

2024 RMS Nominations

Row 1

Nominee	Samm Melton-Hill
Lay/Roster	Pastor
Position Nominated for:	
Occupation	Pastor
Home Congregation	New Beginnings Worshipping Community and Highlands Lutheran Church (Denver, CO)
Membership	2 Years
Sense of God's call	<p>Much of my ministry and sense of call to serving God's people has been informed by the ways in which I have experienced both hurt and healing at the hands of the Church. As a Pastor who didn't grow up Lutheran (or religious in any way), I was an unlikely candidate for ordained ministry. I was much more likely to become a lawyer or welder or truck driver or something else for that matter. And yet, in high school I found my way to a Lutheran church in my area. I often say that I kept coming to youth group because they had pizza and sports and there was (and still is) truly nothing I love more in this world. What I now know is that I found much more than pizza and sports here. This little community helped me discover people that cared deeply about me, who allowed me to ask questions, and who created a space where my doubts were welcome. This was the first community that I understood what love and grace not only meant, but felt like. And yet, it wasn't until years later, as a college student as I found myself navigating the coming out process that I would experience what deep hurt feels like when it takes place at the hands of a community you once thought exuded unconditional love. And so following this deep hurt and as I began Divinity School, I tried so very hard to leave this church. And as I attempted to step away, it was once again a little Lutheran church on the coast of New England that brought me back in. And they didn't do it with a fancy budget and super cool initiatives, but they did it by being present with me, accompanying me in my time of wilderness, and encouraging me in love. In all that I do, I try to ground myself in this story. My own call story reminds me time and time again of why this Church exists and what its purpose in this world is. It is simply put, to love and care for people, especially those who are marginalized and vulnerable. In some ways it mirrors the Rocky Mountain Synod's own mission to "proclaim and embody God's unconditional love for the sake of the world." I feel called to live this story out in all that I do. It is what has led me to being a Chaplain in tough places like the Drug and Alcohol Rehab Center, the Psychiatric Hospital, and the Prison in which I currently serve.</p>

It is here that I encounter the deepest cross sections of God's love and people's pain. I believe strongly that our congregations also represent these cross sections, with the added layer of institutional anxiety as we bear witness to dramatic changes in our own communities and the larger institutional Church. As we navigate these challenges together and seek to listen to where the Spirit is calling us next, I hope to continue to empower communities and congregations in our Synod to continue to live out our calling: to proclaim and embody God's unconditional love in our own ways and with our own communities.

Skills/Experiences As a first-call Pastor, I found myself serving in a unique call, as I serve two congregations in a "yoked" ministry: Highlands Lutheran Church in North Denver and New Beginnings Worshipping Community, a congregation that meets inside the Denver Women's Prison and while the Church faces continued hardships and wrestles with its place in our communities, I believe the Synod will continue to see an increase in Rostered Leaders serving in creative calls like mine. As such changes become more frequent, the Synod will be tasked with accompanying congregations and leaders through these transitions. This past year, along with the leadership team at Highlands, we voted to sell our church building (our home of 100 years!), enter into an intentional yoked partnership with New Beginnings, and become a Congregation in Residence at the Synod office building. As I took part and led many of these conversations, I have experienced immense growth both professionally and personally. In particular to the role of the Synod Council, I believe this experience of transition and change with Highlands will be especially beneficial as an increasing number of congregations begin having similar discussions surrounding budgets, property, and pastoral leadership. One area in which I believe Highlands excelled in their decision making process was their ability to keep their mission and vision at the forefront of all we did. The community of Highlands found ways to reconcile the very realistic financial needs of the congregation with the mission and vision that God set upon our community. I am immensely proud of the ways in which they have sought to live out God's calling for us in a new, often scary, yet creative way. My hope is that I can bring a similar perspective to the Synod Council as they continue to engage in difficult budget and property conversations and think about what it means to be a Church in today's world. Additionally, as a Mission Developer and the Pastor of New Beginnings, I bring an entirely separate perspective to the Council setting. As a member of the Synod Council, I hope to continue to speak to the ways in which our budget is the primary theological statement of our communities. As I say often to my congregations, the budget is a direct reflection of the things that are most important to us and I hope to speak to this belief through a position of leadership within the Synod.

Service Activity 1 Arizona State University, Best Skills, Best Churches (Fall 2023)

Service Activity 2 Innovation and Mission Outreach Board (Fall 2022-Present)

Service Activity 3 ELCA Prison and Re-Entry Network (Spring 2023-Present)

Committee

Position

Nominated for:

Council Position

Nominated for:

At-Large Rostered Leader

2025 Churchwide
