



**North/West Lower  
Michigan Synod**

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[mittensynod.org](http://mittensynod.org)**

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## **Advent Disappointment**

If you follow my Take One videos, perhaps you've gleaned that I am disappointed in the imagery of Advent. Jeremiah promises "a righteous Branch to spring up for David" (33:15). With all that is happening in my life and the lives of the pastors I speak with every day, with all that is happening in our church, and especially in our society and the world, I want more than a branch. I want an 80-foot-tall tree of righteousness; I want a forest of 80-foot-tall trees of righteousness. A branch is disappointing.

I am energized by Malachi's image of a messenger of the Lord who "is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap" (3:2). We can all name someone who needs a purifying scrub! Yet, how often we feel like the one God is content to sear and to scour. Everyone else, it seems, gets a bubble bath.

And I don't think I'm the only one who really needs the fulfillment of Zephaniah's promise of "a warrior who gives a victory," a warrior who takes away judgments against us, turns away our enemies, removes disaster, and deals with all our oppressors (3:17-19). But this is not what I experience. All around we see defeat, judgment, enemies gaining the upper hand, disaster looming large, and oppressors growing stronger.

And on Christmas, when John declares, "The light shines in the darkness," I want to hear, "and the darkness is banished." I want a flood light, or at least a bat signal. But we don't get that. We get, "and the darkness did not overcome it" (1:5). John's image of "darkness" remains thick and bleak and pervasive, save for a tiny bit of light. Even the image itself reveals how foreboding things are.

Rather than an 80-foot-tall tree, a warrior, or a flood light, we get "a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12). This vulnerable baby will live a vulnerable life that leads to a cross. There Jesus will deal with our oppressors and turn away our enemies by embracing them. Malachi's refiner's fire and fullers' soap turns out to be Zephaniah's promise that the LORD our God rejoices over us with gladness, renews us in love, exults over us with loud singing (3:17). The victory is not that God instantly takes all that threatens and burdens us away. The victory is that the LORD our God is in our midst, with us in everything we face. And this is true not just for us but for everyone; this is true for the cosmos, for all of creation.

Perhaps the reason we are so invested in making especially this Christmas celebration so big and so spectacular and so "normal" is that, faced with all we are faced with, the Christmas message seems small and powerless and disappointing. Desperate for a tree, a warrior, and a flood light, we are underwhelmed by a baby, a manger, and a cross. So, we prop up the Christmas message with our celebration and take it upon ourselves to do everything we can not to further disappoint anyone.

Well, let us be clear. First, taking it upon ourselves to save Christmas is a recipe for disaster. So maybe we need to take a deep breath. More important, even when the imagery of Advent and Christmas are justifiably disappointing, even when the message of Advent and Christmas feels small and powerless, especially when the darkness is thick and bleak and pervasive, biblical hope, Christian hope, our hope is the conviction that God will provide a future.

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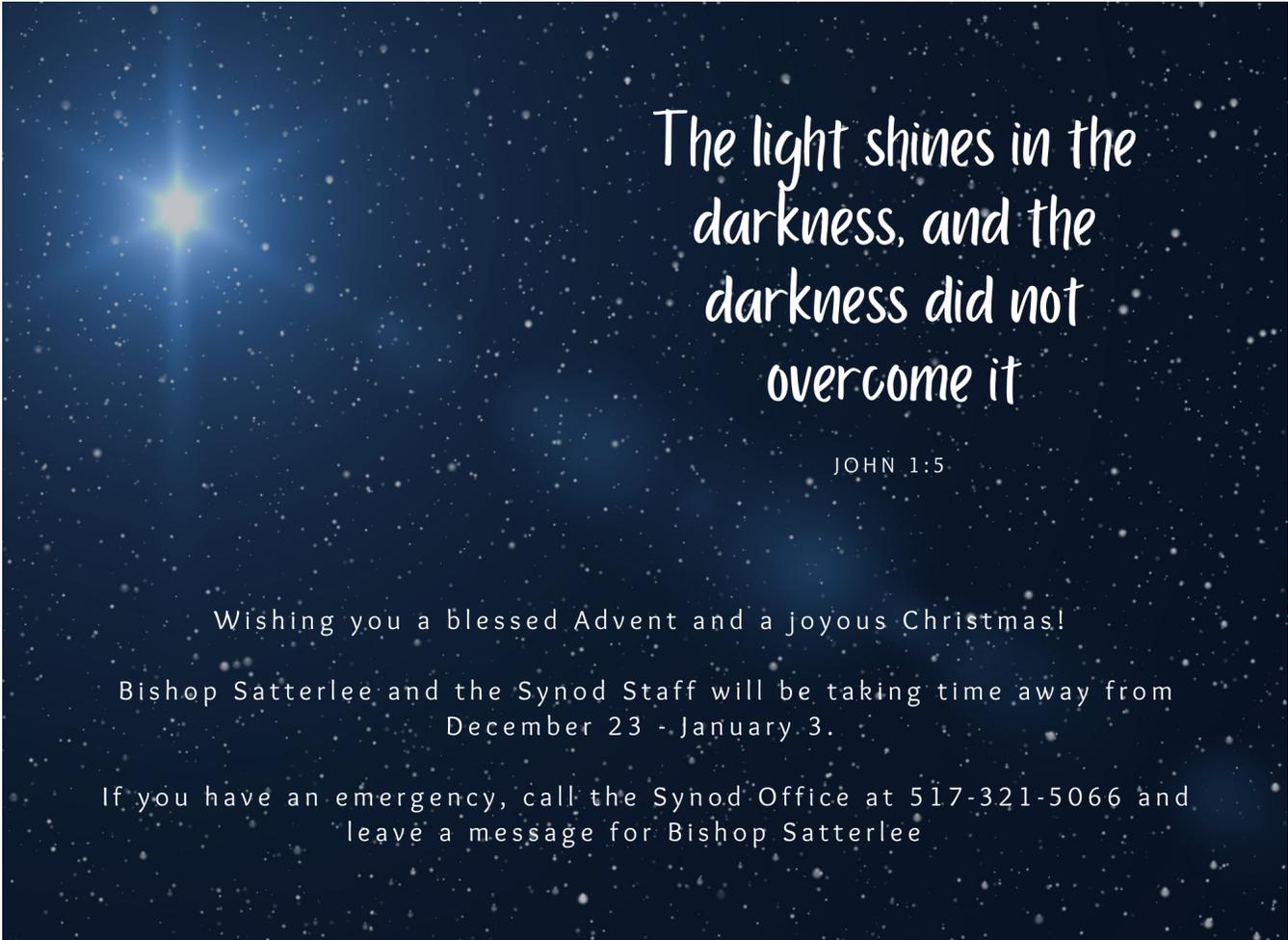
God will provide a future. Trusting in this conviction, we can express our disappointment, name our loss, acknowledge our fear, exercise our grief, and give voice to our resignation and despair without abandoning our hope.

God will provide a future. As I express my disappointment, sadness, resignation, fear, and despair, I hang on to hope by carrying around and clinging to a quotation a friend sent me in the days before Advent began: "Advent is a whisper, rather than a shout. Not a blazing fire, but a candle in the darkness."

"Advent is a whisper, rather than a shout. Not a blazing fire, but a candle in the darkness." This quote is right. Especially this season, shouting strikes me as forced, even inauthentic. And blazing light can hide reality. The big, spectacular, "normal" celebration we strive for may turn out to be the greatest disappointment of all.

So, let's do something else. Trusting that God is providing a future, let's express our disappointment, name our loss, acknowledge our fear, exercise our grief, and give voice to our resignation and despair. God-With-Us, grant us a whisper of promise and a flicker of hope and the grace to express our disappointment in the confidence that You are providing a future. In the Name of Jesus. Amen

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



The light shines in the  
darkness, and the  
darkness did not  
overcome it

JOHN 1:5

Wishing you a blessed Advent and a joyous Christmas!

Bishop Satterlee and the Synod Staff will be taking time away from  
December 23 - January 3.

If you have an emergency, call the Synod Office at 517-321-5066 and  
leave a message for Bishop Satterlee

## Sabbatical Reflections

I gratefully acknowledge and thank the ELCA and the North/West Lower Michigan Synod for the gift of a sabbatical. These three months have been a blessing and gave me the time to experience things that otherwise I might have missed in life. I usually go at life full speed. There is always plenty to do and not enough time to do it. This sabbatical has given me time to focus on areas of history, restorations, growth, and passions.

The theme verse for my sabbatical was Isaiah 43:1-7: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." This proved to be true throughout the close to 5,000 miles of adventures and learnings of my sabbatical.

I cannot begin to share all of the experiences during the three months, so here are some highlights:

I traveled to Ohio to visit the graves of some of my relatives, including Christian Sprang, born 1777 in Bern, Switzerland and died 1862 in Holmes County, Ohio. He and his wife Magdalena were the first members of the Sprang family to come to America. He would be my 3x great grandfather. His son, George Frederick, is buried in a cemetery two miles down the road. In Kenton, Ohio, where my father grew up, I visited the church where my dad and little brother were baptized and I found my grandparents grave. There are 13 Sprangs buried in the cemetery there. I was surprised at the amount of emotion and memories that came flooding back. Visiting the graves of my ancestors has given me a renewed sense of passing the faith on from generation to generation. It also makes me wonder about what next generations will think and experience about faith. I also ponder how the church can be relevant to younger generations while holding on to the past but not making the past what is worshiped.



Other travel during my sabbatical focused on the Alabama Civil Rights Trail through Birmingham. I started at Bethel Baptist Church, where most anti-segregation marches started, and followed the trail to Kelly Ingram Park, which is dedicated to those who worked, marched, and protested segregation and racism. It was scary to see the depictions of the resistance from the police and the KKK in statues and monuments as they showed the use of water cannons, angry dogs, and police with clubs.

Across the street from the park is the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, which is dedicated to the history of Civil Rights in America and other countries. On the

other corner is the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. As I was taking some pictures and walking around outside, I received a very cordial invitation from a man who turned out to be the senior pastor. Inside the church, I visited the museum on the lower level in the room next to where the bomb went off. Members of the church, some of whom were there that day, tell the story of the pre-meditated actions of white supremacists who placed the bomb on a Sunday morning between Sunday School and worship for maximum effect. I still remember the day of the bombing in 1963. The event touched people across the globe.



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I then drove to the historical marker outside the Birmingham Jail where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." Dr. King was arrested for violating a hastily passed law to ban anti-segregation protests and his letter was in response to a letter from prominent white pastors stating they should avoid conflict and let the courts decide about segregation. I finished the tour by visiting Rickwood Field, America's oldest professional baseball park built in 1910. It was home to the Birmingham Barons, a white team and the Birmingham Black Barons of the Negro League. Over the years, the field has hosted such famous players as Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Dizzy Dean, Shoeless Joe Jackson, Satchel Paige, Piper Davis, and Willie Mays, who grew up just a few streets over from the field. I was walking around when a maintenance worker invited me in, gave me a personal tour of the locker room, the museum, let me stand on home plate, and showed me the mechanical scoreboard.

I have taken anti-racism training at least four times, read and studied about racism, and worked for racial equity in the church. Nothing has made me more keenly aware of our systematic racism and the deep-seated hate by white supremacists than my journey on the Alabama Civil Rights Trail. Those experiences will stay with me as I continue being a leader in the church and work to counter racism.

The last part of my sabbatical was focused on my passion for building. I once took a class from the Lutheran Theologian Rev. Joseph Sittler. He suggested that in order to expand one's mind, a pastor should practice and learn about another disciplines besides being a pastor. For me that has always been practicing building skills. It has allowed me to participate in 10 international and domestic mission trips through the years, remodel homes, and volunteer with Habitat for Humanity.

During my sabbatical, I completed a major renovation project on the front of our house and also worked on my son's and my dad's houses. As I worked, I thought about the building and restoring of faith that goes on in our lives. We have ups and downs, our faith grows and wanes, and God is always working at rebuilding. Rebuilding hope, rebuilding lives, rebuilding faith. God does that with amazing grace, compassion, and love shown to us in Jesus. As I tore out rotten wood or critter damaged insulation, I thought about God being about the business of making all things new. And I am hopeful that my work in the church is participating in that. Renewing, bringing vitality, and often making things new.

Again, I am thankful for all those that made my sabbatical possible. And for those that protected me from the temptation to "work". I feel renewed for the last few years of ministry ahead and look forward to joining our synod team fully again.

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

### Coronavirus Resources

On November 19, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services issued a public health advisory on the use of face masks. All persons in indoor public settings are advised to wear a face mask, regardless of their vaccination status. Public establishments are advised to implement masking policies and encourage compliance with such policies. Individuals who are not fully vaccinated or who are immunocompromised are advised to avoid large crowds or gatherings. Learn More: <https://bit.ly/31WhuY8>

Vaccination continues to be the most important public health action to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone aged 5 and older is eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine and everyone aged 18 and older is eligible for a booster. Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3iDnU3V>

We continue to post updates and resources pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic on our website. View all resources: <http://bit.ly/3rL2fsF>

## Racial Justice

*"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)*

As the year 2021 draws to a close, I find myself reflecting on the work that we as a synod have done about racial justice during the past year and a half in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. We worked with Justice Leaders Collaborative to provide an Introduction to Social Justice course to deepen our understanding and commitment to social justice in regard to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and ability. Ultimately racial justice is at the core of all these areas of social justice. Our intent was to provide this core course and then move into the follow-up course "White People Working for Racial Justice." We discovered, however, that participants in the core course realized how much they still had to learn and encouraged us to continue providing the core course. Thus far, 60 people have participated in the Introduction to Social Justice course. Participants included pastors, Synod leaders, and congregation members from across the Synod.

We will be offering this introductory course one more time in Spring 2022. The course will be held via Zoom on Tuesday evenings from 6:00-8:00pm, beginning March 1 and running through April 5, 2022. The course will be open to anyone in the Synod who wishes to participate, but is limited to 30 people. After the completion of this course, we will offer the follow-up course "White People Working for Racial Justice."

If you are interested in participating in the Introduction to Social Justice Course, please complete the registration form by February 21, 2022. Register Now: <https://bit.ly/3DZeszq>

As you consider participating in the upcoming course, check out the following endorsements of the course from those who participated:

*I found the class to be very valuable in recognizing my own bias and the pervasiveness of all the "isms". The experience in the group gave me a framework of how to initiate these conversations with parishioners and others.*

*I appreciated the broad topics that were covered during this training - including understanding and key issues related to social identities, racism, classism, sexism, and privilege. I learned new information relative to topics I thought I understood at a high level that helped me with further discernment.*

*The Introduction to Social Justice course reminded me that being anti-racist is an ongoing process. There is no fixed finish line where I will completely "get it." There will always be more that I can learn, from the history of racism in this country, to tactics to being anti-racist, to the new ways racism presents itself in this country.*

*JLC consistently challenged us with the thought of "how do we show up as Christians" in racial justice matters.*

*The material is informative and the breadth of issues extensive. Spending time in the sessions and with the material was a reminder for me that "social justice" is the work of self evaluation, a willingness learn, and to act, no matter how long or deep I have already traveled the path.*

*Having participated in Anti-racism training with other organizations, it was especially meaningful for me to gather with other church leaders for this purpose. We cannot be "God's work. Our hands." without committing to social change. Recognizing systemic racism and confessing our part in it are instrumental in being church.*

Let us continue to pray and walk together to end the sin of racism in our world.

*"The racism, the homophobia, the hatred of Jews and women, the greed accelerate, and they sicken us all. But we do not have to accept it. We do not have to accept any of it. There is a lot to be done, but how we go about it is also important. Because all we have ever had is each other." --- Mab Segrest, Memoir of a Race Traitor*

Rev. Rosanne M. Anderson  
Assistant to the Bishop & Director of Candidacy

## A Christmas Gift for the Church and the Earth

Laurie Swanson, Environmental Stewardship Task Force Member

At the top of my list of things to give as Christmas presents this year is something that could benefit the Earth greatly. It is a book titled *Bringing Nature Home* by Douglas W. Tallamy.

In his book, Mr. Tallamy makes the point that if we don't surround ourselves with plants that have developed locally over the eons of the Earth's history, "we and all the critters around us soon will have nothing to eat!" We are already seeing some of these effects with the lack of bees and other pollinators. This loss of insects actually affects every critter that lives in our environment, especially birds and butterflies. Birds, bees, and butterflies only recognize local plants for their food source. When we introduce plants from other regions, the plants will not be eaten because they are not recognized as food.

So what can we do? Mr. Tallamy says we need to plant plants that are specific to our region—plants that are a perfect match for our climate and our soil. Having plants that are native to our region helps keep our landscape in perfect balance. Introducing plants that are from other regions puts our landscape out of balance as they do not work with our natural environment and can become invasive species as they are not eaten by local animals.

So, whenever you choose plants for your yard, or the church's yard, pick the ones that are native to your area. Lists of native plants can be found in books or online. If you or your church is lucky enough to have a bit of land that has never been developed, leave it natural. And forget those lawn-care poisons. Will it look a little messy? Maybe, but the colorful birds and butterflies you will attract will spiff it right up—a gift from nature!

## 2022 Vital Congregations Re-Boot Camp

Is your congregation ready to take some steps (even small steps) toward renewal or revitalization? Are you ready to try some new things, share some ideas, gain a greater understanding of the broader mission, bring clarity about your own congregation's mission, acquire knowledge on how to live that out in community, gain confidence to share what you have learned with the world, and find new allies from within a cohort of congregations? Then, you are invited to attend the 2022 Spring Session of the ELCA Vital Congregations Re-BOOT Camp.

This is a fast paced co-creative and co-experimental RE-BOOT CAMP facilitated by leaders with steep experience in redeveloping congregations as well as added guest presenters from a variety of settings with a wealth of knowledge. These principles and more will be explored: focusing on Jesus and justice, being expectant of the Holy Spirit, living as disciples of Jesus, multiplying leaders who are young, diverse and bring fresh insights, and aligning with purpose and core values.

This will be a four-session training. The training sessions will be held two times per day from 1:30-3:00 p.m. (eastern time) and from 7:30-9:00 p.m. (eastern time) on January 13th, January 27th, February 3rd and February 17th. You may choose the best time each day that works for you. All sessions will be recorded and available to all registered participants. Pastors and congregations are encouraged to come as teams of 3-5 people for a time of inspiration, learning, planning, sharing, experimenting, visioning, and implementing. **Note:** This training is for people who did **not** attend the Vital Congregations Re-BOOT Camp in 2021.

Registration closes on January 7, 2022. Register Now: <https://bit.ly/3pZMNJo>

Learn More about the Re-BOOT Camp: <https://bit.ly/3m4so55>

For more information, contact Pastor David Sprang at [davidsprang@mittensynod.org](mailto:davidsprang@mittensynod.org)

### Synod Finances

Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund	November	YTD
Mission Support Revenue	95,617	1,101,886
Other Revenue*	85,537	226,321
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>181,154</b>	<b>1,328,207</b>
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	47,808	550,943
Other Expenses	60,583	566,897
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>108,391</b>	<b>1,117,840</b>
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	72,763	210,368
Beginning Fund Balance	371,803	234,198
Ending Fund Balance	444,566	444,566
<b>Other Fund Balances</b>		
Unrestricted-Designated		699,676
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related		1,058,563
Temporarily-Restricted		332,168
Permanently-Restricted		924,639
<b>Total - All Funds (as of 11/30/21)</b>		<b>3,459,612</b>

\*Year to date Other Revenue reflects forgiveness of PPP Loans #1 and #2

### End of Year Contributions

As the end of the calendar year approaches, and as congregations receive end of year contributions, we should remember that checks dated and received or postmarked on or before December 31 may be considered tax-deductible contributions for 2021. The same applies to credit card transactions processed before midnight on December 31. Transactions dated and received or postmarked, or processed, afterward are to be recognized as 2022 contributions.

Your synod follows a similar guideline for recognizing contributions received during the fiscal year ending January 31. Gifts received in the Synod Office on or before January 31 are included in the fourth quarter (Nov – Jan) congregation giving statements. We promptly provide information to our auditors, who then send revenue confirmations to a random sampling of our congregations.

We thank you for your faithful generosity! Your consistent giving is appreciated and supports a wide range of ministries in our communities, throughout our synod, and around the world through our churchwide organization. Through your giving, we are church together!

## 2022 Synod Assembly Survey

We have been blessed with a plethora of suggestions for the theme for our 2022 Synod Assembly. To better assess the different options and the desires of the Synod, Synod members are invited to complete a brief survey. The survey will assist in the development of our 2022 Synod Assembly and will be open until December 21, 2021.

Take Survey: <https://bit.ly/3s0RFro>

## Lessons and Carols Service

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod will be re-releasing A Service of Lessons and Carols worship video for congregational use on Sunday, December 26, 2021.

This worship service was created last year and consists of recordings from congregations throughout the Synod. A bulletin is also available and will be included with the video file.

If you would like to use this worship video on December 26, 2021, please complete the sign-up form: <https://bit.ly/3mDehnN>

## Equipping Leaders for Mission and Ministry

Equipping Leaders for Mission and Ministry (ELMM) is excited to announce their upcoming events!

### Genesis 1-11 and Historical Overview

Dr. George Heider  
January 14-15, 2022

### Pastoral Care Assistant Training

Dr. Rosanne Swanson  
February 12, 2022

### Genesis 12-50 Our Faith Ancestors

Dr. George Heider  
March 11-12, 2022

## Disability Ministries Book Study

As our synod works to engage and support people who live with disabilities, our synod's Disability Ministries Task Force will be hosting a book study on *Copious Hosting: A Theology of Access for People with Disabilities* by Jennie Weiss Block (Amazon Link: <https://amzn.to/3ExDu9t>).

This five-week book study will be led by Pastors Clay Bates and Kate Van Valkenburg, members of the Synod's Disability Ministries Task Force, and will held on Wednesdays from 12:30 - 1:30pm ET starting January 12, 2022. Join us as we discuss the philosophical concepts of the disability movement, examine the Christian tradition from a disability perspective, and consider a theology of access for people who live with disabilities.

Register Now: <https://bit.ly/3m7SuUy>

## Synod Worship Service

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod will be producing a worship video service for congregational use on Sunday, January 2, 2022.

Bishop Satterlee will be preaching. A bulletin will be included with the video file.

If you would like to use this worship video on January 2, 2022, please complete the sign-up form: <https://bit.ly/3ynzVkk>

If you have additional questions, contact [communications@mittensynod.org](mailto:communications@mittensynod.org)

## Upcoming Events

December 24	Christmas Eve
December 25	Christmas Day
January 1	New Year's Day

## 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. Joan Oleson, Dean</b>
St. Peter/Unionville (Part-Time)	CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Jeff Bonn, Installation December 12	St. John/Baroda (Part-Time)	Pastor Vicky Blough, Stated Supply through mid-January / Seeking additional candidates
<b>Capital Area Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean</b>	Immanuel/Allegan (Part-Time)	Pastor Dennis Smith, Stated Supply / CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Christopher Laughlin. Installation January 16
Christ United/Dewitt (Part-Time)	Episcopal Diocese of Michigan taking the lead in the call process / Seeking a candidate	Hope/Plainwell (Part-Time)	Pastor Julie Winklepleck, Stated Supply / Seeking a candidate
All Saints/Mason (Part-Time)	Pastor Erick Johnson, Stated Supply / Seeking a candidate	St. Peter/Battle Creek	Pastor Cheryl Johnson and Pastor Michael Anton, Stated Supply
Trinity/Hillsdale	Pastor Jessica Hahn to New Jersey Synod. Last Sunday December 26.	Messiah/Constantine (Part-Time)	Pastor Maria Rutland, Stated Supply
<b>Greater Grand Rapids Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Julie Schneider- Thomas, Dean</b>	<b>Stony Lake Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean</b>
Immanuel/Big Rapids (Part-Time)	Supply Pastors	<b>Sunrise Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean</b>
Christ/Wyoming	Pastor Jack Ferra, Interim / Preparing MSP	<b>Traverse Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Jonathan Reid, Dean</b>
St. Luke/Grand Rapids	Supply Pastors		
Trinity/Grand Rapids	Assisting Pastor (part-time): Congregational Vote January 16		