

## **Biographical Information - Rev. Rebecca Piper**

1. **Name:** Rebecca D Piper (preference — Becky)
2. **Current Position:** co-senior pastor at Calvary Lutheran Church
3. **Congregation Membership:** Calvary Lutheran Church, Rapid City SD
4. **Date/Year of Birth:** 09/13/1973
5. **Date/Year of Ordination:** April 2005
6. **Previous Positions:**
  - **2009-2015** Our Savior's Lutheran, Hermosa SD
  - **April 2005-March 2009** Faith Lutheran, New Effington SD; First Lutheran, Claire City SD; Our Savior's Lutheran, Veblen SD [3-point parish served by 1 full-time and 1 half-time (my call) pastor]
7. **Education and Earned Degrees (with institutions and years, most recent first):**
  - 2004** MDIV degree from Luther Seminary, St. Paul MN
  - 1996** BA double major in English and Women's Studies - St. Olaf College, Northfield MN
  - 1992** Lanesboro High School, Lanesboro MN
8. **Please list up to five (5) current or past synodical or Churchwide activities that would inform your service as Bishop of the La Crosse Area Synod.**
  - Anchor church, a grassroots movement in the ELCA (currently a part of the first cohort group).
  - South Dakota Synod:
    - Evangelical Outreach committee, which included Congregational Renewal task force/ trainer (past);
    - Companion Synod committee (past);
    - Discipline committee (past);
    - Bear Butte conference (active member and past president)
9. **List of up to five (5) current or past community-related activities that would inform your service as Bishop of this Synod.**
  - Lutheran Social Services of SD Governing Board (currently serving 2nd term);
  - Pennington County Sheriff's Department Chaplain (current);
  - organized and helped lead a community food bank in Hermosa (past);
  - middle school volleyball coach (past)
10. **What gifts would you bring to the office of Bishop of this Synod (200 words maximum)?** I have been described as a leader who exhibits quiet strength who brings a calm presence and a listening ear. I'm not afraid to ask the difficult questions, face conflict or try something new. It doesn't mean that I always like it, or that it always works out the way that I hope it will, but there is often

something to learn from it. As someone from outside the La Crosse synod, I can bring a different perspective, and can potentially see things in a new way. The work that I have been doing with Anchor Church could also offer opportunities for congregations within the La Crosse synod. My focus is vision work that looks towards where we can go. In scripture, we read in Proverbs 29:18 “where there is no vision, the people perish.” We have God’s vision for all creation, that Jesus came that all may be saved. We are invited into that vision. I am excited about the possibility of discovering opportunities to live out that vision by loving God and loving others in word and action; and partnering with congregations to be the faith and life centers of that work that we are called to do together.

**11. What do you see as the principal challenge this Synod will face in the next six (6) years, and how would you address it (200 words maximum)?** As someone from outside the synod, and with the unknowns of where we will be post-pandemic, this is a difficult question. The ELCA already faces challenges. Russell Crabtree, in *The State of the ELCA: An Organizational Intelligence Perspective*, looks realistically at the challenges hoping that church leadership will do the hard work of change for the sake of the gospel. Having said that, I think a challenge to address is congregational leadership and structure. What are the ways that the synod can support vitalized congregations as faith and life centers in their communities? How can collaborative and shared leadership and resources make that happen? Are congregations and rostered leaders ready to do active visioning work towards a church whose foundation is laid upon the bedrock of its history, but it’s active participation in the community may look different than it does today? What I have been told by other people is that the La Crosse synod is progressively faithful. What I hear in that description is that you are a synod filled with beloved people of God who are ready to meet the challenges to be a welcoming and faithful church for the sake of God’s good news.

**12. Describe your leadership style (200 words maximum).** I describe myself as both an adaptive and collaborative leader. This has especially proven to be helpful during the coronavirus pandemic, as all of us find ourselves in a new place. Adaptability has been essential as “the way we do things” has been challenged and changed, and a new way of being church is underway. By being able to make changes, remain calm and offer guidance, the church’s ministry and focus thrives. I appreciate working with other people in order to share ideas, creativity, prayers and gifts. No one person has all of the gifts needed for congregational or synodical ministry. Although I do not know if it’s a real thing, I also describe myself as a realistic optimist. I have a tendency to focus on the positive and look at what doesn’t work as a way to learn something in order to move forward. I have also been in ministry long enough to know the reality of the sin of human nature, as well as face the challenges of being the church.

**13. What is the last book you read that had special significance for you?** *Cultural Architecture: A Path To Creating Vitalized Congregations* by Douglas A Hill. This book follows the ongoing process that my current congregation went through to not only be a vitalized congregation, but to accompany another congregation to do the same thing. It has helped me as a congregational leader to think about how it’s not simply what we believe, but it’s how we are going to bring action to those beliefs. Doug Hill continues to be a coach and mentor for me through the important work of navigating and implementing congregational cultural change. Another book

that I have now reread for the third time is *White Fragility* by Robin Diangelo. Each time I read it, there is another necessary understanding for me as a white woman. Diangelo talks about how, as a white person, I get to experience race equilibrium and any challenges to that throw me off balance. However, it is important that I “build the capacity to sustain discomfort” so that I will listen, learn, dialogue and act in ways that counteract white privilege (112).

**14. What is your favorite movie and why?** For me, the answer to this question changes depending on the time it’s asked. My current favorite movie is the climbing documentary *Free Solo* about professional climber Alex Honnold’s free solo climb of El Capitan in Yosemite. Not only is the scenery absolutely stunning, but it is such a testament of the human spirit and the amazingly impossible challenges that someone can face and survive. The other reason this is my current favorite movie is that I appreciate movies that my children want to watch and discuss with us.

**15. What are your hobbies/interests?** I enjoy and am reenergized by being in the outdoors, especially with my family, through the following activities: running, walking our dog, hiking, backpacking, camping, cross country skiing and snowshoeing. My oldest son and I have even tried snowshoe backpacking. This summer we will go bike-packing for the first time. I also enjoy reading, cooking, praying in color and yoga devotions.

**16. What else would you like to share with us (100 words maximum)?** I have spent my career as an ordained pastor in South Dakota. I greatly appreciate our synodical leadership, as well as my rostered colleagues. I also value the work of the greater church. I hope to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit; and I look forward to being a voice within the discernment process with you and the other candidates as the La Crosse synod prayerfully looks towards the future. It would be amiss if I did not share that the area is also a personal draw. I grew up in Whalan MN; and my husband is from Wisconsin.