



North/ West Lower Michigan Synod

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Word Taking Flesh

Soon we celebrate the good news that, in the language of John's Gospel, "the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (1:14). Some of our congregations are using a Eucharistic Prayer that includes the petition, "May your word take flesh in us." God's word taking flesh in us sounds so wonderful. And yet, if we get too caught up in this petition as something we do, we miss the point of Christmas. For, while undeniably the work of God's grace, God's Word taking flesh in us is as hard, laborious, and painful as birth—especially when we are confronted with God's Word taking flesh in others.

According to the ELCA's AMMPARO initiative—AMMPARO stands for Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities—approximately 70,000 children and another 70,000 women with their children, most from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, arrived in the U.S. in fiscal year (FY) 2014. Although this number decreased by 42 percent in FY 2015, numbers began increasing again in August 2015. Daily on the news I see, hear, and read stories of the plight of migrant children around the world. The Michigan Migrant Child Task Force estimates that, in 2014, there were 94,167 migrant and seasonal farmworkers and dependents in Michigan.

When I hear stories about these children, I cannot escape the fact that, in Matthew's Gospel, the Christ child, while not unaccompanied, must flee to Egypt to escape being slaughtered with the innocents by King Herod (2:13-23). In a very real way, God's Word takes flesh in migrant and refugee children. This connection is not lost on people of faith throughout our synod and our church. Stated plainly, we want to save these children. At the very least, we want to give them a Christlike welcome— we want to welcome them as Christ—with funding, medical care, housing, education, and everything they need for abundant life. We established Lutheran Social Services of Michigan—now Samaritas—to become expert and do this work on our behalf. And so our hearts break when government policy

and regulations, lack of expertise, legal implications, and potential risks are beyond our ability to do what we want to do, what we sense God calling us to do. Even as we saw the word of God taking flesh in countless refugee and migrant children, the realities of this world prevent God's word from taking flesh in us in the way we might want. We pray for forgiveness, courage, wisdom, and direction to know what we could do.

Sometimes it's not a matter of choosing to do what is right or allowing God's word to take flesh in us. Sometimes we honestly cannot do what we know we should do. "We are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves." Stated another way, no matter how much we want to, no matter how hard we try, sometimes we cannot save ourselves, let alone save others. That's why the angel's announcement is such wonderful good news: "to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:11). Christmas is about our need of a Savior and God providing a Savior in Jesus.

I pray that the Christmas gospel speaks to whatever you know in your heart we need to be saved from. And I pray that the Christmas gospel gives you wisdom on how to embrace those in whom you see God's Word taking flesh.

The Rev. Craig Alan Satterlee, Ph.D., Bishop

Christmas Safety

The Advent/Christmas season is one of the busiest seasons of the church year. Advent Services, Christmas Programs, special dinners, Christmas Eve/Day Services will all bring increased numbers of folks into your buildings. I will put on my Firefighter Hat and remind you of some safety concerns for this season.

Trees: Michigan State Fire Code prohibits live greenery in publicly regulated buildings. In most cases that includes churches. If live trees are used inside a church, the fire codes (see the link below) has very specific guidelines. Be safe with trees. Artificial trees should be made of fire retardant materials.

Lights: Caution must be taken when using Christmas lights. Determine how many lights can be strung together, the capacity of extension cords, and the total power capacity of outlets. Don't use indoor cords for outdoors. Older incandescent bulbs use up to 20 times more power than newer modern LED bulbs. All cords and lights should be UL approved.

Exits: It is exciting to have the building filled to capacity for Christmas events. It is important to know the actual capacity of the building and gathering rooms. Please remember to keep all exits clear, aisles open, and make ushers aware of how to get people out in an emergency. Do not clog aisles and exits with extra chairs or decorations.

Candles: Candles are not permitted on or near greenery. There does not appear to be consensus on the use of candles with worshippers. We use them for regular worship. Local fire officials can be consulted on the best practices for use of candles by attendees at festival worship services. Children should be well supervised in the use of candles. It would be appropriate for an announcement to be made at the beginning of the service of worship to inform the guests about candle safety. Ushers should be instructed in the placement and use of fire extinguishers.

Safety Equipment: Ensure that an annual evaluation has been made on safety equipment such as fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, first aid kits and defibrillators. Ushers and greeters should be trained in how to use this equipment. Contact local fire officials for training and building inspections.



Policies/Procedures: Are there posted procedures to follow in case of a fire or medical emergency with evacuation plans?

Children: Do you have adequate staffing for care of children during these services/events. Have child care workers/volunteers been screened? Are child safety policies posted in the nursery and play areas?

I pray that your holiday worship/programs be safe and fulfilling.

Pastor David Sprang
Assistant to the Bishop – Director for Evangelical Mission
Fire Prevention Officer – Gladwin Rural Urban Fire Protection District

Additional Resources:
Michigan Fire Marshall Bulletin:
<http://bit.ly/2o6W0TM>
Church Mutual Risk Reporter (Seasonal Spotlight, pg. 3): <http://bit.ly/2B04ZJh>

Synod Finances
as of November 30, 2017

| October Income | | Year to Date Income | |
|---------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Mission Support | \$ 118,179 | Mission Support | \$ 1,135,721 |
| <u>All Other Income</u> | <u>\$ 7,552</u> | <u>All Other Income</u> | <u>\$ 110,373</u> |
| Total Income | \$ 125,731 | Total Income | \$ 1,246,094 |
| Expenses | | Expenses | |
| Support to ELCA | \$ 59,090 | Support to ELCA | \$ 567,861 |
| <u>All Other Expenses</u> | <u>\$ 69,508</u> | <u>All Other Expenses</u> | <u>\$ 715,014</u> |
| Total Expenses | \$ 128,598 | Total Expenses | \$ 1,282,875 |
| Plus Net Assets Released | | | |
| From Restricted Funds | \$ 0 | | \$ 7,546 |
| Balance +/- | - \$ 2,867 | Balance +/- | - \$ 29,235 |

Synod Office Closure

The Synod Office will be closed from December 22 - January 1 in observance of Christmas and New Year's Day.

Have a blessed Christmas and a healthy New Year!

Christmas Eucharist and Luncheon

Join the Synod staff on Wednesday, December 20 for Christmas Eucharist! Eucharist will take place at St. Stephen's Lutheran Church at 11:30am. Lunch will be served immediately following the service. Please RSVP by calling the Synod Office at 517-321-5066.

Annual Reports to the Bishop

The Annual Report to the Bishop forms are now available on the Office of the Secretary page of the ELCA website. Please download and save a copy on your computer before completing the form. Once completed, please return to the Synod Office.

Download form: <http://bit.ly/2o59Beo>

Upcoming Events

| December | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| December 20 | Synod Christmas Eucharist | St. Stephen's, Lansing |
| December 22 - January 1 | Synod Office Closed | |
| December 24 | Christmas Day | |

| January | | |
|----------------|----------------|--|
| January 1 | New Year's Day | |

For information on these events and more, be sure to read our weekly update emails and visit the events section on our website.

Congregations in Transition

Note: We include congregations on the public list when the called pastor or rostered leader completes her or his ministry in the congregation. Thus, congregations in which the pastor has resigned but is still serving are not listed here. We also do not post calls that are accepted until Bishop Satterlee signs the Letter of Call.

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|--|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| Bay Conference | Rev. Emily Olsen, Dean | Kalamazoo Conference | Rev. Kjersten Priddy, Dean |
| Hope/Marlette (part-time) | Supply Pastors/Awaiting a candidate | Messiah/Constantine | Dennis Smith retiring December 2017/Awaiting a candidate |
| St. Matthew/Bridgeport | CALL ACCEPTED: Rheanna Goodrich, Installation 1/14 | St. John's/Baroda | Jim Morgan, interim/Interviewing |
| Prince of Peace/Rose City | Matthew Carpenter, Administrative Pastor/CALL ACCEPTED: Jeff Bonn, Intentional Interim | Stony Lake Conference | Rev. Doug Ogden, Dean |
| Our Savior/Saginaw (part-time) | Rob Schmidt, contracted pastor; partnership with Zion/Freeland through 11/2018. | Immanuel/Muskegon | Jack Ferra, Interim |
| Resurrection/Saginaw | CALL ACCEPTED: Marilyn Robinson, Installation 12/17. | St. Luke/Muskegon | Jack Ferra, Interim |
| St. John/Saginaw | CALL ACCEPTED: Carl Ballard, Installation 12/31 | Samuel/Muskegon | Chris Anderson, interim/Discerning Future |
| Grace/Vassar (part-time) | Supply Pastors/Awaiting a candidate | Sunrise Conference | Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean |
| St. Paul's/Au Gres | Rheanna Goodrich/last Sunday 12/31/Exploring Cooperative Ministry with Grace/East Tawas | Trinity/Barton City | F. Laraine Sundin retiring January 2018/Christina Bright contracted through 6/2018 |
| St. Timothy/Midland (part-time) | Gerald Ferguson, administrative pastor/Awaiting a candidate | St. James/Millersburg (part-time) | Jeff Bonn contract ends January 2018/Congregational Vote 12/17 |
| Capital Area Conference | Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean | Trinity/Ocqueoc (part-time) | Jeff Bonn contract ends January 2018/Congregational Vote 12/17 |
| University/East Lansing (associate pastor) | Haley Vay Beaman, interim associate pastor | Traverse Conference | Rev. Rosanne Anderson, Dean |
| Grace/Lansing | Dan Johnson retiring 2/1 | St. Paul's/Reed City | Dawn Pooley retiring June 2018/Preparing MSP |
| St. Stephen/Lansing | Erick Johnson, Interim | Messiah/Roscommon | Gary Greiger, stated supply/Discerning future |
| Greater Grand Rapids Conference | Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean | Augustana/Tustin | Clay Bates contract ends December 2017/Discerning future |
| Grace/Hastings | CALL ACCEPTED: Ken Scheck, Installation 1/13. | | |
| Mamrelund/Kent City | Matt Deames, Intentional Interim/Preparing MSP | | |
| Christ/Wyoming | Polly Standley, Interim/Interviewing | | |