



**North/West Lower
Michigan Synod**

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In this Issue:

Climate Change: A Matter of Faith?

Synod Assembly 2021

Upcoming Events

Congregations in Transition

Climate Change: A Matter of Faith?¹

The connection between Jesus and climate change is not as obvious to some as it is to others. Growing up, I learned more about conservation and the environment from the Boy Scouts than from the Church. Jesus saved souls, not plants and animals. In fact, God said humankind is to “subdue” the earth and “have dominion” over its creatures (Genesis 1:28).

The twenty-first century is a time of unparalleled ecological crisis as the very survival of complex forms of life and beauty, including humankind, are threatened by the decisions and actions of human beings. The ecological damage that modern humanity has inflicted on the planet have reinforced our awareness that the survival and flourishing of humanity are intimately linked with the well-being of the planet. Responding to this concern is a divisive and pressing issue for individuals, communities, companies, and governments.

While addressing climate change is certainly a matter of survival, why is climate change a matter of faith and a concern of the Church? The answer is that the story of salvation in Jesus Christ includes not only the human history of salvation, but also grace bestowed on the cosmos. We show our respect for the Creator and participate in Jesus’ saving work by our stewardship of the creation. Created in God’s image, we “have dominion” over the earth and its creatures by caring for them as God does (Genesis 1:26).

Jesus embraces all creation in the saving work of his life, death, and resurrection. In Jesus’ incarnation, God became one with and transformed, not only human nature, but also material creation, so the divine is made present and available to us in and through creation. Traces of the mystery of God, definitively disclosed in Jesus Christ, can be discovered throughout the universe.² From this perspective, “the term *sarx* in John 1:14 connotes not just human flesh but all that is finite and perishable, the matter that extends throughout the universe.”³ God became flesh to so connect God and the world that the “stuff” of the cosmos is granted both dignity; such that matter mediates God’s presence to humanity, and a future for a creation marked by decomposition and suffering becomes possible by the redeeming grace of Christ.

The “earthy” nature of Jesus’ public ministry reveals God’s concern for the entire cosmos. Jesus attended to people’s bodily needs by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and welcoming the outcast at table. In his preaching of the Reign of God, Jesus often turned to what early and Medieval Christians termed the “Book of Nature” as the starting point for his parables. Jesus directed his disciples to “read the signs of the times” in the signs of nature.

Continued on page 2

¹ This article is based on Craig Alan Satterlee, “Preaching Yoked to Jesus,” unpublished manuscript (2021), pp. 193-196. Do not share without permission of the author.

² Mary Catherine Hilkert, OP, “Preaching from the Book of Nature,” *Worship* 76, no. 4 (July 2002): 291.

³ Robin Ryan, *Jesus and Salvation: Soundings in the Christian Tradition and Contemporary Theology* (Concord, MA: Michael Glazier, 2015), p. 157.

Continued from page 1

“He used images of seeds randomly sown, dying fig trees, untended vineyards, and wandering sheep as entry points for speaking about God's providence, fidelity, justice, and compassion.”⁴ Jesus' concern for physical needs and use of nature images to reveal God indicate that God's Reign encompasses the entire planet with all of its ecosystems and, in fact, the entire cosmos. Moreover, God's word is disclosed not only through the Scriptures, but also through the “Book of Nature,” a genuine source of revelation. As two expressions of the word of God, the Bible and the Book of Nature need to be interpreted in light of each other.

Turning to the cross, when Jesus says that, lifted up from the earth, he will draw all *people* to himself (John 12:32), we might hear *creation* or the *cosmos*. On the cross, Jesus draws all creation to God. Jesus' solidarity on the cross extends beyond humanity to all creatures. Paul observes, “We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now” (Romans 8:22.). Theologians understand creation's “groaning” as the suffering and death that are intrinsic to evolutionary development. They press us to consider how the groaning of all of creation is intertwined with the cries of the human poor.⁵ Jesus embraces creation's agony in his agonizing death. While the cross itself is an unjust act perpetrated by human beings, the divine solidarity revealed in Jesus' participation in death makes the bold claim that no creature, human or nonhuman, is ever alone in its suffering. God is always present in divine compassion.⁶

The Church's proclamation of Jesus' resurrection has always included the bodily or corporeal dimension.⁷ Jesus has been raised by the Father in every aspect of his personhood. Those who proclaimed Jesus as risen from the dead envisioned his destiny as the hope for all creation. The author of Colossians names Christ “the firstborn of creation” and “the firstborn from the dead” (1:15, 18). Ambrose of Milan asserted that “The universe rose again in Him, the heaven rose again in Him, the earth rose again in Him.”⁸ Ambrose even suggested that at the end of time all creation will join human beings in the beatific vision.⁹ The risen Christ is the crown of God's new creation.

If you are not quite ready to put a solar panel on your church, I invite you to spend the Easter season and this summer praying for creation as you would for a sick friend. As you have occasion to be in creation, whether sitting in the sunshine in your home or walking through the woods or along the lake, consider what God may be revealing to you through the Book of Nature. When your congregation is ready to learn or do more, please contact our Synod's Environmental Stewardship Task Force.

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

⁴ Hilkert, “Preaching from the Book of Nature,” 292.

⁵ Hilkert, “Preaching from the Book of Nature,” 293.

⁶ Ryan, *Jesus and Salvation*, p. 159.

⁷ See Luke 24:4-143; John 20: 17, 20.

⁸ Ambrose of Milan, *On the Death of His Brother Satyrus*, Book. 1:102, H. DeRomestin, *Saint Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 191.

⁹ Ambrose of Milan, *Epistle 35:13*, Mary Melchoir Beyenka, O.P., *Saint Ambrose: Letters*. The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 26 (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1954), pp. 281-282.

North/West Lower Michigan Synod 2021 Synod Assembly



Synod Assembly 2021

Given the ongoing concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic, many events continue to be held differently than in past years. For the 2021 Synod Assembly, Synod Council has approved a virtual assembly, which will be held on May 15, 2021 via Zoom.

Due to its virtual nature, this year's Synod Assembly will be primarily business focused. Therefore, only voting members will be able to register for and participate in the Zoom meeting. All non-voting members and visitors are invited to watch the Synod Assembly via livestream on social media.

As congregations select voting members, please keep in mind that voting members should be comfortable using computers, mobile devices, and/or tablets, learning and using applications, and accessing information from websites. Additionally, each voting

member will need their own email address and voting device (smartphone or tablet). They will also need access to a computer to participate in the Zoom meeting. It is recommended that voting members use a computer to host the Zoom meeting and use a smartphone or tablet as their voting device.

In the coming months, additional updates and resources will be posted on the Synod Assembly page of the Synod website: <https://mittensynod.org/events/assembly>

Registration

Registration is now open! Given the nature of this year's Synod Assembly, only voting members will be able to register. All non-voting members and visitors are invited to watch the Synod Assembly via livestream on social media. **Registration forms must be completed online and submitted by April 21, 2021.** There will be no late registration. Please read all of the registration information before completing the registration form.

Given the technological nature of this Synod Assembly, voting members should be comfortable using computers, mobile devices, and/or tablets, learning and using applications, and accessing information from websites. Additionally, each voting member will need their own email address and voting device (smartphone or tablet). They will also need access to a computer to participate in the Zoom meeting. It is recommended that voting members use a computer to host the Zoom meeting and use a smartphone or tablet as their voting device.

As part of registering for Synod Assembly, voting members will have the option to sign up for pre-assembly discussion sessions and technology orientations. The pre-assembly discussion sessions are two-hour, optional, informal sessions aimed at providing voting members with an opportunity to discuss resolutions and the budget. The one-hour technology orientations provide voting members with an opportunity to go over Zoom basics and practice voting. The pre-assembly discussion sessions will be held May 4-5, 2021 and the technology orientations will be held May 11-13, 2021. After completing the registration form, voting members should expect to receive emails in the coming months with additional information.

Register Now: <http://bit.ly/3qHLFZs>

Memorials and Resolutions

In preparation for Synod Assembly, the Environmental Stewardship Task Force invites voting members to watch a short video on the issue of disposable plastics. Watch Now: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhnE940xOu0>

Synod Finances

Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund	March	YTD
Beginning Fund Balance	243,056	232,679
Mission Support Revenue	134,351	252,159
Other Revenue	13,787	14,454
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0
Total Revenue	148,138	266,613
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	67,175	126,080
Other Expenses	50,616	99,810
Total Expenses	117,791	225,889
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	30,347	40,724
Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund Balance as of 3/31/21	273,403	273,403
Other Fund Balances		
Unrestricted-Designated Funds		659,575
Endowment-Related Temporarily-Restricted Funds		811,216
Temporarily-Restricted Funds		320,201
Permanently-Restricted Funds		924,639
Total Other Fund Balances		2,715,631
Total - All Funds (as of 3/31/21)		2,989,034

ELCA Financial Ministries

Some congregation leaders may not be aware of the financial ministries available as part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We invite you to learn about, or refresh your knowledge about, the ELCA Mission Investment Fund, ELCA Foundation Pooled Trust Fund A, and the ELCA Credit Union.

The [ELCA Mission Investment Fund](#) offers investments for individuals, congregations, and social ministry organizations, along with loans for church and ministry building projects, land purchases and refinancing.

Designed specifically for congregations, synods, seminaries, and other affiliates of the ELCA, the [ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust Fund A](#) provides a long-term investment fund with distributions to support ministry.

The [ELCA Federal Credit Union](#) was created by the ELCA to provide additional financial services to ELCA members, employees of synods, congregations, or any other ELCA-related ministry. It is the first of the ELCA's financial ministries to offer individual consumer loans, so, as an ELCA member, you now have access to a wide range of financial services. With the church as its sponsor, the ELCA Federal Credit Union operates in ways that are consistent with the church's values, making it a socially responsible way to do your banking.

Hunger and Climate Change Webinar

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God...” (Romans 8:19)

God's handiwork ties us together with all of creation, from the abundant blessings we enjoy to the many ways we depend on the health of the land and water. As our climate continues to change, more frequent and more severe droughts, flooding, and changing growing seasons all remind us of this relationship and the threat that a changing climate poses for communities around the world. This threat is expected to drive nearly 100 million more people into poverty this decade alone.

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod's Hunger Team and Environmental Stewardship Task Force will be joined by Ryan Cumming, Ph.D., Program Director for Hunger Education with ELCA World Hunger for a conversation about climate change, poverty, hunger — and the many ways God is at work in the United States and around the world. This webinar will be held Thursday, June 24 at 6:30pm.

Together, we will learn more about the climate's impact on hunger and poverty; hear stories of ministries accompanying farmers, migrants, and others impacted by climate events; and share ways the church can work together for a just world —including climate justice — where all are fed.

Registration information will be coming soon. For more information about this event, contact Erick Johnson, Hunger Team Chair at erickj74@gmail.com.

Synod Staff Video Sermons

For the foreseeable future, Bishop Satterlee, Pastor Rosanne Anderson, and Pastor David Sprang will be recording sermons for congregations to use as part of their weekly virtual worship services.

Rostered Ministers are invited to sign up to receive the sermons in advance on Wednesday afternoons. These sermons are then released to the general public on Sunday afternoons.

Sign-up: <https://bit.ly/3hnZd7A>

Coronavirus Resources

We continue to post updates and resources pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic on our website.

On April 10, Gov. Whitmer urged Michiganders to suspend in-person classes, youth sports, and indoor dining and gatherings for the next two weeks. In line with the Governor's urging, Bishop Satterlee strongly recommends the suspension of indoor in-person worship through April 30, 2021. Read Letter: <https://bit.ly/32bV55E>

Beginning Monday, April 5, all Michiganders age 16 and up who were not previously eligible will be eligible to receive a vaccine. Learn More: <http://bit.ly/3cpl4v3>

On March 2, The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services extended its epidemic order requiring masks and limiting some indoor gatherings through April 19, 2021. Learn More: <http://bit.ly/3rUjdOw>

View all COVID-19 resources: <http://bit.ly/3rL2fsF>

Due to Synod Assembly there will be no Bishop's Newsletter for May 2021. The next issue will be June 2021.

Upcoming Events

April 15	Ignite the Church Conference	Online	https://www.ignitethechurch.net
April 18 - 21	Ecumenical Advocacy Days	Online	http://advocacydays.org/
April 27	AMMPARO Informational Meeting	Zoom	https://bit.ly/3wS93Yv
April 29 - 30	Trinity Seminary's Nelson Trout Lectures	Online	https://bit.ly/3a4IiWY
May 15	North/West Lower Michigan Synod Assembly	Online	https://bit.ly/3dd4Q9R

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 Sullivan, Dean
Capital Area Conference	Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean	St. John/Baroda	Updating MSP
Greater Grand Rapids Conference	Rev. Julie Schneider- Thomas, Dean	Stony Lake Conference	Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean
		Sunrise Conference	Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean
		Traverse Conference	Rev. Scott Torkko, Dean