

# Bishop's Newsletter

September 2017



## North/ West Lower Michigan Synod

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## In this Issue:

Bishop's Letter

Vitality

Upcoming Events

Congregations in Transition

## Does God Cause the Weather?

Our news is filled with reports of Harvey and Irma. Today, I read about mosquitoes, mold, and a shortage of medicine in Texas. I heard reports of destruction in the Caribbean, the damaged power grid in Florida, and flooding in Georgia. I watched a piece on the melting Arctic Ocean and the corresponding military buildup because of access to fossil fuel and faster trade routes. The drought, fires, and evacuations in Montana don't seem to be making as much news.

Attempting to make all of this seem reasonable, theological commentators are providing explanations for why God would allow this to happen, if not outright cause it. For example, a [Newsweek](#) article reports, "LGBTQ Americans have caused the country billions of dollars in structural damage, killed dozens of people, and displaced thousands more from their homes, according to the evangelical figures who believe gay people caused Hurricane Harvey."

Despite overwhelming evidence that adverse weather and climate change played a role in the storm that devastated parts of Texas, numerous voices emerged that suggested the biblical proportions of the flood prove that Harvey resulted from God's judgment.

For those who worship a cause-and-effect God, who takes vengeance on innocent masses because of what they consider to be the sinful actions of a few, this all makes sense. For us who know the grace of God revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it does not. A hurricane causing God is contrary to the gospel. As surely as Jesus hung on

the cross, Jesus was with those whose lives were destroyed by hurricane, flood, and fire.

If we need a theological explanation for hurricanes, wildfires, melting seas, and the warming of the planet, perhaps we could look to something more obvious. In Romans we read, "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:21-23).

The planet earth, the first living thing in God's work of creation, is groaning from its bondage to decay, and mother earth is groaning in ways that will be hard. Claimed by God as daughters and sons in the waters of baptism, joined to Christ as heirs of his promise, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be servants of all, we participate in Christ's own work of salvation so that the earth itself is set free from its bondage to decay and obtains the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Our synod has an environmental stewardship team; Linn Kracht is a contact person. This team is eager to help you and your congregation care for and advocate for the planet as we carry out our biblical mandate to nurture, and not exploit, God's good earth.

Wishing you a beautiful autumn in nature,  
The Rev. Craig Alan Satterlee, Ph.D., Bishop

## Vitality

It is the new buzz work among church professionals. Is a church vital? The ELCA has created an assessment tool for congregations. It is open to the world, and ELCA congregation can assess the basic tool for free (<http://www.congregationalvitalitysurvey.com/>). Many congregations did the one page vitality survey as part of their Parochial Report this past year. Results are coming in and they are "interesting" to say the least. The vitality tool is a self-assessment. The debate over vitality seems to be centered on: "who judges the vitality?" those on the inside or those on the outside.

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being poor vitality and 5 being great vitality, the ELCA congregational average was 3.8, above average. That seems to fly in opposition to real numbers that show our denomination shrinking, worship numbers dwindling, and children and youth numbers down drastically. What it says to me is that most ELCA congregations are satisfied with doing things the way they have always been done, because it satisfies the needs of those on the inside. Worship, educational opportunities, and spirituality all satisfy the needs and desires of those who are already members.

I wonder what it would look like to have community members do the survey to assess a congregation's vitality, people on the outside looking in, instead of the people on the inside looking in? Fully one-third of all congregations taking the survey gave themselves a 5 when it comes to being a positive influence in the community. Giving food, serving on community boards, and donating to United Way are all admirable deeds, but that alone does it make a congregation vital in the eyes of the community? I received a list of the top 23 congregations in our synod; those who scored high on the Vitality Survey. In my own opinion, about one-half are vital in the eyes of the community and the rest are vital in nourishing those inside. For instance one congregation, "in a synod far far away", worships 25 with no staff, no outreach, and no children. Yet they rate themselves as (5) very vital.

The ELCA churchwide staff is evaluating the Vitality Survey results. Clearly the questions have to be tweaked to reflect vitality in the whole community and not just inside the church community. As I walk and talk with congregations that seem to be vital they: 1) have a strong spirituality which empowers their outreach, 2) engage the community on a personal/relational level, 3) talk to people about Jesus, 4) invite people in or bring Jesus to the people, 5) have willingness to deny self for the sake of others with Gospel openness and grace for all, 6) preach the good news of grace, acceptance, and forgiveness inside and outside the building in word and deed.

To me it seems important for congregations to initiate conversations within the communities they serve to listen to the needs and assess how the mission and ministry of the congregation can improve the physical vitality of the community. In that process, look at what Jesus is doing in the community and in the church members, as they engage the context God has called them to serve.

The Rev. David E. Sprang, Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Evangelical Mission

### Synod Finances

as of June 30, 2017

June		Year to Date	
Income		Income	
Mission Support	\$ 105,368	Mission Support	\$ 585,546
All Other Income	\$ 2,314	All Other Income	\$ 75,661
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 107,682</b>	<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 661,207</b>
Expenses			
Support to ELCA	\$ 52,684	Support to ELCA	\$ 292,773
All Other Expenses	\$ 69,451	All Other Expenses	\$ 359,969
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 122,135</b>	<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 652,742</b>
Plus Net Assets Released	\$ 583		\$ 2,629
From Restricted Funds			
Balance +/-	- \$ 13,870	Balance +/-	+ \$ 11,094

### Autumn Leadership Event

Rostered leaders, Synodically Authorized Ministers, and Lay Ministry Training Program Graduates are welcome to join us for the Autumn Leadership Event this fall! This year's theme is Ever Reforming—Our Ministries, Our Word and will feature a presentation from Beth Lewis, CEO of 1517 Media.

The event will be held Sunday, October 22, to Tuesday, October 24 at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Traverse City.

**Learn more and Register:** <http://bit.ly/2tkgkys>

### Praying with our Honduran Companions

Our Synod has been in a companion ministry with the Lutheran Church of Honduras (ICLH) for more than a decade. Our partnership has made a difference in the lives of those who share in this faith journey. In gratitude for our relationship, we will be praying for the 12 faith communities in Honduras on October 8, while they are praying for our congregations. We have been invited to pray for the healing ministries of the Salud Para La Vida (Health for Life) program as it touches the lives of the poorest of the poor in underserved neighborhoods, for the water filter program, for kindergarten nutrition programs, and for the spiritual renewal of those who participate in these ministries. The designated prayer of the day leads us forward in mission. Beloved God, from you come all things that are good. Lead us by the inspiration of your Spirit to know those things that are right, and by your merciful guidance, help us to do them, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Consider singing the hymn "Oh, Sing to the Lord" #822 in the Red Hymnal, and reading the Lord's Prayer in Spanish.

### Upcoming Events

September		
September 19	Portico Webinar	Online
September 29-30	WELCA Retreat and Convention	White Cloud

October		
October 6-7	Discernment Retreat	Donaldson, IN
October 19	Synod Boundaries Workshop	Fruitport
October 22-24	Autumn Leadership Event	Traverse City

**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. Emily Olsen, Dean</b>	<b>Kalamazoo Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Kjersten Priddy, Dean</b>
Hope/Marlette (part-time)	Supply Pastors/Preparing MSP	Immanuel/Allegan (part-time)	Dan Ward, contracted pastor, Installation 9/24
St. Matthew/Bridgeport	Supply Pastors/Bridge Builders Consult, Preparing MSP	Messiah/Constantine	Dennis Smith retiring January 2018/Awaiting a candidate
Prince of Peace/Rose City	Supply Pastors/Preparing MSP	St. John's/Baroda	Supply Pastors/Awaiting a candidate
Our Savior/Saginaw (part-time)	Supply Pastors/Discerning Future	<b>Stony Lake Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Doug Ogden, Dean</b>
Resurrection/Saginaw	Barbara and Tim Bender, Interim/Congregational Vote 10/1	Immanuel/Muskegon	Jack Ferra, Interim
St. John/Saginaw	Supply Pastors/Discerning Future	St. Luke/Muskegon	Jack Ferra, Interim
Grace/Vassar (part-time)	Supply Pastors/Discerning Future	Samuel/Muskegon	Jonathan Reid, Stated Supply through 9/17/Awaiting a candidate
St. Peter/Unionville	CALL ACCEPTED: Renee MacLeod. Installation 9/17	<b>Sunrise Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean</b>
St. Paul's/Au Gres	Rhianna Goodrich/Discerning Future	Trinity/Barton City	F. Laraine Sundin retiring January 2018/Discerning Future
St. Timothy/Midland (part-time)	Supply Pastors/Preparing MSP	St. James/Millersburg (part-time)	Jeff Bonn contract ends January 2018/Awaiting a candidate
<b>Capital Area Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean</b>	Trinity/Ocqueoc (part-time)	Jeff Bonn contract ends January 2018/Awaiting a candidate
University/East Lansing	John Schleicher, Interim lead pastor; Haley Van Beaman, Interim associate pastor/Interviewing	<b>Traverse Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Rosanne Anderson, Dean</b>
<b>Greater Grand Rapids Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean</b>	Bethany/Northport	Supply Pastors/CALL ACCEPTED: Ruth Overdier starts 10/1
Grace/Hastings	Supply Pastors/Interviewing	Immanuel/Suttons Bay	Supply Pastors/CALL ACCEPTED: Jonathan Reid
Mamrelund/Kent City	Matt Deames, Intentional Interim	St. Paul's/Reed City	Dawn Pooley retiring June 2018/Preparing MSP
Zion/Woodland	CALL ACCEPTED: Rebecca Ebb-Speese. Installation 9/17	Messiah/Roscommon	Gary Greiger, stated supply/Discerning future
Christ/Wyoming	Polly Standley, Interim beginning 10/1/Preparing MSP	Augustana/Tustin	Clay Bates contract ends December 2017