

Biographical Information - Rev. Anna Sorenson

1. **Name:** Anna Garbisch Sorenson

2. **Current Positions**

Pastor, French Creek Lutheran Church, Ettrick, Wisconsin *2012 - present*

Director of Operations, Sacred Playgrounds, Galesville, Wisconsin *2015 - present*

3. **Congregation membership:** French Creek Lutheran Church, Ettrick, Wisconsin

4. **Date and Year of Birth:** October 20, 1979

5. **Date and Year of ordination:** February 1, 2009

6. **Previous Positions**

Pastor *2009-2012*

Mount Sterling and Utica Lutheran Churches, Mount Sterling, Wisconsin

Stated lay preacher *2008*

Bethel and Bethany Lutheran Churches, Viroqua and Esofea, Wisconsin

Vicar *2006-2007*

Grace Lutheran Church, Norristown, PA

Student Minister, field education placement *2003-2005*

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Princeton Junction, NJ

Summer Retreat Site Director *2003*, High Wilderness Guide *2001, 2002*

Sky Ranch Lutheran Camp, Fort Collins, CO

Summer Staff *1997, 1998, 2000*

Voyageurs Lutheran Ministries, Cook MN

Student Minister *1999*

A Christian Ministry in the National Parks, Grand Teton Park, Jackson WY

7. **Education and Degrees**

Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (United Seminary) - Philadelphia, PA

STM (Master of Sacred Theology) Lutheran Studies *2006*

Princeton Theological Seminary - Princeton, NJ

MDiv. *2005*

Gustavus Adolphus College - St Peter, MN

B.A. Music and Religion *2002*

8. **Current and past church activities**

- Convener of task force on church response to pandemic and guidance for return to in-person and in-building worship, La Crosse Area Synod *2020 - present*
- Anti-racism Task Force member, La Crosse Area synod. With the task force, provide learning and growth opportunities for rostered and lay members *2019-present*
- Voting delegate to churchwide assembly *2019*
- Evangelism and Outreach Committee chair, La Crosse Area Synod, Responsible for direction and agenda for the committee, providing workshops at synod assembly, and resources for congregations *2011-2016*
- Synod Council member As the chair of the Evangelism and Outreach committee, I also sat on the synod council, working with other synod leaders in areas of synod priorities, budget, and challenging decisions about issues of rostered leadership

9. Community related activities

- Middle School Cross Country coach, *2017 (volunteer) 2018 – 2020 (district staff)*
- G-E-T School District - Inspire middle school athletes to challenge themselves, teach fundamentals of running and lifelong healthy habits, teach students how to compete with good sportsmanship, form working relationships with other coaches, school staff, and district administrators

10. Gifts that I would bring to the office of Bishop:

- First, I bring a solid theological grounding in the Lutheran tradition and confessions with an ecumenical inclination. I am a life-long learner and seek to continually grow in faith.
- Second, I model and encourage sabbath keeping among rostered and lay leaders. I believe that our well-being as humans, as Christians, as leaders, depends upon the knowledge that we are beloved of God, not for our good works, but because God is good. Taking time to rest and tending to self-care helps people to remember that our value is more than our productivity.
- Finally, I think in big picture, connective ways. The scriptural metaphor of the body of Christ resonates deeply for me. What each of us does impacts the whole, and the whole impacts the individual. I am able to see that sometimes what presents as a problem or a trouble is actually caused by pain in another part of the body. I want to draw on these last two gifts and equip all leaders and congregations to maintain their individual spiritual health so that the whole body will be strengthened.

11. Principal challenge this synod faces in the next six years:

- A significant challenge in the coming years will be learning how to live in a post-pandemic world. The pandemic accelerated the trend of the church being one among many options for spiritual guidance and connection. This is compounded by a society that is deeply divided and in which cruelty toward one's perceived enemies is celebrated.
- This synod is comprised of communities called together by the Holy Spirit and grounded in our faith in Jesus Christ. Congregations, particularly small congregations, are situated to build and strengthen relationships in which we seek understanding with people who differ from us in a variety of ways. I envision congregations that ground themselves in the basic practices of our faith: worship, prayer, and scripture. I pray that the Spirit will use intentional focus in these practices to lead us to ministries of community and connection that address people's real needs. As we reengage in-person gatherings, we do not have to return to the same ministries due merely to tradition or momentum. Instead, grounded in these basic practices and in prayer, we are free to go where the Spirit leads us. Some ministries will be familiar and others we cannot yet imagine.

12. My leadership style

My leadership style is aspirational, encouraging, and forgiving.

- Aspirational – I look to possibilities of what and how God may be calling the church. I believe we must speak of what we hope and dream, even if it seems so outlandish as to be impossible. Things deemed impossible are often silenced, while aspirations are to be proclaimed and shared. We cannot strive toward that which we cannot name.

- Encouraging – I seek to bring many people to the table. I empower people to stretch themselves, to learn by doing, and to take ownership of the ministry to which God calls them. It brings me great joy to “lead from behind,” while people discover their unique giftedness.
- Forgiving – I am forgiving of others and myself. I believe that the people of God should be comfortable letting go of ministries that no longer serve the community (ending is different than failing). People need to know they are supported even if an idea does not work as planned. I set high standards for myself and others (see aspirational), but as goals to strive for, not as unattainable measures for judgment. I believe strongly in failing forward: that is, in using things that do not work well as opportunities for growth.

13. Book of special significance

- *Preaching in Hitler’s Shadow: Sermons of Resistance in the Third Reich, Edited by Dean G. Stroud, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2013.*
- Preachers should regularly read and listen to the work of other preachers, particularly preachers whose contexts and traditions are different from their own. This collection brings sermons from pastors whose context was life under the Third Reich, at a time when much of the church was complicit with the Nazi Regime. These sermons remind me that our first call in the church is always proclamation of the gospel whether the time is favorable or unfavorable (2 Timothy 4:2). The gospel is not generic; it will always speak to the times in which we find ourselves. This book is among those I turn to again and again.

14. Favorite movie and why

The Princess Bride - Favorite movies come and go, but the Princess Bride has been on my favorites list nearly my whole life. It has just the right amount of action, combined with some silliness, and add in some childhood nostalgia for movie rental night when we had a babysitter, and this one never fails to bring a smile to my face.

15. Hobbies and interests

I enjoy spending time outdoors in many ways – hiking, camping, sitting by a campfire, canoeing, etc. I like to be physically active through running, weightlifting, and yoga, and I am a participant in a worldwide network of body-positive athletes through the Fitness Protection Program. I also share my enjoyment of physical fitness through coaching middle school runners. I also read excessively, bake bread, do counted cross stitch and watch superhero movies with my family.

16. Anything else to share

I met my husband, Jacob, when we both worked on summer staff at Sky Ranch Lutheran Camp. Bible Camp remains an important part our lives and ministries. I am a co-owner of Sacred Playgrounds, which Jacob founded to provided research and training to camps and congregations. I am a parent of two teenage boys who have been campers at Sugar Creek, Luther Park and Sky Ranch.