

Rev. Matthew V. Moss

Thursday, Feb. 26, 2026

To the members of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church & School,

With this letter I am formally notifying you that I have decided to decline the Divine Call extended to me by Peace Lutheran Church in Rapid City, SD. I will remain your Pastor in Christ. This decision was made with much prayer and conversation in my family. Healthy dialogue was had in our congregation between me and fellow staff members and lay leaders. A Divine Call being extended to one of your Pastors can be a surprising and even troubling thing, but it is part of our "Life Together" in a church body (Synod) that is much larger than our single parish. It is a blessed opportunity to assess where we are at and where we are going. It is a time for serious *re*-commitment. I am earnest and sincere in my desire to stay with you in the Senior Pastor role to which you have Called me, and I hope *you too* will take this time to recommit to St. John's, invigorate yourself for the work we have to do together, and seek ways to get involved.

In fact, I am *more* than earnest and sincere, I am *excited* about all the opportunities I see for this congregation. If I have one criticism it would be that too few of you realize what an amazing and blessed congregation we have! You're *too* humble and self-deprecating. Knock it off. It's not pious. God has given us this wonderful place as a gift, not to be buried in a field, but for full and active use (see "The Parable of the Talents", Matthew 25:14-30). Tell others. Invite them to meet Jesus here in the Means of Grace. You yourself, get more active and involved. I want you to see all the opportunities that I see, and I think you'll get as excited as I am.

St. John's is in a place where we should *re-energize* and *revitalize*. None of us wants to see this blessed Church & School grow stale and old, stultifying ourselves around budgets and bylaws. Of course we need a budget and must follow our Constitution & Bylaws – for goodness' sake, I am our District's *Constitution* Committee chairman and one of the Synod's "Stewardship Presenters" – but that cannot be the extent of our "mission" or "vision". That can't be all we're about and all we do. We have much more to motivate and inspire us as we carry out Christ's Gospel ministry in our community.

Evangelism, Adult Catechism, and New Membership

In reflecting on our current status as a congregation, a lot of our lay leaders noted that we have had several larger-than-average new member classes recently. That is true, but do not take that for granted or assume it will continue on its own with us doing nothing. I will confess that such large classes recently are *mostly* accidental and a true gift from God. Our Board of Spiritual Life has not done any formal evangelism program to achieve that. The marketing efforts of our school have only just started to get rolling. *A few* of the new members are products of that and I look forward to seeing how Tori Kuehne can keep that momentum going, but I would also like to see the congregation become more excited and engaging in the activity of Evangelism.

Before I give you a few more exciting opportunities that I see on our horizon, I want to give my support and endorsement for our Principal and Business Manager. This leadership team- as a team- is still in its infancy. Stephanie has just completed her first year, and Dr. Skura is in her third with us. The three of us together have just started getting into our groove and if we have your support, encouragement, and increased activity and involvement, I think our potential as a Church & School is high!

Expanding to Grades 9 – 12

I have spoken about this often. I will gladly share with anyone who needs it my Fall 2025 Assembly letter and the report from interviewing other churches with schools that have completed this expansion. Just ask. This is not immediate or immanent, but if we can lift our gaze more than five years out, this sort of thing is absolutely within our power if we desire it. Others are talking about it, too. In fact, when I spoke with the Circuit Visitor out in South Dakota about Peace and the local churches, that Pastor brought up that one of their hopes and dreams is starting an LCMS high school in the Rapid City area. We are not crazy to be exploring this option. I'm not going to repeat all my previous analysis here, but I do want you to know I find this opportunity incredibly exciting even though it may be a much longer process and require thorough work to get there.

“What Do You Think about Getting a Vicar?”

I've had a few lay leaders ask me this in recent years. My father-in-law had one recently. Glory of Christ has one this year. I was fortunate enough to go to Oklahoma City in November for the retirement party of my Vicarage Supervisor after 35+ years of service to Trinity Lutheran Church in Norman, OK. I was vicar number 21 in 2010-11, and they are still getting them! Becoming a vicarage congregation is a small, very affordable, but ***exceedingly exciting*** opportunity that we could have as early as the 2027-28 school year. Vicars are in the middle of their seminary training to become pastors and spend a whole year out in the field with a congregation. They bring youthful energy and zeal as well as potential programs and ideas around Bible study or outreach. Our whole congregation and staff (Pastors, Kantor, Principal, etc.) would have a lot to offer these seminarians, year in and year out, and we could certainly benefit from their unique gifts, excitement, and following their career afterwards. Did you know St. John's had a vicar a long time ago...who is now LCMS-Indiana District President? Rev. Rick Stuckwisch.

The Worship at St. John's Is Excellent and We Have the Opportunity to Share It with Others

One board member joked that it was okay if I took the Call to Rapid City, but the Kantor had to stay! I know I am biased, but we are richly blessed by her musical ability! God has also given us a beautiful sanctuary, phenomenal acoustics, and a great pipe organ. Each of us (Pastors and Kantor) have great respect and admiration for what the other two bring to bear in the planning, preparation, and leadership of all the worship services in our year from the largest holidays to the smallest “extra” services and every Divine Service in between. I know I need to take my vacation days, but I ***hate*** missing a Sunday. I really look forward to it every week. I hope you do, too. Don't take it for granted. Don't skip. You never know what will be your last Sunday.

And since this treasure does not *belong* to us- to be kept under lock and key- we have every opportunity and obligation to share it with others. Obviously that includes inviting friends and neighbors who are looking for a real Church in these uncertain, illogical, and demonic times. It also includes being a lifeline, a resource, and encouragement to other faithful pastors and churches who are not as richly blessed as we are. This coming October 19 – 20, 2026, St. John's will be ***hosting*** the LCMS-MN-South District Pastors' Conference. The District plans and operates the Conference but we will be responsible for putting together two worship services for the pastors in attendance. Having been to many of these I can tell you from first-hand experience how painful and frustrating it is when these Conference worship services are done badly; and, conversely, how inspiring, uplifting, edifying, and encouraging it can be for Pastors when these services are done reverently, beautifully, and faithfully.

Get active! We will want your help assisting our District in making this Conference a blessed experience, serving and loving fellow workers in God's Kingdom, sharing from the embarrassment of riches we have been given. You will want to mark those dates and attend the services even if you cannot volunteer and help where needed. If you've never heard *the singing* at a Pastors' Conference, you have no idea what kind of a treat you have in store! I cannot wait to hear 80-100 pastors belting out our strong Lutheran hymns to our organ's accompaniment and in our sanctuary's acoustics!

For Pastor Johnson, Kantor Moss, and myself, we are looking at this opportunity as a test-run for something we have long desired to pull off. We would love to offer up St. John's as a host site for an annual conference for Pastors and Church Musicians to share and learn about worship, liturgy, hymnody, and preaching. Our annual "worship retreats" have been re-energizing and a blessed experience. If we can share our findings and also learn from others, we can keep this snowball rolling, gathering more reverence and excellence with each season of the Church Year.

Slowing Down without Sacrificing Productivity

Lastly, I share a concern more than an opportunity. Multiple leaders expressed concern that I might bum out at the pace I am currently keeping, and I agree. So I want to be clear – I am very, *very* excited about all the above opportunities and more. I love what I get to do here. I can even see ways to stay involved with the above ideas (and more!), but it will not all come from me. It cannot. It should not. God forbid! That is why I repeat (again): I am recommitting here, I need you to do so also- to recommit, revitalize, and get active and involved.

I need to slow down for the benefit of my family. As I had shared on Sunday, February 22nd, I am moving up my Call Decision from March 8th to March 1st so that Katie and I can serve as Baptism Sponsors to our newest nephew on the 8th. We will be back in the Divine Service on March 15th, but I cannot stay for the Congregational Assembly. I know that is unusual, but that is how the scheduling worked out. As a Christmas present, we gave our children tickets to the Minnesota Orchestra's children's concert that day. I know you'll manage fine without me at that meeting. I need to go be "Dad."

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Matthew V. Moss