



**North/West Lower
Michigan Synod**

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Ground Everything in the Good News of Jesus Christ

“What is your most important or meaningful story about Jesus today?” I ask myself this question to close every day. Sometimes I am flabbergasted by what story or saying floats into my mind. For example, on the Friday after Thanksgiving, the news was filled with the hostage exchange in Israel and Gaza, hate speech on college campuses and at Black Friday shopping centers, and the unending political division in our country. I was anticipating Christ the King Sunday, when we hear Jesus say, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40) and that evening I heard Jesus saying, “I was maligned and you spoke up for me. I was threatened and you stood up for me.”

Of course, Jesus never said this but that is when a saying attributed to Jesus floated into my mind: “So, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:16). I know how hard our rostered ministers try to remain balanced and to not give offense. For a while now, I have wondered where the line is between caring for all God’s people and being lukewarm to Jesus. I suspect we are going to find out. I am convinced (perhaps I am afraid) that 2024 will be a year in which the church will not have the luxury of remaining lukewarm. The church will not get away with remaining neither cold nor hot. Some will call upon the church to be hot; others will demand the church be cold. It would be so much easier if we were all of one mind. But we are not.

Less important than where we end up on any issue is how we ground it in the good news of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we all must become confident and comfortable speaking of Jesus in ways that directly address life in this world. Speaking of Jesus may lead some to be hot and others to be cold. What’s important is that we speak of Jesus and offer good news that matters. I am not assigning us more to do. I am realizing that the wisdom of what we have been doing since our last synod assembly will likely become apparent in 2024. My advent prayer is that God will bolster those sharing the story of Jesus, and that the spirit will inspire more of us to join them. A way to start might be closing your day by asking yourself, “What is your most important or meaningful story about Jesus today?”

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

Walking Together in Ministry

Pastor Megan Crouch, Chair of the Global Mission Committee

I have always thought that one of the best things about being a synod is that it encourages us to partner beyond our individual communities, and see where Jesus is at work through the lives and ministries of others. I find this to be especially true when it comes to our synod's global partners in Honduras and Papua New Guinea. That is why I was deeply honored to represent our synod alongside Mrs. Linda Stark at the Latin American and Caribbean Consultation (LAC) held in early November.

A consultation is an event held every three years, where global partners gather with their companion synods from the ELCA to worship, learn, and develop new ministry goals for their continued relationship. We met with our partners from the Iglesia Cristiana Luterana de Honduras (ICLH), and it was wonderful to see Pastor President Julio Calidonio, Pastor Rolando Rao, and ICLH Secretary Gloria Rodriguez in person for the first time since COVID started.

One of the biggest things I learned from our time together was the depth of support that leaders in the ICLH receive from partnership. They, like many church leaders in our own synod, find themselves struggling with isolation and exhaustion in the wake of COVID. Staying connected to their global partners in the ELCA was a reminder to them that they were not alone. One of our goals for the future is to use technology to stay better connected through quarterly Zoom meetings where we will share prayer requests, updates, and plan future ministry together. These meetings will also include the ICLH's other ELCA partners.



The other thing that made a big impact on me, was learning about the importance of the health ministries the ICLH offers in their communities with our support. These include children's health and dental screenings in two communities, raising awareness for and providing access to various cancer screenings, and supporting HIV/AIDS support groups. The ICLH is hoping to grow these ministries so that they can continue to live out their calling to care for the sick and promote health in some of the poorest places in their country.

The health ministry has many new volunteers, and we are planning to travel to Honduras April 9-16, 2024 to help host a

training event for them, and to celebrate the work they are doing in God's name. You can learn more about our work with the ICLH at <https://bit.ly/3t9gRIi>.



NORTH/WEST LOWER MICHIGAN SYNOD ELCA

A SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS

Advent and Christmas Worship Videos

Bishop Satterlee will record a sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Advent (December 24) for congregational use.

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod will also rerelease the Synod produced Lessons and Carols video worship service for congregational use.

If your congregation would like to receive access to these videos, please complete the form linked below. Video links will be emailed to those registered on Monday, December 18, 2023.

Register: <https://forms.gle/ET31jCBuayUSpeXF6>

Advent Hope for Creation...in What Light Comes

Pastor Paul Busekist, Environmental Stewardship Task Force

Did you know that some plants flourish and grow in the dark? One such plant, called Philodendron, can grow in complete darkness. While this fact may seem an odd source of hope, this Advent season I draw a little comfort that – as the apostle Paul states in Romans 8 – true hope lies also in what we cannot yet see or discern, until the light of Christ comes.

I can tell you that until we reached out to many of you at the 2023 Synod Assembly, we were guessing a bit at how much Creation Care was a part of your ministry. Yet, from the 44 people who responded to the ESTF survey, we received much enlightenment. Take, for example, the survey's third question: "How Do You Express God's love and care for Creation in the congregation?"

30 of 44 people said this expression was regularly done with sermons; 42 used prayers (i.e. prayers of intercession, etc.); 14 used storytelling and newsletters; 14 respondents related God's love and care of Creation to social issues. Eight comments on this question centered on actions – recycling, energy efficient equipment, hands-on projects, avoiding foam, posting info around the church building, and stewardship committee efforts.

If you would like to learn more about the survey, we have compiled a complete list of the survey results. It is available at www.bethlehemtc.org/ESTF (look for the document called "survey23.pdf").

Thank you to all those who participated in the Solar Faithful webinar on October 26. If you were unable attend, a recording is available here (use passcode: Wn9\$#6gv): <https://bit.ly/4aiU10l>.

Open Hearts, Open Church

Pastor Jessica Rivera-Walker, Open Hearts, Open Church Task Force

"Why do we have to say that we welcome gay people, Pastor? Why do we have to spell it out? People know we welcome everybody!"

Being a Pastor in the ELCA (going on seventeen years now), I've heard some version of these questions more times than I can count. It's always well intentioned, but is born out of an anxiety that if we spell out, literally, exactly who is welcome that we will a) make others feel unwelcome; b) single people out; or c) face criticism or backlash. It's also a question that comes from a place of longing since we want others to experience church as a safe and loving place; and because we know that for many, it's not.

Galatians states, "for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 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" (3:26-28). This passage informs the Vision Statement of Open Hearts, Open Church, a task force functioning under the Synod's Publicly Engaged Church Committee, which reads, "As Jesus draws all people to himself, we are freed to transcend societal divisions and embody the radical grace, forgiveness, and inclusion modeled by Christ."

The primary aim of Open Hearts, Open Church is to function "as a resource team to provide guidance, support, and companionship as we journey with regard to full inclusion of all sexual orientations and gender identities" (Open Hearts, Open Church Purpose Statement). We can help congregations work through the process of discerning how we understand God's call for us to love one another, and how we live out "the full welcome and inclusion that Jesus shows toward all people" (Open Hearts, Open Church Purpose Statement). When invited to speak, we create a sacred and safe space for discussion, story-sharing, and connection. We invite all who are interested to join us in this holy work! You can find out more at openheartsopenchurch.org; or by contacting chairperson Diane Madej at diane.madej@frontier.com.

Bishop Satterlee's Sabbatical

I begin a sabbatical January 1, 2024 and I will return on April 1, 2024. Sabbaticals are an established part of our synod's care and renewal of our called staff. I will make two trips to warm places with Cathy and Chelsey, read, probably write, and likely take a retreat at a monastery. I will continue to watch my diet, make exercise a daily priority, slow down, pray, and rest. I am is grateful for this privilege, opportunity, and care. Thank you!

I have every confidence that Pastor Bright, Pastor Sprang, and the rest of the staff, supported by the Conference Deans and Synod Council, will carry-on fine without me. Perhaps they and you may even miss me. Just as pastors have a colleague that congregation leaders can reach out to when they are away, I have identified a bishop colleague who has agreed to help out if something comes up that only a bishop should handle. I also reserve the right to return if something comes to my attention that, in my judgment, warrants interrupting my sabbatical to become directly involved.

Sabbaticals are not exiles. I expect to be in conversation with the staff, whose company I genuinely enjoy, and also with people in our synod who have, over the years, become my friends and sources of support. I may decide to do an occasional Take One video. The point is that I don't have to. I'm certainly going to attend our Adult Theological Education course this winter.

The fruits of previous sabbaticals include our Living Stones Initiatives and two books. I am eager to discover what the harvest of this sacred time will be. Again, thank you for this privilege and opportunity.

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

Annual Rostered Minister Reports

2022 Annual Rostered Minister Report forms are now available! All rostered ministers are expected to complete and return a report to Bishop Satterlee.

To complete the annual report form, please download the form and save it to your computer before completing it. Once completed, please email it to Bishop Satterlee at bishopcraigsatterlee@mittensynod.org. Bishop Satterlee will respond to all rostered minister reports when he returns from sabbatical in April 2024.

Download Forms: <https://bit.ly/38HxIEU>.

Annual Congregation Reports

As in previous years, all ELCA congregations, synod-authorized worshipping communities (SAWCs), and new starts will need to complete the annual congregation report. The ELCA has updated the process to submit this report and there is now only one form to complete, Form A, which asks for congregation statistics and financial data. The kinds of questions previously asked on Form C will instead be gathered through surveys throughout the year.

The Annual Congregation Report packet will be mailed in mid-January. The packet will contain a paper copy of Form A, instructional documents, and the password that congregations or communities will use to file their report online. The online system for Form A for 2023 will open in mid-January. It will be accessible at elca.org/congregationreport.

A blank, generic version of Form A is available at elca.org/reportinstructions so congregations that wish to begin compiling their data can do so.

If any congregation, SAWC, or new start still wishes to file 2022 reports, they must do so before the online system for filing Form A and Form C for 2022 shuts down on Thursday, December 21, 2023.

2023

2023

2023
WRAPPED



North/West Lower Michigan Synod

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

THIS YEAR'S HIGHLIGHTS

2023 Wrapped

NORTH/WEST LOWER MICHIGAN SYNOD ELCA

Join us as we celebrate 2023 and look back on the accomplishments of our synod!

Statistics are from January 2023 - December 2023.

Mission Support is from February 2023 - November 2023.

\$1,007,506



received in Mission Support

\$503,753

given to ELCA Churchwide

\$115,321

given in grants

\$30,321

given in grants through synod initiatives

\$69,000

given in grants to strategic congregations, new starts, and campus ministries

\$16,000

given in grants through the Seminary Debt Reduction Assistance Program

TRAPP GRANTS

Sunrise, Traverse, and Northern Bay Conferences

1,380

families given hygiene products

1,860

meals provided

1,050

winter coats and boots given

connected with

304 PEOPLE

through in-person synod events

connected with

449 PEOPLE

through virtual synod events

connected with

1,295 PEOPLE

through recordings of synod events

The Synod Staff spent

35,291

minutes



meeting with congregations, leaders, and ELCA colleagues on Zoom

The Bishop and Assistants to the Bishop visited

85

congregations

8

congregations celebrated milestone anniversaries

The Bishop and Assistants to the Bishop led worship at

70

congregations

The Bishop connected with

6,951

people through the Take One videos

13 ROSTERED MINISTERS

installed

2 ROSTERED MINISTERS

ordained

6 ROSTERED MINISTERS

joined the synod

4 ROSTERED MINISTERS

retired

80 PEOPLE

in

9 CONGREGATIONS

*are intentionally learning to better tell
and share the story of Jesus*

SYNOD STAFF'S TOP 6

Music/Podcasts

Everything Happens (Podcast)

Culpable (Podcast)

Chicago

George Winston

The Bridge (Sirius Radio
Channel 27)

Taylor Swift

Movies/TV Shows

Loki

Star Trek: Picard

The Great British Baking Show

National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation

The Haunting of Hill House

Sweet Magnolias

Books

Once Upon a Wardrobe by Patti Callahan Henry

Tom Clancy

White Feminism: From the Suffragettes to Influencers and Who
They Leave Behind by Koa Beck

Paul: A Biography by NT Wright

Lessons in Chemistry by Bonnie Garmus

Spare by Prince Harry, The Duke of Sussex

WRAPPED

2023 Wrapped

**NORTH/WEST LOWER
MICHIGAN SYNOD ELCA**

Thank you for your
generosity, your commitment
to the Gospel, and your
support of the ministries of
the North/West Lower
Michigan Synod!


PPED

Adult Theological Education - Six Women from Church History that You Need to Know

NORTH/WEST LOWER MICHIGAN SYNOD ELCA

**ADULT THEOLOGICAL
EDUCATION**

**SIX WOMEN FROM CHURCH HISTORY THAT
YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT**



**JOIN THE REV. DR. JOY
SCHROEDER, PROFESSOR OF
CHURCH HISTORY AT CAPITAL
UNIVERSITY, FOR A SIX-WEEK
STUDY OF CHRISTIAN WOMEN
THROUGH THE AGES!**

**TUESDAYS STARTING JANUARY 16
ZOOM**

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod announces the next session of our Adult Theological Education program: *Six Women from Church History that You Need to Know About*. Join the Rev. Dr. Joy Schroeder for a six-week study of Christian women through the ages starting on January 16, 2024!

The Rev. Dr. Joy Schroeder, an ELCA pastor, is Professor of Church History at Capital University, where she teaches in the Department of Religion and Philosophy and Trinity Lutheran Seminary. She holds the Trinity Chair in Lutheran Heritage. Dr. Schroeder earned a B.A. in Classics from Luther College, a Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. from the University of Notre Dame.

She is the author of five books on the history of how Christians and Jews have interpreted scripture. Her most recent book, co-authored with Marion Ann Taylor (University of Toronto) is *Voices Long Silenced: Women Biblical Interpreters through the Centuries* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2022).

Ever since the beginning of Christianity, women have been teachers, writers, and preachers of the Gospel. Learn about the struggles and accomplishments of six exemplary women from church history:

- Perpetua (d. ca. 202), North African martyr and visionary writer
- Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), Saxon nun and theologian
- Argula von Grumbach (ca. 1492-ca. 1554), Bavarian Lutheran reformer and pamphlet writer
- Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695), Mexican nun and poet
- Jarena Lee (1783-1864), African American preacher
- Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), Indian Bible translator and founder of women's shelters

Dr. Schroeder will discuss these women's inspirational lives and writings.

The class will meet on six consecutive Tuesday evenings: January 16, 23, 30, February 6, 13, 20, 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 and available to registered participants. Registration is required and will close on January 5 2024. Register now: <https://forms.gle/L5nBFWXf4sEqhbLg9>

2024 ELCA Youth Gathering

The 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering will be held July 16-20, 2024 in New Orleans under the theme, "Created to Be." Registration is now open! Learn more: <https://elca.org/gathering>

Congregational Leaders can apply for funds from The North/West Lower Michigan Synod ELCA Youth Gathering Fund, which seeks to make the ELCA Youth Gathering more accessible for families and congregations in our synod, by completing this application: <https://bit.ly/3QYRQsz>

As you plan for the 2024 Gathering, Pastor Dan Schewe, our synod's ELCA Youth Gathering Champion, is available to answer questions. Email Pastor Schewe at mittensynodgathering2024@gmail.com.

Synod Finances

	November	Year to Date
Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund		
Mission Support Revenue	129,408	1,007,506
Synod Assembly Revenue	0	40,550
Other Revenue	2,677	64,846
Total Revenue	132,085	1,112,902
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	64,704	503,753
Synod Assembly Expense	0	54,665
Other Expenses	68,788	561,273
Total Expenses	133,492	1,119,681
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	(1,407)	(6,778)
Beginning Fund Balance	503,954	509,326
Ending Fund Balance	502,548	502,548
Other Fund Balances		
Unrestricted-Designated		589,847
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related*		696,513
Temporarily-Restricted		314,951
Permanently-Restricted		1,002,547
Total - All Funds (as of 11/30/23)		3,106,406

*November 30 ELCA Ministry Growth Fund Account Statements were not available at the time of publishing this summary. The amounts shown here reflect balances as of 10/31/23.

Giving Statements

Congregations should have received their 2023Q3 (Aug-Oct) giving statements by now, along with a supply of remittance forms, the 2024 Statement of Intent form, and the Certification of Congregation Financial Compliance form.

If you did not receive this mailing, let us know at finance@mittensynod.org. We look forward to receiving the 2024 Statement of Intent forms by February 15, 2024.

Thank you for your faithful generosity as we work together for the sake of the Gospel!

Stories of Faith in Action

The November 2023 Mission Support Memo is now available!

In this edition, learn how Mission Support empowers us to be church together both in our communities and around the world. Also, learn how to access ELCA Stewardship video resources.

The November 2023 Mission Support Memo and previous Mission Support Memos are located on the ELCA website: <https://bit.ly/3Qf7waL>

Salt, Light, and Leaven: 2024 Synod Assembly

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod is excited to announce "Salt, Light, and Leaven" as the theme for the 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, we 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.

In order to celebrate and share the ways our congregations are "salt of the earth," "light of the world," and "leaven" of the kingdom, congregations or groups of congregations will have the opportunity to produce and submit a video showcasing one way they are salt, light, and leaven. We will select four videos to be shown during the 2024 Synod Assembly. Congregations who submit a video will receive a \$100 donation to their ministry and congregations whose videos are selected to be shown at the 2024 Synod Assembly will receive a \$500 donation to their ministry.

All congregations in our synod are invited to submit a video for consideration. There is a limit of one video per congregation. The goal of the video is to provide an experience of the congregation's ministry rather than a report about it. Think of the video as a "virtual tour" of an aspect of the congregation and ministry. This might be an annual event, such as providing backpacks to school kids, or an on-going ministry such as a food pantry. Preference will be given to ministries that in some way include sharing the story of Jesus. Videos must be 8-10 minutes in length.

Congregations interested in submitting a video must complete the interest form by January 15, 2024. This form confirms a congregation's intent to submit a video. All videos must be submitted by April 3, 2024 for review.

Selected congregations will be notified on April 17, 2024. Videos from congregations who are not selected will be shared on the Synod's social media after the conclusion of the 2024 Synod Assembly. As this opportunity is for congregations, Synod task forces, tables, and ministries are not eligible. Congregations should review the submission guidelines carefully and contact assembly@mittensynod.org with any questions.

Video Submission Guidelines

- Congregations must be located in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod. Synod task forces/tables/ministries are not eligible for this opportunity.
- There is a limit of one video per congregation.
- Videos must focus on one area or ministry that shows how the congregation or group of congregations is salt, light, and leaven. Preference will be given to ministries that include sharing the story of Jesus.
- Congregations must produce and submit their own videos. The Synod Staff is not available to assist with video production.
- Videos must be 8-10 minutes in length.
- Congregations interested in submitting a video must complete the interest form by January 15, 2024. Interest Form: <https://forms.gle/xVqyZF1GXYtR9occ8>
- All videos must be submitted by April 3, 2024. Video Submission: <https://bit.ly/3tdgLPG>

Congregational Financial Wellness

Have you wondered if your congregational financial systems and policies were up to date and meeting the standards for excellence?

Join Pastor David Sprang, Assistant to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission, and Steve Oelschlager, ELCA Congregational Assessment Research Coordinator, for a one-hour introduction to the ELCA's free Congregational Financial Assessment and corresponding resources.

This seminar will be held via Zoom on January 18, 2024 at 7:00pm ET.

Register Now: <https://bit.ly/3uVcK3b>

Boundary Training for Rostered Ministers

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod will be offering Boundary Training as a four part series via Zoom.

These 1-hour sessions will be held on Thursdays at 11am ET on January 11, 18, 25, and February 1, 2024. Participants are expected to attend all four sessions.

We are privileged that Barbara Keller, Misconduct Prevention Director for the ELCA, will be the presenter for the initial session on January 11. Pastor David Sprang and Pastor Rosanne Anderson will lead the other three sessions.

Register Now: <https://bit.ly/3ZU0HyE>



THE PRINCE OF PEACE AT CHRISTMAS

A video message from the ELCA
 December 2023



In her Christmas message, Presiding Bishop Eaton recalls the message from the angels: "Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace to God's people on Earth." She reminds us that when we greet one another with the sign of peace, "we share the peace, the love of God, and as we do, we know that God has reached from heaven to earth and in the Prince of Peace is sharing God's peace with us."

Watch Now: <https://bit.ly/3TnxSsY>

Upcoming Events

December 24	Christmas Eve	
December 25	Christmas Day	
January 1	New Year's Day	
January 11	Boundary Training for Rostered Ministers	Learn more: https://bit.ly/3ZU0HyE
January 16	Adult Theological Education: Six Women	Learn more: https://bit.ly/3rnwR8l
January 18	Congregational Financial Wellness Seminar	Learn more: https://bit.ly/3uVcK3b

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		Pastor Emily Olsen-Brandt, Dean	
Messiah/Bay City	Pastor Dan Stoneback, Interim / CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Tim Jahn. Installation January 28	Prince of Peace/Rose City	Pastor Nan Dehnke last Sunday December 31
Capital Area Conference		Pastor Neil Brady, Dean	
University/East Lansing	Pastor Bryan Schneider-Thomas, Interim / CALLS ACCEPTED: Pastors Emily and Zachariah Shipman (Western North Dakota)		
Greater Grand Rapids Conference		Pastor Julie Schneider-Thomas, Pastor Kate Van Valkenburg, Co-Deans	
Trinity/Grand Rapids	Pastor Dennis Smith, Interim / Preparing MSP		
St. Paul/Greenville and Settlement/Gowen	Supply Pastors / CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Nan Dehnke (one year). Installation January 10.		
Bread of Life/Hudsonville	Pastor David Beese, Stated Supply / Discerning future		
Peace/Sparta	Supply Pastors / Preparing MSP		
Zion/Woodland (Part-Time)	Supply Pastors / Seeking candidates		
Kalamazoo Conference		Pastor Joan Oleson, Dean	
Prince of Peace/Portage	Welcoming a diaconal intern / Suspending Call Process		
Stony Lake Conference		Pastor Sarah Samuelson, Dean	
Harbor of Grace/Muskegon	CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Jack Ferra; Installation January 14		
Sunrise Conference		Pastor Megan Crouch, Dean	
New Life/Alcona County	Supply Pastors / Seeking candidates		
St. Paul/Alpena	Seeking a part-time assistant pastor		
Traverse Conference		Pastor Jonathan Reid, Dean	
Advent/Lake Ann	Pastor Tim Jahn last Sunday December 31. / Pastor Rosanne Anderson, Administrative Pastor / Supply Pastors		
St. Paul/Reed City	Supply Pastors / Seeking candidates		