



North/ West Lower Michigan Synod

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A Spiritual House Made of Living Stones

"As you come to him, a living stone rejected by mortals but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4-5 ESV). First Peter was written to encourage people who were emotionally drained and disorientated by traumatic historical and social events. They were reeling from the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, the dwelling place of God, and they were experiencing alienation and suffering as outsiders of the social and political system.

Like the first recipients of this epistle, we need encouragement as we also find ourselves emotionally drained and disorientated by a changing church in a changing culture and world. Many of our beloved brothers and sisters reel as they peer just a few years into the future and behold the loss of their church home and congregation. Where once our congregations stood at the center of people's lives and communities, we find ourselves outside the social and political system. Peter invited his readers to keep coming to Jesus and to allow themselves to be built up into a spiritual temple or household of God, good news for people experiencing homelessness and wondering where God was in all of this. Peter's invitation bids across the centuries to us.

Once we hoped to build a physical home for our Synod—a "synod house," a Center of Mission and Ministry. When that did not happen, we moved in the direction of growing as a spiritual house made of living stones by helping our people to grow spiritually, strengthening connectivity through technology, and raising up leaders with seminary scholarships. These days, many of our congregations grow as living stones through the accompaniment, coaching, guidance, instruction, and intervention of our Synod, often through the staff. Our rostered ministers and congregational leaders grow as living stones through inspiration, instruction, networking, and support provided by our synod.

Pastors Anderson, Sprang, Timm, and I further proposed, and Synod Council approved, inviting 100 people (or combinations of people) of our synod to make a three-year commitment of an annual designated "Living Stone" gift of \$500 each year to our synod for the Living Stone ministry initiatives. Together, the annual grant and Living Stone gifts will yield \$115,000 per year and will eliminate our annual deficit. Moreover, these efforts will help individuals appreciative of and committed to synodical ministry know they can give directly to the North/ West Lower Michigan Synod in the same way they give to Samaritas, Living Water Ministries, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, and the ELCA's Always Being Made New campaign.

Pastors Anderson, Sprang, Timm, and I therefore proposed, and Synod Council approved, that we continue to move in this direction— as a spiritual house made of living stones—by designating the approximately \$200,000 originally intended for the physical bricks and mortar of a synod building to support our strategic initiatives over a three-year period (2020/21-2022/23) through an annual grant to the general budget of \$65,000.

Pastors Anderson, Sprang, Timm, and I proposed—and Synod Council improved—"Living Stone" ministry initiatives to accompany this Living Stone financial initiative. These ministry initiatives will assist our congregations and leaders "to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

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Our wish list includes:

- 18 congregations participating in REVIVE, a year-long vitality program developed by Pastor David Sprang and our vitality team.
- 75 congregational leaders over the three-year period complete a retooled Equipping Leaders for Mission and Ministry (ELMM) program in four tracks: (1) Lutheran Bible study leader; (2) stewardship specialist; (3) community evangelist/catalyst; (4) assisting minister.
- 20 candidates for rostered ministry are identified, accompanied, and supported.
- Rostered ministers are relieved of some measure of educational indebtedness.
- Congregations leading and growing in their mission support of our synod, together with individuals committed to the Living Stone financial initiative, are honored and thanked at Mission Support Dinners.
- Rostered and congregational leaders receive increased opportunities for inspiration and continuing education.
- Our synod makes a renewed commitment to discuss ways to welcome all God's people.
- Our youth, especially those in smaller congregations, are afforded an additional level of youth ministry, to build on the excellent events provided by Living Water Ministries, perhaps through a retreat in each conference over the three-year period.
- Struggling congregations receive accompaniment and assistance to realistically assess their sustainability and, where desirable, to partner with neighboring congregations, both ELCA and full communion partners.
- People outside the church are invited to "come to [Jesus], a living stone rejected by mortals but in the sight of God chosen and precious" because we remain vigilant to opportunities for synodically authorized worshiping communities.
- Latino and Native American communities on the territory of our Synod experience the love of Jesus through our listening to and learning from them.

In next month's newsletter, I'll put more flesh on these Living Stone ministry initiatives. For now, I invite you to spend some time praying over them. Which one do you and your congregation want to invest your heart and your energy in? The Holy Spirit may very well give you insights that will shape these directions.

I invite you to participate in the Living Stone financial initiative by making a three year \$500 annual commitment (\$1500) to our Synod. We are already receiving these commitments, starting with the Synod Staff. In a way, we're putting the cart before the horse by asking for money before we have pledge cards. If you are interested in making this commitment, send me an email at bishopcraigsatterlee@mittensynod.org. I also invite you to send me the names of people I should contact and invite to become Living Stone givers. I love our Synod, its leaders and congregations, and I am proud of the work we are doing. So, I am happy to talk to people about why they would enjoy financially supporting this ministry both in person or on the phone. If you have questions or would like me to talk to your congregation or council, please call me at 517-321-5066. I am also happy to have you join me in prayer for what I believe the Holy Spirit is leading us to do. "As you come to him, a living stone rejected by mortals but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4-5).

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

Dear Parents With Young Children in Church

Jamie Bruesehoff

You are doing something really, really important. I know it's not easy. I see you with your arms overflowing, and I know you came to church already tired. Parenting is tiring. Really tiring.

I watch you bounce and sway trying to keep the baby quiet, juggling the infant car seat and the diaper bag as you find a seat. I see you wince as your child cries. I see you anxiously pull things out of your bag of tricks to try to quiet them.

And I see you with your toddler and your preschooler. I watch you cringe when your little girl asks an innocent question in a voice that might not be an inside voice let alone a church whisper. I hear the exasperation in your voice as you beg your child to just sit, to be quiet as you feel everyone's eyes on you. Not everyone is looking, but I know it feels that way.

I know you're wondering, is this worth it? Why do I bother? I know you often leave church more exhausted than fulfilled. But what you are doing is so important.

When you are here, the church is filled with a joyful noise. When you are here, the Body of Christ is more fully present. When you are here, we are reminded that this worship thing we do isn't about bible study or personal, quiet contemplation but coming together to worship as a community where all are welcome, where we share in the Word and Sacrament together. When you are here, I have hope that these pews won't be empty in 10 years when your kids are old enough to sit quietly and behave in worship. I know that they are learning how and why we worship now, before it's too late. They are learning that worship is important.

I see them learning. In the midst of the cries, whines, and giggles, in the midst of the crinkling of pretzel bags and the growing pile of crumbs, I see a little girl who insists on going two pews up to share peace with someone she's never met. I hear a little boy slurping (quite loudly) every last drop of his communion wine out of the cup, determined not to miss a drop of Jesus. I watch a child excitedly color a cross and point to the one in the front of the sanctuary. I hear the echos of "Amens" just a few seconds after the rest of the community says it together. I watch a boy just learning to read try to sound out the words in the worship book or count his way to Hymn 672. Even on weeks when I can't see my own children learning because, well, it's one of those mornings, I can see your children learning.

I know how hard it is to do what you're doing, but I want you to know it matters. It matters to me. It matters to my children to not be alone in the pew. It matters to the congregation to know that families care about faith, to see young people... and even on those weeks when you can't see the little moments, it matters to your children.

It matters that they learn that worship is what we do as a community of faith, that everyone is welcome, that their worship matters. When we teach children that their worship matters, we teach them that they are enough right here and right now as members of the church community. They don't need to wait until they can believe, pray or worship a certain way to be welcome here, and I know adults who are still looking to be shown that. It matters that children learn that they are an integral part of this church, that their prayers, their songs, and even their badly (or perfectly-timed, depending on who you ask) cries and whines are a joyful noise because it means they are present.

I know it's hard, but thank you for what you do when you bring your children to church. Please know that your family – with all of its noise, struggle, commotion, and joy – are not simply tolerated, you are a vital part of the community gathered in worship.

This article originally appeared on Jamie Bruesehoff's blog "I am totally *that* mom"

View the original post: <https://bit.ly/1FVGiLC>

Synod Finances as of December 31, 2018

December Revenue and Support

Mission Support	\$ 114,115
Other	\$ 38,314
Total	\$ 152,429

December Expenses

Support to ELCA	\$ 70,558
Other	\$ 62,443
Total	\$ 133,001

Net Assets Released from Restriction	\$ 0
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Net Change in Fund Balance	\$ 19,428
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Year to Date Revenue and Support

Mission Support	\$ 1,261,810
Other	\$ 127,994
Total	\$1,389,804

Year to Date Expenses

Support to ELCA	\$ 630,905
Other	\$ 847,294
Total	\$1,478,199

Net Assets Released from Restriction	\$ 1,497
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Net Change in Fund Balance	\$ (86,898)
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Rostered Minister Annual Reports

All rostered ministers are expected to complete and return a report to Bishop Satterlee by February 15, 2019.

Remember to save the form to your computer before completing it. Once completed, forms should be emailed to Bishop Satterlee.

Download Forms: <https://bit.ly/2ElhjHx>

Synod Office Closure

The Synod Office will be closed on January 21, 2019 in observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

Save the Date for Spring Events

Spring Discernment Retreat

March 1-2, Mansfield, OH

Are you sensing that God may be calling you to minister as a deacon or pastor in the ELCA? Participation in a Discernment Retreat is an excellent way to explore that question.

Register: <https://bit.ly/2RhyTE2>

Synod Boundaries Workshop

March 7, Resurrection, Saginaw

All rostered ministers who have not attended a boundaries workshop in the past 3 years are strongly encouraged to attend. Lay leaders may also attend.

Register: <https://bit.ly/2FkvEFB>

Silent Directed Retreat

March 17-20, St. Francis, Dewitt

Take time during Lent to rest, reflect, and deepen your relationship with God. Join us for an ecumenical lenten retreat sponsored by Living Fire Ministries.

Register: <https://bit.ly/2ACXZTK>

For the Life of the World: Bonhoeffer & Ecology

March 23, University Lutheran, East Lansing

The Publicly Engaged Church Table, in cooperation with the Holle Speaker Series, will be presenting a seminar by Rev. Dr. Lisa E. Dahill, Associated Professor of Religion at California Lutheran University.

Learn More: <https://bit.ly/2FpzEnB>

Walking Together

March 30, Calvary, Lansing

Congregational Lay Leaders are invited to a day of worship, learning, and encouragement, centered on the theme of Your Congregation/Our Synod: A Spiritual House Made of Living Stones.

Register: <https://bit.ly/2FkwulJ>

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.

Bay Conference	Rev. Emily Olsen, Dean	Kalamazoo Conference	Rev. Kjersten Priddy, Dean
Hope/Marlette (part-time)	Supply Pastors/Discerning Future	Savior/Kalamazoo	Paul Neuchterlein, Interim/ Congregational Vote 1/27
Prince of Peace/Rose City	Jeff Bonn, Intentional Interim/Awaiting a candidate	St. John and Trinity Episcopal/Three Rivers	Jim Morgan, Stated Supply/ Congregational Vote 1/27
Grace/Vassar (part-time)	Supply Pastors/Discerning Future	Stony Lake Conference	Rev. Doug Ogden, Dean
St. Paul/Au Gres (part-time)	Partnering with Grace, East Tawas/Congregational Meeting to call Amanda Carpenter as deacon 1/13. Consecration and Installation 2/2.	Samuel/Muskegon	Chris Anderson, Interim/ Interviewing
Capital Area Conference	Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean	Sunrise Conference	Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean
St. Stephen/Lansing	Erick Johnson, Interim/ Updating MSP	Peace/Gaylord	Gary Grieger, Interim/ Requesting additional candidates
Calvary/Lansing	David Augenstein, Stated Supply/Preparing MSP	St. Paul/Alpena	Supply Pastors/Interviewing
Greater Grand Rapids Conference	Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean	Traverse Conference	Rev. Rosanne Anderson, Dean
Peace/Holland	Clay Bates, Interim/Preparing MSP		
Immanuel/Big Rapids	Dennis Smith, contracted through June/Discerning Future		