

J. Michael Mills

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EDUCATION

- Doctor of Ministry, Pastoral Care** in progress
United Lutheran Seminary, Gettysburg and Philadelphia
- Master of Divinity** 2022
United Lutheran Seminary. Begun part-time in 2018 while on active duty; residential requirements completed 2020.
- Russian Basic Course** 1999–2000
Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, Monterey, California

ORDINATION

- Ordained to Word and Sacrament Ministry** August 27, 2022
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Rostered through the Southwestern Texas Synod.

CURRENT RESEARCH

The Transitions Wall

A three-layer record of congregational change in the western Upper Peninsula. Anonymous community-generated entries of members' own life transitions are set alongside registers of pastoral acts and annual reports, on a single timeline, to make a congregation's own motion visible to itself. The project asks why change in a congregation registers as rupture when transition is the ordinary condition of every community, and works at the intersection of public theology, public humanities, and digital humanities.

MINISTRY EXPERIENCE

- Pastor, Bridge Building Ministry** October 2024–present
Northern Great Lakes Synod, ELCA. Serving four ELCA congregations in Ishpeming, Michigan, as they consider a shared future.
- Bishop's Staff, Southwestern Texas Synod** March 2023–September 2024
Holy Fork in the Road Ministry: a synodically authorized ministry born out of the completed ministry of Lord of Life Lutheran Church, and a position created by that closure to continue and extend the work. Transitional ministry with approximately twenty-six congregations.
- Pastor, Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Austin** August 2022–March 2023
First call. The congregation completed its ministry in March 2023.
- Intern, Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Austin** 2020–2022
- Clinical Pastoral Education, one unit** 2021
Ascension Seton Hospital System, Austin, Texas

TEACHING

“What’s in Your Backpack? Ten Things Every Congregation Council Should Know.” Curriculum co-written with the Rev. Sharolyn Swenson.

Holy Fork in the Road exploration seminars. Austin, Texas.

Council retreats for discernment. Multiple congregations, Southwestern Texas and Northern Great Lakes Synods.

Spiritual Practices for Communities.

Gender Justice. Region 5 ELCA curriculum, taught.

Conscience Conversations. ELCA Reconsiderations Task Force curriculum, taught.

Confirmation, in partnership with Conference 8 congregations, Northern Great Lakes Synod.

SERVICE

Discipline Committee, Northern Great Lakes Synod, ELCA.

Discipline Committee, Southwestern Texas Synod, ELCA.

Congregation Council President, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Taneytown, Maryland. 2007–2009 and 2013–2015, overseeing the pastoral call process in both terms.

CERTIFICATIONS

End-of-Life Doula, International End-of-Life Doula Association (INELDA).

Crisis Counselor, The Trevor Project.

PRIOR CAREER

United States Navy

1998–2019

Retired Senior Chief Cryptologic Technician Interpretive (SS/IW). Russian linguist. Led Direct Support Department with 180 deployable personnel; served as Direct Support Leading Chief Petty Officer at sea and mission supervisor for joint teams. Twelve submarine deployments across Sixth and Seventh Fleets and one deployment to Iraq; 615 days deployed. Qualified in Submarines (2010) and as Enlisted Information Warfare Specialist (2013).

Selected awards: Defense Meritorious Service Medal; Joint Service Commendation Medal (2); Joint Meritorious Unit Award (2); and other service awards.

LANGUAGES

Russian — elementary proficiency.