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# Assembly Speaker

## ELCA Churchwide Representative and Bible Study Leader

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### **Rev. Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl**

**Coordinator for the Lutheran Malaria Initiative and HIV/AIDS Strategy, ELCA**



Pastor DeGroot-Nesdahl's first call was to St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin. She served other parishes in Glenburn, Lansford, and Surrey, ND, prior to becoming Supervisor of Pastoral Care at St. Joseph's Hospital in Minot, ND. In 1990 she moved to Bismarck, ND, when she became Assistant to the Bishop of the Western North Dakota Synod. In 1995, and again in 2001, Pastor DeGroot-Nesdahl was elected Bishop of the South Dakota Synod/ELCA, based in Sioux Falls, SD. South Dakota Bishops are term limited (2), so she concluded her service as Bishop in the fall of 2007. After serving a year as Interim Senior Pastor of Lutheran Memorial Church in Pierre, SD, she accepted the invitation of the ELCA to serve in her current position, beginning in December, 2008.

Born and raised in North Dakota, Pastor DeGroot-Nesdahl is the youngest of two daughters of a grain buyer and a school teacher, and granddaughter of pioneer homesteaders—one set of Norwegian descent, and the other Dutch. She grew up in the Lutheran church where she was active in youth ministry and continued to be involved on a District (now Synod) level of Luther League (now LYO) while in high school and college. She was active in Lutheran Campus Ministry in college

where she was encouraged to consider ordained ministry, following the 1970 decision of the American Lutheran Church (ALC) to ordain women.

Pastor DeGroot-Nesdahl graduated from Jamestown (ND) High School; and from the University of North Dakota (Grand Forks). Her major was speech communication, with minors in theatre and religion. She received her Masters of Divinity from Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, in 1977, and was among the first 15 women ordained in the old ALC/LCA church bodies. In 1996 Wartburg Seminary bestowed on her an Honorary Doctorate in recognition of her election as the Bishop of South Dakota Synod/ELCA, and of being the second female Bishop in the ELCA.

Active in theatre throughout her education years, she eventually met the man she would later marry when they were both cast in the summer production of a romantic comedy in the community theatre in her hometown of Jamestown, ND. Their characters got married at the end of the play, and they, eventually, thought that was a good idea for them, as well! Pastor DeGroot-Nesdahl and her husband Gary—her partner on stage and throughout real life—are the parents of three grown children, two sons and a daughter. Both boys are married and have blessed them with beautiful daughters-in-law, as well as three grandchildren. Gary's background is in education (and theatre!); prior to moving to Chicago, he served as Executive Director of the Association of Christian Churches in South Dakota. Now he's practicing being retired, and doing pretty well at it.

#### Fun Facts –

- Instituted the annual Bishop's Trail Ride in SD Synod
- Traveled globally on behalf of the ELCA and the SD Synod: Nicaragua; Cameroon; Colombia; Zimbabwe; Malawi, South Africa, Switzerland; and Sweden.
- Preached at the Opening Worship of the ELCA National Youth Gathering in 1997.
- Received an Honorable Mention ribbon for the Cow Milking Contest at the Sioux Empire Fair.
- Served as Vice-Chair of the ELCA Conference of Bishops from 2001 – 2007.
- Received the 'Women in Business' Leadership Award: Women Breaking Barriers Category, from the Sales and Marketing Executives Association of Sioux Falls, SD.

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# Assembly Musicians

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## Dakota Road

Al Berven, Scott Jibben, Hans Peterson, Christel Lankhorst, Gary Allen, Larry Olson



We are excited to announce Dakota Road will be with us the entire assembly to lead us in gathering music, worship, and other surprises throughout the assembly.

Dakota Road has become known nationally for their stirring original music and playful performance style. They craft powerful stories of life and faith woven in colorful musical styles ranging from acoustic ballads to rocking anthems. Their songs of struggle and hope connect with people of all ages and walks of life.



### Christel Lankhorst

Christel grew up in Kansas in a very musical family. She had her debut solo performance when she sang *Love is a Circle* for a school talent show in kindergarten. Her first recording was at age four, singing *This Little Light of Mine* on a reel to reel recorder while her big brothers howled in the background. It was a rocky start. But she has enjoyed singing in church, school, college choir, for weddings and other events ever since.

Unsure if music would earn her keep in this world, Christel went on to college and graduate school and has a bachelor's and a master's degree in social work. She was a camp counselor and program director during her summers in college and did church youth ministry for four years. After graduate school, Christel worked for a behavioral health company for three years. She has always had a passion for being with people. And throughout her youth work, she placed a strong emphasis on social ministry, planning programs that focused on service to others.

Christel has been recording and touring with Dakota Road since 1999. She plays bass and acoustic guitar and is one of the lead vocalists. She recently moved to Beresford, South Dakota and is currently working on development and booking for Dakota Road Music.

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### Hans Peterson

Born and raised in Alaska, Hans began his life in the midwest at Luther College. Since graduation he toured with a musical group to West Africa, worked as a youth director/contemporary worship coordinator in Stewartville, MN, lived in an artist cooperative, and served in a Catholic Worker house of hospitality. Hans' interest in learning and love for music led him to United Seminary (UCC) where he completed a masters degree of theology in the arts. He ventures out as a solo artist and with the Dakota Road band, playing both piano and acoustic guitar. Currently he lives with his wife Heidi, and their son Nelson on her family's farm near Jordan, MN. When he is not singing songs, he is picking berries, keeping bees and harvesting hazelnuts.

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### Larry Olson

Singer/songwriter/guitarist Larry Olson grew up on a farm near Madison, MN and was graduated in 1985 from South Dakota State University with a degree in teaching. While at SDSU, Larry began crafting and performing original songs and in 1988 he co-founded Dakota Road Music, a publishing and performance company that specializes in original music. Since then Larry has recorded numerous CDs and written and published hundreds of songs that have been passed to the corners of the U.S. and beyond. Larry's songs come alive with stories of his rural roots, ponderings of parenthood and journeys of faith.

*or the less serious....* Larry Olson -singer/songwriter/guitarist/farm assist- grew up on a farm near Madison, MN where his parents raised feeder kids and feeder cats. Larry works as a publisher/performer with Dakota Road Music and is currently negotiating with the American Cows are Cool Council to be their spokes model for their new "GOT BUTTER" campaign. He lives on an acreage north of Beresford, SD with his wife Karol and kids Joshua & Rachel.

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