



## North/ West Lower Michigan Synod

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## Renewing Congregations

As stated in our mission statement, we "prayerfully participate in Christ's own work of reconciling the world God's very Self" by renewing congregations. Renewing is different from restoring. To restore is to bring back what was previous; to return to a former state or condition. To renew is to begin again. I have come to think of renewing congregations as helping begin again at the earliest stage of their life-cycle.

Yes, like all living things, congregations have life-cycles—they are born, they grow, and they die. William Bridges describes an organization's life-cycle as consisting of seven stages ([Managing Transitions](#), p. 77).

- The first life stage, dreaming, is the time of organization and planning. A congregation works to articulate its vision and to get people to bring that vision into existence.
- Congregations start launching their vision in their second life stage, a process marked by improvisation rather than formal systems and policies.
- In its third life stage, congregations get organized. They start to slow down in order to rein in the chaos and bring order. Roles often become specialized and formally defined and experience becomes more important.
- As they enter the fourth stage, making it, the congregation has the resources to do significant ministry. In this stage, congregations can expand and grow for a long time. As they have become solidly established, congregations begin to reap the rewards of their efforts and have a basis for expansion. Making it often leads congregations to feel that they should continue moving and become an institution.
- When a congregation becomes an institution, the fifth life stage, its priority shifts from the ministry it accomplishes to the impression it makes. In this life stage, the congregation's reputation is established. People emphasize what is appropriate for the congregation and in terms of membership and staffing, the concern is less about talent and more about fit.
- In its sixth life stage, the congregation starts closing in on itself and losing vital connections to the outside world, whether that is its immediate neighborhood, the greater church, or contemporary culture.
- Once a congregation starts closing in, they start down the path to dying, the final life stage. As a rule, congregations come to the end of their life in ways that make death less obvious.

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In understanding the different stages in a congregation's life cycle, we can better recognize and support these transitions. Whenever there is a painful, troubled time in the congregation and the cause of it is not readily identifiable, a developmental transition from one life stage to the next is probably occurring. In the first half of the life cycle, not making a transition when the time is ripe for one can also lead to a troubled time as it causes a "retardation" in the organization that threatens its future development and very existence. In many cases, people who were most at home in one stage are most likely to experience the next stage as a personal setback.

One such transition a congregation must face occurs after they become an institution. While in this phase, congregations must either choose the path of renewal or choose to die. Renewal, or claiming a new vision, means re-dreaming the dream on which the congregation is based, recapturing the style natural to a young and just launched congregation, and cultivating a new climate and style of leadership. Transitions such as this one can be traumatic because in choosing renewal, congregations must let go of the very things that got them this far—their sense of identity, ways of doing ministry, and ways of living together as a Christian community.

No one can do renewal for a congregation—not a bishop, a book or a program, or a charismatic leader. But when congregations are ready to renew, we are eager to help. Our work in this area includes the call process, teaching and equipping leaders with resources for community engagement, providing pastoral care, and helping congregations obtain additional resources to aid with their renewal. For congregations who do not choose the path of renewal, we are also here to work with and support them in coming to terms with death in a graceful and meaningful manner and with the confidence that in Christ, death—even the death of the congregation—is the gate to new life.

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

**"Who is Sarah Holland?"**

"Who is Sarah Holland?" a pastor asked after receiving an email from Sarah on my behalf. Sarah is a Lutheran. She has a degree in journalism, has worked as an executive assistant for an attorney, and currently owns her own business. Sarah is smart, quiet, inquisitive—she loves theology—and she makes me laugh. Since April, Sarah has volunteered in our office providing me with direct support—helping me with email, reading to me, and assisting with correspondence. We find that we make a good team. In February, Sarah will join us officially as my executive assistant for 10 hours a week. Our plan is that she will be in the office Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 10am to 1pm, with an hour of flexible time. As you have the opportunity to interact with Sarah, please welcome her!

## Lenten Partner Prayers

Would you like to have someone praying for you this Lent? If so, please email your name and email address to [assistant@mittensynod.org](mailto:assistant@mittensynod.org) by February 21, 2017. We will assign an anonymous prayer partner to you by Ash Wednesday—March 1, 2017.

## Synod Assembly 2017

Synod Assembly 2017: Synod Assembly will be held May 21-23, 2017 at Immanuel Lutheran Church and Comfort Inn and Suites Hotel and Conference Center in Mt. Pleasant.

Our Assembly theme is "Freed by God's Grace," from the verse "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

We will welcome the Reverend Dr. R. Guy Erwin, Bishop of the Southwest California Synod, as our keynote speaker. Bishop Erwin, a member of the Osage Nation, is the first Native American bishop elected to office in the ELCA. He is a noted church historian who has frequently taught courses on Martin Luther and the Lutheran Reformation. Bishop Erwin will address both of these topics during his time with the assembly.

Watch the synod's website and the weekly updates for registration in early February.

## Synod Finances as of December 31, 2016

December		Year to Date	
<b>Income</b>		<b>Income</b>	
Mission Support	\$ 120,038	Mission Support	\$ 1,193,770
All Other Income	\$ 160	All Other Income	\$ 122,352
Total Income	\$ 121,198	Total Income	\$ 1,316,122
<b>Expenses</b>		<b>Expenses</b>	
Support to ELCA	\$ 60,019	Support to ELCA	\$ 596,885
All Other Expenses	\$ 68,059	All Other Expenses	\$ 764,408
Total Expenses	\$ 128,078	Total Expenses	\$ 1,361,293
Plus Net Assets Released	2,667		49,183
From Restricted funds			
Balance +/-	- \$ 4,213	Balance +/-	+ \$ 4,013

## Called to Invite

As part of the Missional Leader Training, a training for new congregations and redeveloping congregations in the ELCA, participants read the article: "We Will No Longer Be A Welcoming Church" (Living Lutheran, June 22, 2016). It's a catchy title to push its readers to think about inviting and not just welcoming.

In the Gospel Lesson for Epiphany 2, from John 1:35, Jesus asked John's followers, "What are you looking for?" It's a simple question, but one that has profound significance for the church today. In most places where the church exists, we have stopped listening to what those outside of our church are looking for. Instead, we spend a great deal of time listening to those inside, asking what they need to be comfortable and cared for. Listening to those outside of our churches has often become a lost art. In his book, Autopsy of a Deceased Church, Thom Rainer says the single most common characteristic of a dead or dying church is becoming inward focused. Jesus asked, "What are you looking for?" What might your church discover if that question were posed in the community around your church? How could the church be transformed if the congregation listened and made changes to become more welcoming to what people outside were looking for?

The answer Jesus received was, "Where are you staying?" The translation is cumbersome. It seems to me that the people are saying, "We want to be where you are dwelling with God." And Jesus invited them saying, "Come and see." It seems to me that in the text, the people were looking to be close to God, and they perceived that Jesus knew the way.

When we ask people, "What are you looking for?" we might hear the same response, "I want to be in a place where people dwell with God." I would hope, assume, that your worship service brings people closer to God. I would guess that is why you participate. The next question to ask is, "Would your service make outsiders feel closer to God?" Congregations may be satisfied with how the service meets their needs, but may not always ask the question of whether it meets the needs of outsiders.

For a congregation to be inviting, and not just welcoming, what we are inviting people to must be something open to them; something that meets their needs. Often, we are welcoming of the people we want to come in and be a part of the same thing we have always done. However, most people who are on the outside want to be part of something new; something they helped shape.

Jesus has called us to be inviting. Jesus has called us to listen to others and welcome their input. When we have listened, and adjusted to the needs of our neighbors, then we can be like Jesus and invite them to come and see. Come and meet Jesus with us.

Rev. David. E. Sprang, Assistant to the Bishop, Director for Evangelical Mission

## John's Lenten Texts Workshop

Bishop Satterlee will lead preachers through the magnificent Lenten texts from John's Gospel on Tuesday, February 21 at Zion in Comstock Park. Watch the Weekly Update for details and plan now to attend!

## "Why Are Lutherans Political?" A Day of Conversation with Dr. James M. Childs, Jr.

In our Nation today, the relationship between faith and politics is a highly-charged topic of discussion. Dr. James Childs, Jr., Professor Emeritus of Theology and Ethics ad Trinity Lutheran Seminary, will guide us in exploration of this topic through presentations and conversation. This event will be held Saturday, March 25, 2017 from 9:30am to 3:30pm at Faith Lutheran Church in Okemos. All are welcome!

You may register for this event by contacting Ann at the Synod Office. Lunch will be provided for a modest fee.

## Save the Date: You Matter Event

Rostered Leaders "You Matter Day": Join us Tuesday, July 18, 2017 at Faith Lutheran Church in Saginaw. Our special guest, the Rev. Bishop Michael Rinehart of the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod will share some of this work and wisdom on the gift and challenge of prayer.

## Upcoming Events

### January

January 16	Synod Office Closed	
January 21	Anti-Racism Team Meeting	St. Stephen, Lansing

### February

February 2	Synod Boundaries Workshop	Zion, Saginaw
February 4	Youth Ministry Table	Trinity, Grand Rapids
February 9	Faith Formation Table	St. Stephen, Lansing
February 21	John's Lenten Texts with Bishop Satterlee	Zion, Comstock Park

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.

<b>Bay Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Dan Stoneback, Dean</b>	<b>Kalamazoo Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Kari Fast, Dean</b>
Faith/Saginaw	Nancy Steele (ECUSA), Interim/Reviewing MSP	St. Peter/Battle Creek	Cheryl Johnson, Stated Supply/Awaiting Candidate
Our Savior/Saginaw	Ann Grady (ECUSA), Intentional Interim	Immanuel/Allegan	Paul Kehnle, Stated Supply. Dean Beckwith, Pastoral Care
Resurrection/Saginaw	Barbara and Tim Bender, Interim/Call Committee Training	Prince of Peace/Portage	Jim Morgan (UMC), Stated Supply/Interviewing
<b>Capital Area Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean</b>	St. John's/Baroda	Brad Ross to NEOH Synod
University/East Lansing	John Schleicher, Interim/Preparing MSP		
<b>Greater Grand Rapids Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean</b>	<b>Stony Lake Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Doug Ogden, Dean</b>
Faith/Sidney	Betsy Kamphuis, Administrative Pastor/ Congregational Meeting January 22	Immanuel/Muskegon	Jack Ferra, Interim
Trinity/Grand Rapids	Part-time assistant/ Congregational Meeting January 15	St. Luke/Muskegon	Jack Ferra, Interim
St. Luke's/Grand Rapids	Associate Pastor/ Congregational Meeting January 29	Edgewood/Fruitport	Supply Pastors/ Interviewing
Grace/Hastings	Paul Kuhlman, Intentional Interim		
Mamrelund/Kent City	Matt Deames, Intentional Interim	<b>Sunrise Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean</b>
Zion/Woodland	Polly Standley, Intentional Interim	<b>Traverse Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Rosanne Anderson, Dean</b>
		Calvary/Elk Rapids	Supply Pastors/Discerning future
		Advent/Lake Ann	Chrysanne Timm, Interim Pastor/Preparing MSP
		Bethany/Northport	Supply Pastors/Awaiting candidate
		Immanuel/Suttons Bay	Supply Pastors/Preparing MSP