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To the St. Andrew Lutheran Church Call Team,

The single most formative faith experience of my youth was going to church camp every summer. Located in the woodlands and natural prairie of eastern Iowa, this ecumenical Christian camp awakened my heart to its connection to the earth and lit a fire in my gut for a different sort of life. At camp, the pastor taught us about the three most important relationships we have: our relationship with God, our relationship with others, and our relationship with nature. I was inspired to foster and abide in each of these relationships – through worship and prayer, through unexpected acts of kindness and boundary-defying friendships, and through breathing in the beauty of the natural world each and every day. As I grew and changed year by year, these relationships held and fed me, reminding me of who I am, my place in this world, and my purpose in life.

When I first looked at your website, I went right to the “About St. Andrew” page. As I scrolled down, I caught sight of your core values, and my heart leapt (seriously, it really did!). God care, earth care, community care, neighbor care, and self care. *This is me!* I thought to myself. *These are my values!* I was so excited to find a community committed to these same primary relationships. As an adult, I have come to recognize the value of my relationship with myself as yet another crucial relationship. I now see my relationship with myself, with others, and with nature as three portals for experiencing the presence of God.

The more I learn about your congregation, the more excited I become. Your commitment to creation care resonates deeply with me. The harm humanity causes to the natural environment has weighed heavily on me since childhood, and this concern is connected to my desire to live a different sort of life than is common in our society. Like you, I am also deeply concerned with the inequalities embedded in our current social system, including the hardships faced by marginalized and stigmatized groups (BIPOC communities, refugees and asylum seekers, people with disabilities, people struggling with mental wellness, etc.). As a bisexual woman, I am also passionate about creating a world that is safe for my queer siblings, who for so long have been mistreated both in society and in the church. I am thrilled to find a church that shares these passions and is actively responding to Jesus’ call to work for justice and liberation.

From your paperwork, I can also see that you are at a place in your congregation’s journey where you need a pastor who can provide solid administrative leadership, sound financial guidance, and wise strategic planning. In addition to preaching and teaching, stewardship, staff supervision, board leadership (Council), and planning are among my greatest strengths. In 2020, I developed a mentoring relationship with Pastor Mike Ward, author of *Abundance: Creating a Culture of Generosity* and stewardship consultant for ELCA churches across the country, whose work resonates strongly with my leadership style and inclinations. With his mentorship, I led numerous highly successful stewardship campaigns in my last congregation, including one that increased pledges by a congregational record of 27%. I also transformed the functioning of the Church Council and worked with them to develop a strategic plan that included financial stability

as a primary goal. Additionally, I have set up supervision structures and staff review processes based on best practices in two different congregations: my first call and the congregation where I currently serve as Bridge Pastor. Mike Ward continues to be a mentor for me, extending my naturally strong financial instincts and well-developed leadership chops with the wisdom of his decades of experience.

As I continue to reflect and pray about the possibility of serving the people of St. Andrew, I can't help but notice the powerful alignment of our goals and gifts. I, as a pastor, and you, as a congregation, both long for a renewed world. We both value diversity, inclusion, and justice, and we dedicate our lives to attending to God, earth, neighbor, community, and self. You, as a congregation, need a leader with the administrative and financial skills to guide you into the future, and I, as a pastor, am unique in my strong affinity for and strength in those areas. I am youthful and energetic, but also experienced and steady. I have served a suburban church, and I can easily connect with people in this context, challenging them to grow and learn at a pace that is digestible and fulfilling. I am looking to develop a deep and meaningful relationship with a congregation and stay for the long term.

I would love to have the opportunity to interview with you and learn more about your congregation. My prayers are with you in your discernment process.

In Christ,

Pastor Allison Bengfort, MDiv, MSW