

The Vocation of First Call Congregations
Case Study Report
St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Stevensville, Michigan
Site Visit: June, 2007
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“Called to Serve Together”

Introduction

The gardens and lawn of St. Luke's church were lush and inviting as I arrived on a Friday afternoon in June to spend a weekend with the people of this faith community. Outdoor activities have a welcome home in the expanse of property on a main street in Stevensville, Michigan – I could imagine picnics, games, worship, and other events in the large back yard. The front of the property has a well-maintained parking lot, and a prominent sign out front included the name of our project and this researcher. The doors into the building were propped wide open, with a gentle breeze blowing through the hall. The pastor, Krehl Stringer, met me with a broad smile and a big hug. Our past relationship as co-workers at the ELCA churchwide office meant that this reunion was a happy one.

Congregation History and Context

St Luke's Lutheran Church is a congregation set in a small town of 35,000 just south of the larger St. Joseph/Benton Harbor (170,000) area of Michigan. Less than two hours from Chicago on the edge of Lake Michigan, it has both a suburban and summer resort feel to the area.

St. Luke's was chartered as a congregation in September 1964. This congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is one that proclaims with this mission statement:

St. Luke's Lutheran Church accepts Jesus Christ as our savior and guide. Our mission is to glorify God, spread God's Word, and do God's work by ministering to All of God's people through worship, fellowship, education, and outreach. We strive to be an open, loving, sharing, and forgiving congregation, alive and growing in God's love.

The invitation to worship that has been distributed in the community includes the following description:

St. Luke's is a congregation where you're united in spirituality, diversity, and care for one another. Working with other denominations in the community, St. Luke's helps to meet the needs of the disadvantaged.

The St. Luke's building sits on a large piece of property with many well-established trees and some pleasant gardens. The building itself is modest for the size of the property. It is visible from the street but seems nestled into the property without attracting attention.



The brick building was built in 1968, just four years after the congregation was established. An addition was added in 1989, expanding the sanctuary and adding several classrooms and a basement fellowship area. The offices are airy and pleasant. The sanctuary is reminiscent of a ship in its architecture. The low ceiling limits the acoustic capacity of the space, but an organ and baby grand piano provide musical accompaniment.

The sign that sits at the edge of the property, along Cleveland Avenue, is used for information about the activities of the life of this congregation. According to the pastor, it provides a glimpse of what is going on through notices, sermon titles or other announcements. The grounds are neat and well-maintained. The large lawn is mowed by volunteers and the ample parking lot is kept clear of snow in the winter by a member who plows it after each snowfall. A janitor spends each Saturday cleaning the entire building, as he has done for 12 years.

Pastor Krehl Stringer invited Barb P., a member of St. Luke's, to be the contact person for this project. Barb and I communicated well through email and phone calls. She and Pastor Stringer consulted about how to best provide insight into St. Luke's in light of its extensive experience with first call pastors. In its 43 year history St. Luke's has had about ten pastors, most of whom have been new to public ministry. A large packet of materials about the congregation provided information about leadership, committee efforts, projects and congregational life. With many corporate managers in the congregation, documents are thorough and informative. The congregation has a current budget of \$189,000, with more than 17% designated for benevolence giving. There were 25 Thanksgiving baskets prepared in 2006 and 57 names for the Angel Tree at Christmas. The mission and ministry of this congregation are clear and intentional. People of this faith community know what this congregation is about in its ministry.

Friday evening I was treated to discovering the context of this congregation with Jim and Lois, who are long time members of St. Luke's. Lois spoke of how the church meant so

much to her...her children were baptized there, her first husband was supported and carried through to his death in this community.

We began our tour at Taylor Rental, the business owned by Jim and Lois. They supply party and equipment needs for the Benton Harbor area from an 8000 square foot building. We then headed to Dank, a German-American Hall where a fish dinner is served the first Friday of each month. We joined friends and were seated in a hall full of 300 people eating German potato salad, cole slaw, and tasty fried fish. There was a German band and a large dancing floor. What an introduction!

After dinner Jim and Lois drove around the area to show me the highlights. Whirlpool is the primary and largest business in the area. This congregation has many members who are employed there. Their buildings are significant in the landscape. Benton Harbor, St. Joseph and Stevensville all run together as they hug the shoreline of Lake Michigan. We stopped at the beach and also parked the car to walk in downtown St. Joe, where there is a lovely harbor and a small shopping area. Ice cream was a welcome treat from the local parlor. Jim and Lois seemed to know many people who stopped to greet them. We greeted another local pastor as well as several members of St. Luke's whom we encountered in our evening outing.

Call Process Experience

St. Luke's has extensive call process experience in its 40 year history. I spoke with Ruth who is a charter member of the congregation. Her husband was the first council president. They raised four children in this church. Ruth brought wisdom and clarity to my understanding of this faith community and its leadership. Her review of the pastors who have served was insightful.

Ruth remembers the "industrious" pastor who served so well. She recalls the pastor who has now returned to the community in his retirement, suggesting his appreciation for this congregation. One short term first call "was not particularly good," she told me. Ruth valued another pastor who stayed five years and did a good job building the congregation. The pastor who followed, and stayed ten years, "had a good read on people." Ruth commented "We didn't have to train him." She remembers the woman pastor as bringing a new perspective and spoke kindly of her.

The placement and call process requires close communication with the synod, which provides names of potential candidates. The congregation has experienced stress as this process has repeated itself over the years. They have had difficulty in receiving timely support, but the process has indeed provided for their pastoral needs.

Tom, another church leader, reflected on how the synod has a responsibility to prepare candidates for the community and its expectations of a pastor. He commented "We need to put everything on the table and do it on the front end" with good communication. Some other leaders expressed frustration with the synod and the call process. The

Council takes a business approach, calm, reasoned, and open in communication as they discern the emerging “fit” of a new pastor. Tom described the synod’s approach as “archaic” and commented that 90% of the process is “focus.” They were particularly frustrated at how long a candidate took to respond to their call

Congregation Issues and Identity

This congregation is characterized by several primary issues:

- 1. Stability and identity in light of transition and conflict**
- 2. Vocational Identity - extensive program and outreach with limited resources**
- 3. Clear expectations - a strong sense of God’s mission**
- 4. Worship Life - energy for the ministry of St. Luke’s**
- 5. Generosity in giving....through St. Luke’s and beyond**

Barb P., coordinator for the case study site visit, is the congregation council secretary. She has become more involved since her recent retirement from Whirlpool as a leader in Change Management. She previously served as chair of the Outreach Committee. Barb commented that they had waited for a pastor to come and “tell us what to do. But now he has arrived, and he is asking us ‘What is God telling us? Where do we go as we follow the call of God in this community?’ We are encouraged to think, to be thoughtful”. She stated that she thinks the questions are timely and appropriate. She was attracted to the congregation about ten years ago by its hospitality and welcome....a theme I was to hear again and again. Barb was raised Catholic, then lapsed, and later joined a Congregational church. Her husband is a retired social worker. Barb was on the call committee for the previous pastor, also a first call pastor, and the first woman who was called to serve here. That pastor stayed three years and left under stressful circumstances which will be addressed in sections following.

The congregation consists of primarily middle management, middle income level families. Giving is strong among the 176 baptized members. One member told me that there was “a long period of bleeding” when many families left, so attendance statistics are much more modest than a few years ago. Currently the average attendance is 63 people, compared to 100 per Sunday just ten years ago. Three other ELCA congregations are within a few miles of St. Luke’s. One church leader commented that he thinks there are too many congregations here. One church was established just four or five years ago as an LCMS congregation split and the pastor changed to the ELCA with this new congregation. A Baptist church is down Cleveland Street a short distance, and other congregations are nearby as well.

1. Stability and Identity in Light of Transition and Conflict

The congregation has a purposing statement as well as a mission statement. The leaders of St. Luke’s seek to claim their identity as a congregation. Church documents suggest that regular attention is given by the Council to strategic planning and possibilities for

ministry. A Council retreat was held early in 2007 “to establish goals for the year and become familiar with procedures required for the business of St. Luke’s to run smoothly” (Congregational President report, 2006-7).

The stability of this congregation might be surprising in light of the transition and conflict that have impacted this community. Pastoral leadership has changed every few years – more than what might be typical of an ELCA congregation. With First Call pastors as the likely candidates for call, and some extended periods of vacancy, congregation members have relied on their own experience to provide consistency in program and outreach. Members themselves seem to know who they are and documents reflect what is essential to how they function:

- the grounding of Lutheran values
- worship as primary
- welcome and outreach

One person commented: “We have some strong leader personalities in our congregation, and change is not always easy. But communication is important - both before and after change.” She also told me that these leaders have taken ownership in the congregation, particularly in the interim periods.

Wayne and Joan have both been on Council and worked with outreach and in other areas. When Wayne commented on change he said, “There are very few things that can’t be changed if handled well – and not always slowly. We need to honor people’s interests and be aware of who cares about things.” An example he gave was an old, large tree in front of the parking lot where the roots were pushing up the pavement and it needed to be removed. Resistance emerged to that decision, but the issue was resolved in a healthy way.

Significant turmoil in recent years caused many families to leave St. Luke’s. One leader reflected that the congregation went too long in vacancy periods and lost a sense of connection that affected their culture. The issue of people leaving had been building for some time, in his opinion. The membership decline occurred most clearly toward the end of the previous pastor’s ministry at St. Luke’s. Some people stayed away for a while after leaving in discontent but have returned now that community life seems more stable and less toxic. An interim pastor brought stability, strong preaching, and grounding. One person described this “kind man” as a “meat and potatoes” kind of pastor who took his ministry seriously and was willing to stay as long as he was needed. He was beloved by members and helped them through this transition. His experience and patience were helpful, according to one leader.

One leader’s comment about conflict was this: “It’s through the crises that you become connected to each other.” There are many long term members in this congregation who bring a sense of history and stability. They are devoted to sustaining many programs and activities in the congregation. Many leaders also are committed to “change management” and ways of building trust in relationships. They want to determine what is worth keeping and what is valuable in their ministry and build on that. This intentional approach was expressed by many congregation members throughout the visit.

2. Vocational Identity- Extensive program and outreach with limited resources

Bob and Sandy moved to Stevensville from Wisconsin 17 years ago.

Bob was a cheese maker for 35 years, and then sold cars for several years. They have five grown children. Bob is on crutches and unable to drive due to a serious motorcycle accident in September 2005. Sandy has been his caretaker, and also tends to her children's needs, though they are scattered across the country. Bob moved first. He looked for a church, attended another Lutheran congregation, and Sandy and the kids came later. But they never felt really included or connected in that church. They came to St. Luke's and Sandy remembered, "On our first visit, more people talked to me here than a whole year at the other church." Their kids also felt welcomed. Bob said that this place is 'extremely welcoming.' People are warm, friendly, and willing to help. There is a sense that people share their needs or come to the congregation for help when they are aware something is needed. People are consistently open, receptive and responsive. Bob thinks that is what helps new pastors here as well: they encounter willing, helpful people who are considerate of the needs of others.

Bob and Sandy's personal experience reflects the identity of this congregation. As Bob has continued to recover and rehab from his leg injuries, they have been the recipients of much care and attention...visits, meals, time to play cards and "Bob-sit" in the months following the accident. Bob and Sandy took a trip to Las Vegas since the accident, sharing the vacation with another couple from the congregation (the woman had just had knee replacement surgery and was in a battery-charged cart). While they had a good time together, the couple has not been at church since January. Bob and Sandy do not know and haven't gotten an explanation.

Now Bob and Sandy volunteer at a hospital and they also help fold bulletins and assemble newsletters at the church. They served in youth ministry for several years. Sandy organized a trip to Guatemala after the Youth Gathering plans they had made fell through. She approached a member who worked at her office to explore the idea. He suggested she prepare a proposal, so she gathered costs, etc and then went to the council. The Council approved the mission trip and contributed several thousand dollars. Tears came to Sandy's eyes as she shared this amazing story...her courage in pursuing what seemed impossible, a task she did not imagine she could accomplish. They raised \$20,000, half of which went to the orphanage in Guatemala and half to the travel costs of 12 youth, the pastor and chaperones getting there. When the youth came back, one young woman stood in church and announced that they had met a little girl, Rosamaria, who was five years old. She needed parents. After the service a couple in the congregation said they were interested... Nine months later they had adopted Rosamaria. This lingers as the highlight of the trip. In addition, one of the youth has become a pastor, twin boys work in youth ministry, and Bob and Sandy's own son is active in youth work in his congregation.

Joyce and Chuck joined the congregation in 1999. Joyce has been a teacher aide in an elementary school. Chuck worked in computer software, but his business in South Bend

is now an executive search firm and resume resource. They were members at another ELCA congregation for twenty years. It was a small struggling congregation and they finally decided to pursue other churches. They began attending a church near St. Luke's. On Easter Sunday they arrived to find the time had changed for the service. They drove down the road to St. Luke's and attended. They found it friendly and nice and never went anywhere else. The pastor visited soon after, and they became involved. Chuck said there are several significant qualities at St. Luke's:

- a strong foundation of lay people who step up when there is a need
- good interim pastors
- programs that have continued through vacancies

He said "We function pretty efficiently without a pastor, so we need to adjust when a new pastor arrives." He wonders if maybe some people never made that shift when the previous pastor (a woman) arrived. She seemed to not do well with some of the members.

Chuck also expressed his sense that the congregation works with a situation as it emerges. They have learned to be more intentional and open in their identity, particularly about welcoming a new pastor. There is general acceptance and hope with the new pastor. The pastor and family have been included in social activities and effort is made by many to invite them to a variety of occasions.

When asked about community presence, Chuck commented "I think we are a secret."

Chuck and Joyce also reflected on how they think of the building, which is adequate but not built for growth. They thought of how the congregation has diversity in its members with many who have significant financial resources. But the members seem to wait to put improvements into the structure. They are more inclined to do ministry, not to put resources into a beautiful building. This couple thinks the building can be missed by people driving by. But this struggle is one that is grounded in an authentic question of stewardship and a reflection of the people. Perhaps they have not thought about attracting other members through building for growth.

While the core group of lay people in this congregation are clearly committed to faith in action, the extensive programming is rather remarkable compared to other congregations of this size in the ELCA. Major events in 2006 were listed in the annual report as follows:

- Soup kitchen
- Improvements to building
- Council Retreat
- Call Committee
- Five Lenten suppers
- Easter breakfast
- Confirmation
- Ordination service for a member
- Graduate's reception
- June beach service

China missions presentation
VBS
Rally Sunday
Stewardship program and dinner
Christian education
New member reception
Funerals and baptisms

The Sunday worship bulletin has a worship volunteer list that requires 23 people each week. There are three Bible studies and six committee meetings listed for the first week of June and 9 invitations for service. Leaders and members are generous with their time and talent. Yet the outreach position has been vacant for several months and other needs are unfilled.

3. Expectations of Church and Pastor- A strong sense of God's mission

Many individual responses to how God calls this church to be in mission go on quietly through the people of St. Luke's. People here see faith in action as how they live their lives and they practice that in their daily lives.

I spoke with Lois, a long-time member at St. Luke's who has been involved in "everything." She said she has seen many pastors come and then move on. She shared her memories of various pastors in the church's history. Some are now retiring. In fact, one previous pastor had retired from Illinois and came back to this area and joined the congregation. She said that most have gone on to do very well in other places and have had long terms of service.

"Why do you tend to call new pastors"? I asked. She responded, "Mostly because that is what we can afford. We have more than one family or person who assists in getting them started. We are generous in this church, and the new pastors have always been welcomed well. We tell them when things aren't going so well, and provide support as they settle into the community." Lois remembered doing various welcome activities, such as showers, parties, and meals.

Another member commented, "New pastors have a fire inside and want to practice what they have learned in seminary." One Council member stated, "Experienced pastors we interviewed came with different issues. They had their own baggage and expectations. So we went back and we think we can grow together. A first call opportunity seems better for us, but the pastor's training and experience needs to fit with our needs." Another council leader commented that a second career, first call pastor seemed to be a good match for her congregation.

When asked about the idea of being a 'First Call' congregation, Wayne stated that "It's not a label that would be the first I would hang on St. Luke's. Yes, we have had First Call pastors. But we are not a training ground." Still, he recognized that this place is one where people, including new pastors, learn to be in community. They see that a new

pastor can learn to sense what is important and head off conflict as he or she builds relationships with members.

A new pastor is not always sensitive to some issues. The previous pastor was quick-witted and alienated some members who misinterpreted her comments as more serious than she perhaps intended. Wayne and his wife Joan have witnessed the disappointments of people being hurt and misunderstood in this faith community. Still, they are devoted to the congregation and are hopeful for its mission.

Pastor's Story

Krehl Stringer is a second career pastor who was ordained in August 2006 at his home church in St. Charles, Illinois. Several members of the call committee from St. Luke's attended his ordination service. I spoke briefly to them at that time, and they were pleased to be welcoming Pastor Stringer and his family. When the Stringers arrived in Stevensville they were warmly welcomed into the community. A series of events and orientations were arranged by various members of the congregation.

Pastor Stringer brings significant life experience to his service as a pastor in the ELCA. He served in the Navy and had other work experience before he began his theological studies. Krehl's brother is also a pastor and his sister and husband are attending seminary. His call to ordained ministry came in stages as he completed first an MA and then returned to complete an MDiv and accept a call to serve at St. Luke's. During his years in seminary he worked in the churchwide office of the ELCA in Candidacy and Leadership.

Krehl and Meghan hoped to be assigned in the Midwest so that they could be near family in Michigan and Indiana. They waited for several months before being interviewed, and the first congregation they considered did not seem like the right fit theologically for Krehl. When the bishop gave his name to St. Luke's, the call process proceeded well and Krehl began in August of 2006.

Krehl and Meghan have begun adjusting to their new community. The children have done well in their new schools and Meghan feels welcomed. She has pursued her music interests with mixed success at this point. The family has experienced care by many members of the congregation.

Pastor Stringer is establishing his own style of collaborative ministry at St. Luke's. His focus is on relationship building, discernment and mutual uplifting. A portion of his recent newsletter article reflects how he shares his hopes:

Some in our congregation have begun a critical conversation around how a congregation goes about discerning where God is calling it to live out God's love in the world. Undoubtedly, Paul's words about love in 1 Corinthians 13 will warm our embrace of that all-inclusive process with patience, forbearance, and joy. Engaging the Gospel (lit. "God's-speech) through prayer and scripture,

developing specific goals for realizing our Gospel mission, and implementing steps for making God's love a resurrecting reality in people's lives – that's the vision, therein the inspiration congregations have discovered through the centuries! Suddenly, Easter day dawns on us as a resurrecting love embracing all God's children of every time and place. You, too, have a time and place to share in that resurrecting mission of God's love in the world. It's called St. Luke's Lutheran Church!

Pastor Stringer brings his message of good news and mission in every aspect of his ministry. He provides education and information from the wider church and has become involved in community activities that connect him with other church leaders. He provides leadership through his reports to the Congregation Council each month and uses strong communication skills as he affirms ministry among God's people.

Pastor Stringer continues to settle into his new pastoral identity. The congregation has been intentional in welcoming this first time pastor into its life. The council president has met regularly with the pastor – first weekly, but now monthly. She affirmed his potential but also pointed out, “naturally there were some challenges as we began ministry together.” Conversations about professional development have included suggestions about mentoring and coaching in a variety of areas. He has followed up with these ideas and feels well supported for ministry. He describes the congregation as caring, patient, and understanding.

A Mutual Ministry Committee has been established to provide support and assure that the congregation is heard as well as the pastor and that communication lines are open. They meet four times a year.

4. Worship - Energy for the ministry of St. Luke's

Sunday worship began at 9:30 am with announcements by the pastor. After several topics were mentioned, other leaders in the congregation made additional remarks about specific items. One issue of note was a brief report on the facilities task force by Bob, council member, who brought the congregation up to date about their work so far.

All worship resources were printed in the bulletin in larger print, so no hymnals were needed. The bulletin welcomes “all who have come to praise God with us today! May you experience God's love and truth as we worship together.” A guest organist provided music – an organ and a baby grand piano are in the front of the sanctuary. The sanctuary was comfortably full, including children and elderly.

A traditional service included scripture readings, a children's sermon, and a sermon on “The Embrace of Mystery.” Instructions in the bulletin suggest to “stand as you are able” at appropriate times. Holy Communion (with individual or common cup options) was offered to all, as stated in the bulletin: “At St. Luke's, we celebrate an open communion table; all are welcome to come and receive the Real Presence of Christ in the sacrament...Those not receiving communion are invited to come forward for a blessing.”

The nourishing and equipping purposes of worship were accomplished in this service. Weekly worship is central to this church as the source for replenishing and focusing their energy.

5. Congregation Strengths - Generosity in giving....through St. Luke's and beyond

A clear strength of this congregation is its leaders. Council Members: Ed, Bob, Barb D., Barb, Tom, Jane, Bob, Barb P, Rod and a few others spent Saturday morning at a conversation time with this researcher. They were open and enthusiastic in describing this congregation's vitality, mission, and culture.

A lovely breakfast was prepared by various council members - quiche, casserole, fresh fruit and berry buckle (baked by the pastor). A well-equipped kitchen included all Whirlpool appliances. Four of this group were Whirlpool leaders – a major influence in the community and this congregation. This is corporate headquarters, so people are mostly managers rather than blue collar workers. The corporate approach to leadership is reflected in many comments made by the congregation's leadership.

A lively conversation about the congregation highlighted the values and theology of this community. Comments included:

You count.

We've got the best thing – 'saved by grace' – you don't have to do anything.

We don't judge.

We are called to serve.

Faith is everything.

We are an example to others in giving.

Our welcoming way is a response to our grace grounding.

Evangelism is talking about it!

We love one another.

We are kind to one another and appreciate others.

We respond to needs.

An example of this last statement came from Barb. Barb began attending the church a few years ago. She had weight concerns and needed surgery. The insurance would not cover what she needed. The congregation raised funds on her behalf and provided \$15,000 toward her needs. Barb says "I'm alive because of this congregation. They saved my life!" Comments from others were "That's how we became an us" and "We made her president after that!" The sensitivity to needs, both in the larger world and their own community, is a mark of this congregation.

The leadership of this congregation is well-equipped and organized. The current council President, Barb D. was previously on the call committee. As she began her leadership in January, she set two initial goals:

Request all council members to read the constitution

Implement Robert's Rules of Order for meetings

Barb D. also set the tone of the meetings by requesting written reports and brief verbal reports, shortening the meetings. Written reports are extensive and help to maintain the openness and communication desired by church leaders.

A frequently named strength of the congregation is its hospitality. I sensed this as many people greeted me warmly throughout the weekend. The congregation has a program where members contact visitors and bring a home baked treat.

Joan invited Wayne to do a home visit (HBO) with her a few years ago to take a plate of cookies to some visitors. They went to eat afterwards....and fell in love.

They have now been married 11 years. Joan has been at St. Luke's since 1987. She worked for Lutheran Brotherhood and visited many congregations, including LCMS, where she saw different ways of being church. She was drawn to St. Luke's by the people and a sense of it being a caring place. She has been very active, on council, outreach, and other committees. Joan values participating in church life.

Wayne was an LCMS school teacher at a local school for 11 years after growing up in Chicago, where he attended Concordia River Forest. He left teaching and has been training and teaching in colleges since then, always as educator. As he looked for a church in 1993 he found St. Luke's to be open and the kind of place that had what he wanted. Wayne and Joan are two of the members who help to create an intentional environment that is friendly and supportive.

Conclusion

The Sunday afternoon gathering of this congregation provided an opportunity to give some feedback about what I had heard and seen and learned in the congregation. Some of what I said to about 35 gathered members was this:

I have heard the stories of your leadership - charter members still faithful, longtime members who continue to give of their time, talent, and treasure. Newer members who have felt deeply welcomed and integrated into the life of your congregation. Many who have served as leaders in the congregation....council members, committee chair, people who have taught and folded and cooked and mowed and tended and laughed and shared together, who have had courage through pastors, vacancies, in-between times, thriving times and challenging times, times of change and times of need.

A characteristic that stands out among many is your faith in action. You respond to need. You state the need....your own, another member's, the community's, the poor and the hungry. You stand up and speak. And you act. You respond. You take care of the poor and the needy and the new with generous acts of kindness and assistance.

You care about your pastors. You have seen many of them in these forty plus years. At least six of them have been new pastors, just out of seminary, in their First Call, living into their identity as pastor. You have welcomed them, showered them with attention and with love and acceptance. They have benefited...with confidence, with growth, with deepening concern for the needs of the world and of this community. You have been blessed as you have given so freely.

You have been strong. You have brought the lessons and understandings of your corporate experience into this place. You have brought order, and method, and process, and organization to this community. You are searching for the words, the depth, the theology, the understanding of how God is calling you to be in this time and place.

St. Luke's Lutheran Church of Stevensville, Michigan is a community of gathered people of God. These individuals and families share a common belief in God and a hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ that grounds and connects them. They are friendly to one another and to those who visit. They stretch to be welcoming and flexible in how they do ministry.

The congregation considers one aspect of its vocation as that of being a "First Call congregation" as it has come to welcome new pastors and learn together.

St Luke's is intentional in its organization and outreach to identify and live out its vocation as a church of Christ. The congregation worships with meaningful and nourishing practices, beautiful music, and a sense that God is indeed at work in the midst of them. Members and visitors are cared for and loved in this generous and lively congregation. The additional vocation as a first call congregation comes as an emerging gift to this congregation, the synod and the wider church.

To God I give thanks for the ministry and mission of St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Stevensville, Michigan.