



**North/West Lower
Michigan Synod**

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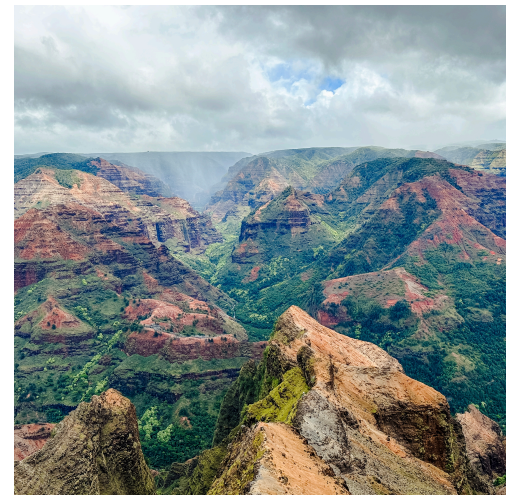
Congregations in Transition

“Mālama ka ‘aina”

In the Hawaiian language, the phrase “Mālama ka ‘aina” means to take care of the land. Hawaiians, to this day, love, preserve, and protect the land as the source of their living. Hawaiians believe that, if we take care of the land, the land will take care of us. A related phrase, “Mālama Honua,” means to take care of the earth. When we protect the planet, we keep it well for future generations.

My family and I learned the concept of “Mālama ka ‘aina” as we explored the islands. We were asked not to litter and to stay on the trails, keep our distance from wildlife, and make certain there were no seeds on our shoes that could take root and threaten plants endemic to Hawaii. Mostly, we were invited to consider the islands and the ocean that surrounds and connects them as sacred.

There are few places in the modern world in which the connection between humankind, myth, and nature is more obvious than Hawaii. More than a relic of Hawaii's distant past, Hawaiian mythology is a very present spiritual belief among many of the islands' indigenous people. As noted historian Herb Kawainui Kane stated in the PBS series, *The Hawaiians*, island natives believed that, “The entire universe was an orderly, fixed whole in which all the parts were integral to the whole, including man himself. Man was descended from the Gods, but so were the rocks, so were the animals, so were the fish. Thus man had to regard the rocks, the fish and the birds as his relatives.”



Waimea Canyon, Kauai



Poipu Beach, Kauai

In Hawaiian mythology, the islands and ocean provide unmistakable evidence of the gods. Pele is the goddess of fire and volcano; Namaka is the goddess of water and the sea—and waves. Laka, the goddess of the forest who enriches the plants with light, is best known for creating the beautiful Hawaiian hula dance. Seen most recently in Disney's *Moana*, Maui is a demigod and the god of the sun. When the sun rose and set too quickly, Maui tamed it and extended the length of a day so people could have longer days to work. Yet, my favorite is Kamohoalii, the chief deity among the shark gods, who is revered for his role in guiding ancient Polynesian travelers to Hawaii, leading lost ships to safety, and protecting sailors. For a lighthearted appreciation of Hawaiian mythology, pay attention to the ocean in Disney's *Moana*. For something more substantial, read Chapter 2 of James Michener's novel *Hawaii*.

These goddesses and gods, and several more, are connected to particular places in Hawaii. For example, on the island of Kauai, Pele dug into the earth and formed a hill called Pu'oupele or “the hill of Pele.” We understand associating places with the divine, at least in theory. In the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament, Jacob called the place where he wrestled with the angel Peniel “face of God,” because he saw God face-to-face and his life was

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preserved (Genesis 32:30). Many pilgrims to the Holy Land report they experience Jesus's presence most acutely not in church buildings, but in natural places, including the Jordan River, Sea of Galilee, Mount of Olives, and Garden of Gethsemane.

Yet, these Biblical locations are far away; connecting to the places Jesus lived, taught, suffered, died, and rose requires either study or pilgrimage. So, here at home, we experience Jesus in church buildings, which are a step removed from nature and creation. If we are honest with ourselves, we subtly discourage people from experiencing Jesus in nature and creation, out of fear that, if people genuinely experience Jesus in nature, they may not return to our church buildings.

How much we want to care for and protect our church buildings! Rather than sacrificially caring for the land, so the land will take care of us, by asking how many buildings the church actually needs, we endeavor to make our buildings more hospitable to the planet through green teams and solar panels. These are certainly worthwhile undertakings that, of course, deserve to be lauded. Nevertheless, I return from Hawaii wondering what would happen if we strove to recover the sacredness of creation rather than confining Jesus and our appreciation of sacred space to our buildings. What kind of impact would we have if "Mālama ka 'aina" became an integral part of our spirituality?

How might we cultivate this Hawaiian (and Native American) spiritual perspective? Earth Day is April 22. Perhaps we could use this day and month to put some plans in place for the summer. Here are four ideas:

- First, let's get out of our buildings at least one Sunday this summer. I'm not thinking of folding chairs on the church's front lawn. Let's go to the beach. Let's go to the park. Let's go into the woods. I seem to recall that, once upon a time, Immanuel in Suttons Bay held Easter sunrise worship in a cherry orchard; perhaps they still do. Our Ludington and Muskegon congregations used to worship on the beach. St. Paul's in Alpena worships on the shore of Lake Superior. Forty years ago, as an intern, I spent some summer Sundays leading worship at Trinity/Midland's camp.

Perhaps being locked out of our church buildings during the pandemic has made us determined never to leave them again. People remind me that Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues and that Jesus taught in the temple in Jerusalem. That's true. Jesus also taught in a boat on the sea of Galilee and on a mountain (as in Sermon on the Mount). Jesus also prayed on a mountain, in a garden, and at a river. We can leave our building; our building will be there when we come back. I acknowledge that this is easier for me to say because I do not have a single church building that I call home.



Laniakea Beach, Oahu

Keep worship simple when you venture out into nature. As obvious as it sounds, don't attempt to re-create indoor worship outdoors. People and the word are all we really need to worship. Read a story about Jesus spending time in nature, ideally a story that is appropriate for the location. We can sing and pray things we know by heart. Don't bring books. Don't make bulletins. Some water for remembering baptism might be lovely; consider using the water that's there. Some bread and wine might be nice, but it's not necessary. I suggest some silence or guided meditation that provides space to experience the triune God in the setting.

- Second, let's encourage our people to spend time in nature this summer; to do this, we may need to give them permission not to show up at the church building once or twice, though they can certainly send their envelope. I spend some of my holiest summer Sunday mornings sitting at the end of my dock or standing waist deep in lake water praying. I have spent time with God on the same lake for more than 60 years; it is such a sacred place to me that Cathy and I have a cabin there that I call the cathedral. Wouldn't it be neat to have a map of Michigan where people could put post-it notes at the places they experienced God in nature this summer.



'Akaka Falls, Hawai'i

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- Third, perhaps we could help people experience God in nature. We could give them Bible verses to contemplate and prayers to pray on their summer excursions. We could write a devotion about a place in nature near our church and post it on Facebook or our webpage for everyone to read.

I might write about the sublime area where the Platte River flows into Lake Michigan, not during the hot summer days when it is the finish line for Platte River tubers and paddlers. I'd write about the post-Labor Day Platte River, where one can experience solitary sunsets and survey how the sand of the summer's widened beach was carried offshore again by the fall storms. The shoreline is constantly being sculpted by waves and breaking-wave swash, which forms a variety of patterns. The beach widens and thins, is sculpted and re-sculpted. This place that I have known all of my life dies and rises, is reborn and re-created. Standing where the Platte River flows into Lake Michigan is for me an experience of God's will and work, especially in Jesus Christ.



Platte River and Lake Michigan

- Fourth, let's name our own sacred place, to ourselves and to one another. I was inspired as I experienced Hawaii's mountains, volcanoes, rainforests, waterfalls, and beaches. I understand and appreciate their sacredness. Yet, while I certainly experienced God in Hawaii, Hawaii is not my sacred place. God is most present to me at a lake and a river in northern Michigan that I am privileged to care for and protect at least for a time. This place cares for me or through this place God cares for me. And I want it to be well for future generations.

More than anywhere else, a lake that flows into a river that flows into Lake Michigan is the place where "Mālama ka 'aina" resonates most with me. Where is that place for you? If you know it, I pray you get to spend some time there. If you don't know it, I pray you find it this summer. When we can name our particular sacred place, perhaps we will be better prepared to care for and protect the planet as something as sacred as our church buildings, so that the land can care for us and the planet can be well for the generations who come after us.

"Mālama ka 'aina"

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

Jesus as Savior Preaching Retreat

Save the Date! Join us for the Jesus as Savior Preaching Retreat on October 21-23, 2024 at St. Francis Retreat Center in Dewitt!

Dr. Robert Kreig, Professor Emeritus of Theology at the University of Notre Dame will present on the topic of preaching Jesus as Savior.

This retreat is designed for preachers, but anyone who cares about preaching is welcome to attend. This event has been generously supported by a gift from Ms. Christine Allen.

More information will be available soon!

Renewal of Ordination Vows

Save the Date! The Synod's Kalamazoo Conference will offer a renewal of ordination vows with Bishop Satterlee on Tuesday, May 14, 2024!

The service will be held at 11:00am ET at Trinity Lutheran Church in Battle Creek.

All rostered ministers are invited to attend.

More information will be available soon!

Salt, Light, and Leaven: 2024 Synod Assembly



Jesus names us “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world,” and compares the kingdom of heaven or reign of God to “leaven” (Matthew 5:13–16; 13:33).

At the 2024 Synod Assembly, the North/West Lower Michigan Synod will celebrate ways our congregations are “salt of the earth,” “light of the world,” and “leaven” of the kingdom in ways large and small as we prayerfully participate in Jesus’s own work of reconciling the world to God’s very self.

The 2024 Synod Assembly will be held virtually via Zoom on May 11, 2024. A livestream will be available on the Synod’s YouTube Channel.

All information pertaining to the 2024 Synod Assembly will be posted on the Assembly page of the Synod’s website (<http://bit.ly/3E6VYzP>). If you have additional questions, email assembly@mittensynod.org.

Registration

Registration has closed. There is no late registration and we are not able to process changes to voting members or replacement voting member registrations.

Pre-Assembly Sessions

As no resolutions or memorials were submitted for the 2024 Synod Assembly, the Pre-Assembly Discussion on Resolutions/Memorials has been cancelled. The Pre-Assembly Discussion on Budget/Compensation Guidelines will be held May 2 from 6:00-8:00pm ET. The Zoom link for this session will be emailed to those registered on April 26. If you do not receive that email, please check your spam folder and email assembly@mittensynod.org.

All voting members are **required** to attend a one-hour Technology Orientation. These sessions will provide an overview of Zoom basics along with training on the voting process. Technology Orientations will be held May 7, 8, 9 from 6:00-7:00pm ET. Please bring your voting device to your Technology Orientation. **As reminder, voting members need their own voting device (ex: smartphone or tablet). Voting members cannot share a voting device.** Zoom links for these sessions will be emailed to those registered on May 3. If you do not receive that email, please check your spam folder and email assembly@mittensynod.org.

Voting credentials (Voter IDs) will be emailed to voting members after they attend a Technology Orientation. For example, if you attend the Technology Orientation on Thursday, you will receive your Voter ID Thursday night. **If you do not attend a Technology Orientation, you will not receive a Voter ID and will not be able to participate in Synod Assembly on May 11.**

Assembly Book

The “Assembly Book” will again be a series of pdf documents published on the Synod website. The Assembly Book will be published on the website on April 21, 2024. Voting members are strongly encouraged to read it prior to Synod Assembly.

Synod Assembly Zoom Meeting Check-In

The Zoom link for Synod Assembly will be sent to registered voting members on the morning of May 6. If you do not receive the link to Synod Assembly by 12:00pm (noon) on May 6 please check your spam folder and email assembly@mittensynod.org.

All voting members must be checked-in on the Synod Assembly Zoom call to participate in the meeting. Check-In will be open from 8:00am-9:00am on May 11. **All voting members must be signed on to the Synod Assembly Zoom meeting by 9:00am.** Those who are not signed-on by then will not be able to participate or vote. More information about the Check-In Process is available on the website.

Technology Help Desk

If you are having technical issues or have technical questions about Zoom or the Vevox Voting Software, please contact the Tech Help Desk at techhelp@mittensynod.org or by calling or texting 1-855-33-SYNOD (1-855-337-9663).

Adult Theological Education Witnessing to Christ and Love for Neighbor in an Election Year

NORTH/WEST LOWER MICHIGAN SYNOD ELCA

ADULT THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

WITNESSING TO CHRIST AND LOVE FOR NEIGHBOR IN AN ELECTION YEAR



JOIN THE REV. AMY E. REUMANN, ELCA WITNESS IN SOCIETY SENIOR DIRECTOR, FOR A SIX WEEK STUDY ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INTERSECTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN OUR FAITH JOURNEY!

TUESDAYS STARTING SEPTEMBER 3
ZOOM

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod announces the next session of our Adult Theological Education program: Witnessing to Christ and Love for Neighbor in an Election Year.

Join the Rev. Amy Reumann for a six-week study starting September 3, 2024!

The Rev. Amy E. Reumann serves as ELCA Senior Director for Witness in Society in Washington, D.C. Her leadership directs staff and church advocacy in federal public policy, through the ELCA-affiliated state public policy office (sppo) network, at the United Nations through Lutheran Office for World Community representation, and with the ELCA Corporate Social Responsibility program.

“Witnessing to Christ and Love for Neighbor in an Election Year” is an opportunity to hear from the Rev. Amy E. Reumann on civic engagement intersections and opportunities in our faith journey. Core affirmation of our baptism is to “serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus” and “to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.” Informed by our discipleship, “We have a responsibility not only to fulfill our private roles and functions in life, and to pray for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2), but also to be civically engaged,” relays the ELCA social message on government and civic engagement. Dive in with six Tuesday evening sessions.

The class will meet on six consecutive Tuesday evenings: September 3, 10, 17, 24; October 1, 8, 2024 from 7:00 - 8:15pm ET via Zoom. This course is open to all adults, both laypeople and rostered ministers, and is free of charge. Sessions will be recorded. Registration is required and will close on August 24, 2024.

Register now: <https://forms.gle/PpVaWwUDYwPMvDUU7>




THE NORTH/WEST LOWER MICHIGAN SYNOD INVITES YOU TO THE

SYNOD CELEBRATION RIVER CRUISE

Join us aboard the Michigan Princess for a river cruise with dinner, celebrations of significant anniversaries, and thanks for mission support and ministries.

August 1, 2024 • 6pm
MICHIGAN PRINCESS
GRAND RIVER PARK
LANSING, MI

Synod Celebration River Cruise

All are invited to attend the Synod Celebration River Cruise on August 1, 2024!

Join us aboard the Michigan Princess for a river cruise with dinner, celebrations of significant anniversaries and thanks for mission support and ministries!

Those celebrating significant anniversaries will receive more information soon. All others are invited to complete the registration from by June 26, 2024.

We have established a three-tier cost depending on ability to pay. If you have additional questions, please contact davidsprang@mittensynod.org.

Register Now: <https://bit.ly/3U2CZyx>

Caring for the Lord's Earth

Bishop Emeritus John Schleicher, Environmental Stewardship Task Force

“The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it” (Psalm 24:1a)

Sitting in a taxi in Munich on February 17, stuck in traffic, John Kerry wrestled with an idea. The U.S. climate envoy was in southern Germany to attend an annual security conference. In a few hours, the former Secretary of State would receive an award named in honor of a well-known Nazi resister, Ewald von Kleist. As he ruminated on his remarks, he worked to connect what he called the ‘echoes of the 1930's’ in today's geopolitics with the need for unity on climate action.

That night he found the words: “On climate, on Ukraine, and on so much more, the whole world needs to come together...We stand next to another abyss. It is the test of our own times, a test as acute and as existential as any previous one” (TIME, 4/8/24 p.53).

As we again approach another Earth Day, we are experiencing first hand (literally for Phylis and me in the recent storm that toppled trees in our backyard) weird weather patterns unlike any we've known before. Who of us has not wondered this winter and spring about the destiny of cherries and apples and grapes, hitherto growing so abundantly in our state.

We are not without hope. Rob Rafson, head of Chart House Energy, a Muskegon based company working hand in hand with organizations like Michigan Interfaith Power and Light, has helped birth Solar Faithful, people of faith standing together “next to the abyss” during perhaps the greatest test of our time. Already in our synod family, Solar Faithful has enabled First Lutheran in Muskegon Heights, Faith in Okemos, and Bethlehem in Traverse City to install solar arrays (with substantial rebates or no cost to the congregations). With new governmental incentives it is truly possible that in the next six or seven years a majority of our congregations could stand together next to the abyss utilizing solar power, creating and/or supporting community/rain gardens, and voting our faith in the months and years ahead as a bold stewards of the LORD's earth

In many ways the future for the earth looks very bleak. According to the United Nations, two-thirds of the world is desertifying and the world's remaining topsoil will be gone in 60 years unless we find a way to save our soil. We have yet to come close to reducing our emissions enough to mitigate rising mean temperatures. Yet, for us, trusting day by day in the power of Jesus' death and resurrection, we will stand together, working the rest of our lives to honor and cherish this precious planet and all that is in it.

God's work. Our hands.



September 8, 2024

Save the Date for “God's work. Our hands.” Sunday!

Congregations across the ELCA will join together for our annual day of service on September 8, 2024.

Participating in service projects is one way to celebrate who we are as the ELCA — one church, freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor.

Learn more at elca.org/dayofservice.

2024 ELCA Youth Gathering

CREATED

TO BE MYLE
the table Young Adult Gathering

TODAY IS THE LAST DAY TO REGISTER!

VISIT [ELCA.ORG/GATHERING](https://elca.org/gathering)

Synod Finances		
	March	Year to Date
Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund		<i>(Feb-Mar)</i>
Mission Support Revenue	82,958	187,637
Synod Assembly Revenue	0	0
Other Revenue	14,027	17,779
Total Revenue	96,984	205,417
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	41,479	93,819
Synod Assembly Expense	0	0
Other Expenses	68,047	71,717
Total Expenses	109,526	220,190
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	(12,542)	(14,774)
Beginning Fund Balance	144,508	146,740
Ending Fund Balance	131,967	131,967
Other Fund Balances		
Unrestricted-Designated		1,006,203
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related*		868,120
Temporarily-Restricted		316,830
Permanently-Restricted		1,035,547
Total - All Funds (as of 3/31/24)		3,358,667

*Mission Support received March 1-31 was \$25K less than prior year. We believe this is related to the timing of mail delivery.

*March 31 ELCA Ministry Growth Fund Account Statements were not available at the time of publishing this summary. The amounts shown here reflect balances as of 2/29/24.

Tax-Exempt Status

Occasionally we receive requests from congregations for information about tax-exempt status and/or federal employer identification numbers, aka FEINs.

Congregations should have their own FEIN and questions about tax exempt status should be sent to 501c3@elca.org.

Mission Support Memo

The April 2024 Mission Support Memo is now available! This month's memo inspires us to wonder how God might be calling us into ministry and shares an opportunity to learn best practices in creating and empowering stewardship teams.

This month's Mission Support Memo and previous Mission Support Memos are located on the ELCA website: <https://bit.ly/3Qf7waL>

Disability Learning Day

Our synod's Disability Ministry Task Force is hosting a Disability Learning Day on May 18, 2024! This learning event is designed for rostered ministers and lay leaders and will be held at Peace Lutheran Church in Gaylord from 9:30am - 3:00pm ET.

A Keynote Address will be given by Victoria White, who serves as Program Director at With Ministries. Her experience and passion in education and ministry converge in her writing, speaking, consulting and training for congregations, equipping them to build belonging with people of all abilities. She will discuss ways of including people with varying disabilities in worship and best practices for building belonging.

Attendees will participate in two workshops from the following offerings:

- Biblical Perspective on Disability led by Bishop Craig Alan Satterlee
- Ministry with People with Dementia, led by Pastor Clay Bates
- Normalizing Neurodiversity in Your Context, led by Victoria White

There will also be time for group discussion so please bring both your struggles and challenges and ideas and strategies that have worked in your context. Books and other resources will also be available for sale.

The registration cost is \$20 and includes lunch and a book or fidget toy. To attend, please complete the registration form at: <https://tithely.com/event-registration/#/8701547>. The last day to register is Monday, May 13, 2024. If you have additional questions, contact Pastor Clay Bates at clayhbates@gmail.com.

This event has been generously supported by a member of our synod who shares our passion for ministry with people with disabilities.

May Bishop's Newsletter

Due to the timing of Synod Assembly, there will be no Bishop's Newsletter for the month of May.

Check the Weekly Updates for news and events. **The Bishop's Newsletter will return in June!**

Last Chance: Synod Pets!

Thank you to everyone who has submitted photos of their pets!

If you haven't submitted a photo and would still like to be included, please email a photo of your pet, their name, and your connection to the Mitten Synod (ex: congregation name) to communications@mittensynod.org. **To be included, send your photo by April 19, 2024!**

As the resulting project will be shared publicly in synod communications, submission of a photo confirms your consent to have it and the corresponding information shared.

Upcoming Events

April 15	Registration Deadline: ELCA Youth Gathering	Learn more: elca.org/gathering
April 16	Cultivating Generous Congregations	Learn more: https://bit.ly/3Vc4EhI
April 21	Synod Assembly Book Available	Learn more: https://bit.ly/3E6VYzP
April 22	Earth Day	
April 22	Wartburg Seminary Land Acknowledgement Workshop	Learn more: https://bit.ly/3xITNBZ
May 2	Pre-Assembly Discussion on Budget & Compensation Guidelines	Learn more: https://bit.ly/3E6VYzP
May 7-9	Synod Assembly Technology Orientations	Learn more: https://bit.ly/3E6VYzP
May 11	Synod Assembly	Learn more: https://bit.ly/3E6VYzP
May 14	Renewal of Ordination Vows	Learn more: https://bit.ly/3JfPEYP

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.

<p>Bay Conference</p> <p>Prince of Peace/Rose City</p>	<p>Pastor Emily Olsen-Brandt, Dean</p> <p>Pastor David Sprang, Administrative Pastor / Supply Pastors / Discerning Future</p>	<p>Kalamazoo Conference</p> <p>Stony Lake Conference</p>	<p>Pastor Joan Oleson, Dean</p> <p>Pastor Sarah Samuelson, Dean</p>
<p>Capital Area Conference</p> <p>Grace/Lansing</p>	<p>Pastor Neil Brady, Dean</p> <p>Pastor Brian Schneider-Thomas, Interim</p>	<p>Sunrise Conference</p> <p>New Life/Alcona County</p> <p>St. Paul/Alpena</p> <p>Trinity/Barton City</p>	<p>Pastor Megan Crouch, Dean</p> <p>Supply Pastors / Seeking candidates</p> <p>Seeking a part-time assistant pastor</p> <p>Discerning Future</p>
<p>Greater Grand Rapids Conference</p> <p>Trinity/Grand Rapids</p> <p>Bread of Life/Hudsonville</p> <p>Peace/Sparta</p> <p>Zion/Woodland</p>	<p>Pastor Julie Schneider-Thomas, Pastor Kate Van Valkenburg, Co-Deans</p> <p>Pastor Dennis Smith, Interim Senior Pastor / Seeking candidates</p> <p>CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor David Beese, Term Call through 2029</p> <p>Supply Pastors / Interviewing</p> <p>Supply Pastors / Seeking candidates</p>	<p>Traverse Conference</p> <p>Advent/Lake Ann</p> <p>St. Paul/Reed City</p> <p>Messiah/Roscommon</p>	<p>Pastor Jonathan Reid, Dean</p> <p>Pastor Rosanne Anderson, Administrative Pastor / Supply Pastors</p> <p>Supply Pastors / Call Extended</p> <p>Took first vote to disaffiliate from the ELCA</p>