Ridge Episcopal Mission

PO Box 207 · Martin, SD 57551

Memo line: **2026 Niobrara Convocation**

Come and See

Whether you pack a tent, reserve a room, bring a camp chair, or send a check, you are part of this Convocation. Come and see what God has been doing in this circle for more than 150 years, and help carry it forward into another generation. Invite a friend, a family, or a whole congregation. The circle is wide, and there is room for you.

❖ NIOBRARA COUNCIL MEETING

Saturday, April 25, 2026

11:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. CT

Deloria Center

2815 East Sully Avenue · Pierre, SD

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SUMMER CAMP

Thunderhead Registration Is Open

Summer 2026 sessions at TEC — a week rooted in creation, faith, and genuine community.

Thunderhead Episcopal Center's **Summer 2026 sessions** are officially open for registration. Whether your young people are first-time campers or returning veterans of the Thunderhead community, now is the time to get them signed up. Camp is one of the most transformative experiences we offer in this Diocese — a week away from screens, rooted in creation, faith, and genuine community.

Registration is available at thunderheadec.org or via paper form through your congregation. **Campership assistance is available** — no family should hesitate to reach out.

❖ TEC WORK WEEKEND — HELP US GET CAMP READY

Saturday, May 23 – Sunday, May 24, 2026

Thunderhead Episcopal Center

Join us for a weekend of fellowship and service as we ready the camp for summer. **Painters and cleaners are especially needed!** All skills welcome — bring a friend.

FORMATION

Confirmation Video Project

Clergy, lay educators, teachers, and theologians wanted.

We are looking for folks who are interested in participating in a video program for Confirmation preparation. These videos will be shared with all churches to use as a standalone Confirmation program or together with a program of the church's choosing.

The idea is that there will be one video for each topic covered in Confirmation preparation (scripture will be broken into two videos) and each video will be done by a different person, either lay or ordained. If you love any of the standard Confirmation topics and would like to make a video, please reach out to the Rev. Canon Ellen Huber at ellen@episcopalchurchsd.org.

Each video will be accompanied by discussion questions to use as stop-and-discuss points, and will be easily accessible for small or large groups or even individual study. We are so excited to get this program going and into the lives of Confirmands!

BUILDING FUND

Does Your Church Need Repairs? We Can Help.

Celebrating the 2025 grant recipients and inviting new applicants.

We are hard at work giving out grants to help diocesan churches fund much-needed repairs so that our parishioners are safe and able to attend church through the winter months.

We would like to highlight the grants that were approved in 2025 and, more importantly, the dedication and hard work of the following churches:

Building Grants

- St. Julia's, Porcupine — ADA-compliant handicap ramp
- Gethsemane Episcopal Church, Wanblee — ADA-compliant handicap ramp
- Church of the Mediator, Kyle — ADA-compliant handicap ramp
- Church of the Advent, Calico — New roof
- Church of the Holy Comforter, Lower Brule — New sidewalk
- St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Hot Springs — Bat remediation project
- St. John's Episcopal Church, Crow Creek — New front door
- St. John's Episcopal Church, Eagle Butte — New front door
- St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Promise — Repairs to church interior
- St. Katharine's Episcopal Church, Martin — Repair to rectory garage

Triennial Grants for Heating

- St. James Episcopal Church, Enemy Swim — New windows and new boiler
- St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Promise — New windows
- Church of the Holy Comforter, Lower Brule — Insulation
- St. James Episcopal Church, Bear Creek — Repairs to allow electrical connection

As a reminder, **Building Fund Grants** prioritize major issues with roofs, windows, and foundations and pressing safety issues. **Triennial Grants** are for churches who have trouble meeting in the winter because they are unable to — or cannot afford to — heat their church.

HOW TO APPLY FOR A GRANT

Email or snail-mail a copy of a Building Fund Application Form along with supporting documents: specific details outlining why your congregation would be unable to afford the repair without help, a copy of your current year's budget, a copy of your financial report for last year, and the amount (if any) that your congregation has been able to raise toward the repair.

Questions? Call **Maggie Riley**, Canon for Finance and Property, at **605-494-2020** or email maggie@episcopalchurchsd.org. She can email or snail-mail you a copy of the application form.

If you have any trouble with the application, or don't have the requested documentation, please call our office and we can help gather the needed information — we don't want difficulties with the application to keep a church from applying.

IN MEMORIAM

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Craig Anderson

VIII Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of South Dakota

A memorial service for the Rt. Rev. Dr. Craig Anderson will be held at **Calvary Cathedral** on the Feast of the Ascension, **Thursday, May 14, beginning at 10:00 a.m.** Bishop Craig's obituary may be found here.

Please continue to pray for Liz, his wife, and for all members of their family. May his soul, and the souls of all the departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace and rise in glory.

❖ MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Memorial Service for Bishop Craig Anderson

Thursday, May 14, 2026 · 10:00 a.m. CT

Calvary Cathedral — Sioux Falls

RETREAT

Connecting, Creating, Celebrating

A Women Clergy Retreat sponsored by Provinces V and VI · May 31 — June 3

A retreat for Women Clergy will be held May 31 — June 3 at the St. Francis Retreat Center in DeWitt, Michigan (near Lansing; a 90-minute drive from Detroit Airport). This retreat is centered on the experiences of women clergy, and everyone (trans, cis, nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, and more) who feels this is for them is welcome.

With the focus on Connecting, Creating, Celebrating, this retreat is intended to be an open, safe space for women clergy to come together, support one another, learn from each other, and honor the life-giving connections we have with God, each other, our congregations and communities, the world, and the planet.

The cost for the retreat is **$360**, which includes lodging, meals, and retreat material. Financial assistance is available; see provincev.org/wcr26.html or contact Heather Barta at ProvinceVCoordinator@gmail.com or Ellen Bruckner at ebruckner7@gmail.com. Registration is now open.

YOUTH

PYEC in Denver · July 7–11

Empowered Disciple — a provincial gathering for high schoolers.

The Provincial Youth Event in Colorado (PYEC), *Empowered Disciple,* will take place July 7–11 at the University of Denver. The event arose in response to the postponement of the national Episcopal Youth Event (EYE), with Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe encouraging regional gatherings to fill the gap. PYEC will bring high schoolers together for workshops, worship, and fellowship.

The cost to attend is **$550**, and registration is open to rising freshmen through graduated seniors.

Please note that PYEC **overlaps with TEC's High School Week (July 5–10)** — families with high schoolers will want to hold both opportunities in prayer. We would love to have our South Dakota high schoolers at Thunderhead that week, but we fully support those who feel called to the provincial gathering.

Learn more: episcopalcolorado.org/…/pyec. Questions to Missioner Elizabeth Cervasio at elizabeth@episcopalcolorado.org.

A LETTER FROM THE CANON FOR CREATION CARE

"This Fragile Earth, Our Island Home"

— BCP, Eucharistic Prayer C

Dear Fellow South Dakota Episcopalians,

As Canon for Creation Care for the Diocese of South Dakota, I'm writing with a simple offer: **if your congregation would like help thinking about creation care, please let me know.** I'm available to consult (for free!) on the phone or online, and I'm also willing to make a visit to meet with your congregation.

My full-time job is teaching, so I'm not always available for travel, but I can often make time for a phone call with a vestry meeting, with junior wardens, or with others who want some help thinking about how to care for the

land that is in our stewardship, and all our relations who dwell on, in, or above the land.

Some of the things I can help you with include education for your congregation and your community; building church gardens that don't require much care and that can produce food for our neighbors; thinking about better use of water and energy in our buildings and landscapes; helping our communities and our state develop better policies on soil and water conservation; and collaboration with other organizations to get more done.

I would also love to hear about the things you've already been doing, and to share that news with other congregations. Send me a note — and share some photos if you can!

Just to let you know, I don't plan to tell any of you what you must do, and I won't do the work for you. But I'm glad to share ideas and my expertise, to point you to resources, and to connect you with others who have similar projects in mind.

With joy in all God's creation,

Dave O'Hara, Canon for Creation Care

Professor of Christian Values, Environmental Studies, and Sustainability — Augustana University

dr.dlohara@gmail.com

Resources on Creation Care

Some background from the last few General Conventions. In 2022, **Resolution A087** urged all dioceses to work toward wasting less energy and taking better care of all our neighbors and all of creation. Among other things, the Resolution requested the diocesan bishops of every diocese…

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> *…to begin to build networks of landowners and creation trustees in each diocese who will devote portions of their land to reforestation, prairie restoration, wetland and coastland preservation; adopt and share regenerative agricultural and ranching practices; collaborate with neighboring dioceses for best water practices to protect our watersheds; collaborate on creative means of distributing food; and pray for future generations dependent on the land and water we steward.*

Last year in Louisville, it was further resolved that

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> *…the 81st General Convention urge and equip bishops and dioceses to work together in this triennium to form three new regional networks, to be called 'Eco-Region Creation Networks', based on shared ecosystems and watersheds… including the pilot Episcopal Grasslands Network (Kansas, Western Kansas, Nebraska, Northwest Texas, South Dakota, North Dakota, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana).*



Prairie Smoke · Geum triflorum · Paha Sapa

I sketched this at Thunderhead Episcopal Camp two summers ago. Come join us at camp this summer and I'll gladly teach anyone how to sketch flowers, and where to find them!

Further reading: Episcopal Church Creation Care · Bishops Pass 3 Creation Care Resolutions (ENS) · Map Your Church.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

The Jol Wo Lieech (JWL) Youth Ministry Conference

San Diego, California · 2026

Articulated by the Rev. Abraham Dot P. Kok, Vicar, Church of Holy Apostles & JWL Supervisor in the United States



JWL Youth Conference delegates in downtown San Diego, California.

Part I · The JWL Background

The JWL Ministry, primarily associated with the Episcopal Church of South Sudan, is a Dinka Christian song and prayer ministry aimed at fostering faith, peace, and unity through music and worship among the Dinka people. was established in 1989, a pivotal year that marked a significant turning point in the spiritual landscape of the Episcopal Diocese of Bor. It emerged during a challenging period of conflict, designed to act as a beacon of hope, spiritual nourishment, and structural stability for the Anglican community within the region. This initiative was not merely administrative; it was a deep, faith-rooted response to the needs of the church during the tumultuous Second Sudanese Civil War.

The ministry was founded and steered under the visionary leadership of the late Bishop Emeritus Nathaniel Garang Anyieth, who was consecrated in 1984 as the first Diocesan Bishop of Bor. Known as 'the Lost Bishop' and a staunch liberation icon, Bishop Nathaniel brought a unique blend of prophetic ministry and practical evangelism to his flock. His approach to ministry, which directly shaped the JWL initiative, was deeply ingrained with a commitment to providing both spiritual guidance and physical encouragement to displaced communities.

At its core, the JWL ministry was passionately rooted in faith and the Great Commission to make disciples. Bishop Nathaniel's strategy was to strengthen the faith of believers amidst extreme adversity, ensuring that traditional beliefs did not take root in the absence of spiritual leadership. This required a proactive approach to spreading the Gospel across Jonglei State, particularly

through the campaigns in the former Bor District, encouraging communities to fully embrace Christianity.

The context of 1989, when the ministry took shape, was characterized by displacement, conflict, and immense societal challenges. The ministry became crucial for providing spiritual support to displaced civilians and members of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), offering comfort to those who were regarded as the voiceless during their hardest moments. JWL functioned as part of the broader evangelistic effort that saw the church grow exponentially even as traditional life was disrupted by war.

A defining characteristic of the JWL background was its dual purpose as an evangelical campaign and an educational powerhouse, effectively functioning as a seminary training center for the church leaders of the Diocese of Bor. Recognizing that traditional seminary training was impossible in the war zone, Bishop Nathaniel created this in-house structure to equip lay leaders, pastors, and evangelists with the necessary theological knowledge to lead communities.

The training provided through JWL was highly practical and contextually relevant, designed for bi-vocational ministers and leaders who were actively engaging in ministry on the frontlines. The goal was to build a stronger understanding of biblical knowledge, theology, pastoral care, and church polity — empowering local leaders in rural areas who needed a robust theological foundation to continue serving their churches effectively without leaving their congregations.

By creating a certificate-type learning atmosphere, the ministry allowed for the rapid training of local leaders who were desperately needed to lead congregational worship, handle pastoral care, and teach in displaced camps. The JWL ministry played a significant role in spreading the Gospel throughout South Sudan, expanding the church from the Malek area — where the Anglican mission first landed in 1905 — into a vibrant, indigenous-led movement.

Part II · Establishment of JWL Youth Ministry in the United States



JWL clergy at the altar during the San Diego conference.

The establishment of the JWL Youth Ministry in the United States arose from a critical realization among dedicated members that the future vitality of the church depends heavily on the active engagement and spiritual formation of young people. Recognizing that youth are not merely the future leaders of the church but active participants in the present, members felt a pressing need to move beyond traditional youth programming and establish a ministry that cultivates deep, lasting faith.

An essential force in this development was the collaboration with **Bishop Susan Brown of the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego**, whose leadership and vision helped shepherd the initiative from concept to reality. Bishop Brown, known for her dedication to church planting and revitalization, supported the establishment of the JWL Youth Ministry as a crucial component of her commitment to growing the church in California and beyond.

The initial phase involved the formation of an interim leadership team, composed of passionate lay members and clergy dedicated to the vision. Their early work focused on building a sustainable structure, developing curricula, and establishing relationships with families to ensure the ministry's reach and effectiveness.

This interim leadership demonstrated exceptional initiative, pioneering new approaches to youth engagement that aligned with the JWL mission of strengthening Christ's mission. By coordinating efforts across diverse Christian communities, the team began

the essential work of outreach and connection, creating a supportive network for young leaders to grow in their faith, engage in leadership development, and interact with peers in meaningful ways.

A key highlight in the establishment phase was the active partnership and hospitality provided by local congregations, notably **St. Luke's Church and St. Bartholomew Church** in California, within the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego. These parishes offered their resources and spaces, providing a welcoming environment for youth gatherings and the development of the ministry's programs, which was vital for the early success of the initiative.

The Comprehensive JWL Youth Ministry announced the election of its inaugural leadership team in the United States, marking a significant milestone in its organizational maturity and setting the stage for long-term growth and impact. Under this new leadership and the support of the Diocese of San Diego, the ministry was positioned to continue building its foundational work, fostering a culture of mentorship and faith-led leadership development that empowers young individuals to become effective, Christ-centered leaders.

Part III · Faith and Ministerial Obligations

The foundational rootedness of modern ministry in the United States lies in a profound, active faith in God, serving as the cornerstone for establishing a resilient, mission-driven community. This faith is not merely a passive belief but a dynamic, motivating force that drives the ministry to extend its obligations toward serving a broken world through the love of Christ.

As an established interdenominational ministry, the organization embraces a diverse approach to spiritual life, breaking down barriers and reaching across traditional denominational lines to foster unity and purpose. This structure allows the ministry to be a welcoming space for all people, emphasizing a relational ministry that honors God while serving the needs of the surrounding neighborhood.



Women leaders of the JWL Youth Conference.

A vital component of this mission is the inclusion of American young people, recognizing that the future of the faith rests on nurturing the spiritual growth of the next generation. The ministry is committed to providing a safe, authentic environment where youth can freely explore their faith, share their questions, and build lasting, positive relationships with both peers and mentors.

St. Luke's Church in San Diego exemplifies this commitment by acting as a vibrant, welcoming community that actively ordains and empowers new members to take on leadership roles. The ordination process at St. Luke's is not just about filling positions; it is a spiritual recognition of calling, empowering individuals to serve Christ through the church's diverse ministries.

Recognizing that the Body of Christ is diverse, the ministry is dedicated to including, celebrating, and integrating diverse communities into the very heart of its journey. This, as observed in St. Luke's North Park, involves a commitment to radical hospitality, bringing together individuals from different races, cultural backgrounds, and life circumstances.

Part IV · The Future of Church Youth Leadership

The future of young people within the church across the United States, particularly among diverse immigration communities, presents an alarming landscape that demands urgent attention and strategic reimagining of ministry models. Research indicates a significant rise in religiously unaffiliated individuals among younger generations, with Gen Z women leading a departure from traditional faith structures that is unprecedented in recent history.

As older immigrants and church leaders struggle with assimilation, language barriers, and generational gaps, the silenced second generation often feels caught in the middle, facing immense pressure to conform to traditionalism while navigating an increasingly secularized American culture. This creates a vacuum where young people find it harder to relate to the church, leading to a potential decline in faith transmission.

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> *The future of the church is not dead, but it must be reborn through a new generation that is fully invested and empowered to live out the gospel in their own unique way.*

To confront this crisis, churches must move beyond simply attempting to retain youth through attractional, program-driven approaches and instead embrace a deeply relational and incarnational ministry. The data suggests that young people are not necessarily opposed to spirituality, but they are increasingly searching for authenticity and relevance over mere tradition. A successful future requires shifting from a ‘bring them back’ mindset to an ‘empower them forward’ approach, recognizing that second-generation immigrant youth are uniquely positioned as bridges between cultures.

A crucial element in addressing this trend is the intentional, strategic partnership between local churches, denominational institutions, and parachurch organizations. The complexity of modern immigration, combined with the pressures of urban or suburban environments, often exceeds the capabilities of a single congregation. Collaborating with non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and other churches allows for a pooling of resources — including ESL classes, legal assistance for immigration, and specialized mental health support.

The mission of this collaborative ministry should be explicitly evangelical, centered on bringing youth back to a vibrant, personal, and lived-out faith rather than merely engaging them in terminology or superficial activities. Evangelism in this context involves sharing the gospel through the lens of community and solidarity, particularly among immigrant families who may be facing anxiety and vulnerability regarding their status.

Churches must actively dismantle the silent divergence where first-generation immigrant leaders hold on too tightly to power and tradition. The future church requires a leadership structure that is intergenerational, fostering an environment where young people feel safe asking difficult questions and taking initiative.

This ministry cooperation necessitates a shift toward gospel-advancing models that emphasize making disciples, rather than just hosting events. By partnering with organizations that specialize in training student-led teams, churches can empower young people to lead on-campus outreaches and grow movements within their own schools and neighborhoods. This approach fosters ownership, making the faith their own rather than something inherited and imposed.

Ultimately, the goal is to equip these young people as future leaders by offering them concrete opportunities for leadership and ministry rather than merely observing them from afar. This means integrating them into the core, decision-making bodies of the church, allowing their innovative ideas to shape the church’s vision.

Part V · A Partnership with San Diego & South Dakota



JWL Youth Conference attendees in San Diego.

The ministry has taken a significant, proactive step to foster deeper, sustainable relationships with key institutions led by **the Rt. Rev. Dr. Susan Brown** and **the Rt. Rev. Dr. Jonathan Folts**, signaling a strategic shift towards collaborative growth and community engagement. By establishing these formal connections, the leadership aims to bridge the gap between

institutional resources and the spiritual, vocational, and educational needs of the younger generation.

To spearhead this vital initiative, the ministry has entrusted the stewardship of these new relationships to two dedicated reverends. **Rev. Abraham Dot P. Kok**, serving as Supervisor, brings extensive spiritual experience in community building and administrative oversight. Accompanying him is **Rev. Isaiah Thon Dau**, appointed as Director for Mission and Evangelism, who provides strategic direction for the spiritual aspects of this partnership.

The initiative is strongly supported by the Chairperson of the Organization, **Eng. Abit Abuoi Akoi**, and his deputy, **Evangelist John Deng Awai**, who have emphasized the importance of fostering these relationships for long-term impact. Their leadership philosophy centers on empowering the next generation, treating this partnership not just as a task, but as a crucial legacy project.

The entire leadership team has enthusiastically embraced this initiative, recognizing it as a transformative opportunity to nurture the next generation of leaders. A central focus of this partnership is the holistic nurturing of the next generation, providing mentorship, spiritual guidance, and ethical grounding. The partnership is designed to provide practical support systems including mentorship programs, educational resources, and spiritual counseling.

Ultimately, this bold initiative reflects a deep commitment to sustainable ministry. The long-term vision is to establish a robust foundation for future generations, fostering a community that is deeply rooted in faith, highly educated, and ethically sound. The passion behind this initiative promises to leave a lasting, positive impact on the community for years to come.

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❖ MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Episcopal Church Women Meeting

Trinity Episcopal Church

408 North Jefferson Avenue, Pierre

12:00 PM CT In-person Lunch

12 PM MT / 1 PM CT Zoom Meeting

❖ MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Standing Committee Meeting

Via Zoom

May 14, 2026

5:00 PM MT / 6:00 PM CT

❖ MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Diocesan Council Meeting

Via Zoom

May 16, 2026

9:00 AM –11 AM MT / 10:00 AM–12PM CT

❖ MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Thunderhead Committee Meeting

At Thunderhead Episcopal Center, Lead

May 22, 2026

5:30 PM Dinner / Meeting Afterwards

Recent Photos

A look back at recent gatherings, visitations, and celebrations from across the Diocese.



Newest Episcopalians at Good Shepherd, Sioux Falls · February 22, 2026



Winter Talk Conference — Albuquerque, New Mexico · February 26 – March 1



Clergy Day with Lay Leadership on Discernment · *March 4, 2026*



Bishop's Visitation at St. Mary's & Our Blessed Redeemer, Flandreau · *March 8, 2026*



Palm Sunday Service at St. James, Belle Fourche · *March 29, 2026*



Fr. Robin Pierre, Christ Church, Lead — Preparing for Good Friday (that's snow, not fuzz!) · *April 3, 2026*



Easter Sunday at St. Luke's, Hot Springs · *April 5, 2026*



Visitation at Christ Church, Lead · *April 19, 2026*

SAVE THE DATES

April / May Diocesan Events

Click for the full online diocesan calendar.

APRIL 2026

4/23	"Faith in Action, Love Without Limits" Zoom Meeting — 9:00 AM MT / 10:00 AM CT
4/25	Niobrara Council Meeting — Deloria Center, 11:00 AM CT
4/26	Bishop's Visitation at St. Paul's, Vermillion
4/27–30	Diocesan Clergy Retreat — Blue Mountain Abbey
4/30	NO Clergy Zoom Meeting (due to Clergy Retreat)

MAY 2026

5/2–3	Bishop's Visitation to Rosebud Episcopal Mission East
5/7	Clergy Zoom Meeting — 9:00 AM MT / 10:00 AM CT
5/10	Bishop's Visitation at All Angels, Spearfish
5/13	Diocesan Staff Meeting via Zoom — 9:00–11 MT / 10:00–12 CT
5/14	Bishop Craig Anderson's Memorial Service at Calvary Cathedral — 10:00 AM CT
5/14	Standing Committee Meeting — 5:00 PM MT / 6:00 PM CT
5/16	Diocesan Council Meeting via Zoom — 9:00–11 MT / 10:00–12 CT
5/17	Bishop's Visitation at St. Mary's, Mitchell
5/22	TEC Committee Mtg at Thunderhead Episcopal Center— 5:30 PM Dinner, Mtg. Afterwards
5/23–24	Thunderhead Episcopal Center (TEC) Work Weekend at TEC
5/25	Diocesan Office Closed for Memorial Day
5/28	Episcopal Church Women's Meeting @ Trinity, Pierre — 12:00 PM CT in-person lunch / 12 PM MT / 1 PM CT Zoom
5/31	Bishop's Visitation at Christ Church, Red Shirt Table / St. John's, Oglala

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF SOUTH DAKOTA

Faith in Action ❖ Love Without Limits ❖ Disciples in Action

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