



North/West Lower Michigan Synod

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“What do we do?”

“What do we do?” I heard on the news on February 9 that, in Michigan, there is a new case of COVID-19 every 23 seconds. This news explains why, in recent weeks, often on Saturday, I hear from pastors who have been exposed or have COVID-19. Pastor Anderson, Pastor Sprang, and I are again recording weekly sermon videos. I encourage congregations to sign up to receive them so that, God forbid, if your pastor gets sick, you have a sermon to use. We cannot always get it to you on Saturday evening. You can sign up to receive the sermons here: <https://bit.ly/3JkQjpS>

“What do we do?” Pastors and congregations tell me about average worship attendance of 14 to 20 people and are quick to add that hundreds are worshipping with them on Facebook. I know a number of “Facebook worshipers,” including my mother, who attend more than one worship service on Sunday. So, I suspect several congregations are counting some of the same worshipers in their Facebook attendance. Those looking for something to do would do well to plan how the congregation is going to intentionally connect with their Facebook worshipers. We are in the process of establishing Connect Grants across the Synod to incentivize and assist congregations to come up with a plan for engaging both their online worshipers and their communities. You can learn more about these grants and how to apply for them by contacting Pastor Sprang.

“What do we do about...?” A few people ask about their favorite social justice issue. I remind you that Synod Council established John D. Schleicher Care of Creation Grants to help congregations learn about, advocate for, and directly address climate change. We are also offering a third opportunity for people to participate in the Introduction to Social Justice course with Justice Leaders Collaborative. Please consider participating if you have not already. I found this to be a perspective changing experience, particularly on account of its direct connection to Michigan. Registration information is available here: <https://bit.ly/3uHpZCu>

“What do we do?” We are exhausted, frustrated, and fed up. Saint Paul writes, “Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you— unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures...” (1 Corinthians 15:1-11).

Think of sins as more than our personal, selfish instincts and actions. Sins are those powers at work in the world that would separate us from God. COVID-19 is one. Racism is another. Environmental Exploitation is a third. All the isms that appear to be gaining strength are others. Division is yet another, as is a possible war.

Many of us are struggling to maintain our patience and perspective and respond in helpful ways, “Hold firmly to the message I proclaimed to you: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures...” Hold firmly to the message that sin will not win. Some days, I am holding onto the gospel with white knuckles. I pray you are, too.

The peace of Christ be with you!

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

Black History Month

Every February, the U.S. honors the contributions and sacrifices of African Americans who have helped shape the nation. Black History Month celebrates the rich cultural heritage, triumphs and adversities that are an indelible part of our country's history.

"There is no American history without African American history," said Sara Clarke Kaplan, Executive Director of the Antiracist Research Center at American University in Washington, D.C. The Black experience, she said, is embedded in "everything we think of as 'American history.'"

This year's theme, Black Health and Wellness, pays homage to medical scholars and health care providers. The theme is especially timely as we enter the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately affected minority communities and placed unique burdens on Black health care professionals.

President Gerald R. Ford officially recognized Black History Month during the country's 1976 bicentennial. Ford called upon Americans to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history."

February was chosen primarily because the second week of the month coincides with the birthdays of both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Lincoln was influential in the emancipation of slaves, and Douglass, a former slave, was a prominent leader in the abolitionist movement, which fought to end slavery. Canada also commemorates Black History Month in February, while the U.K. and Ireland celebrate it in October.

Throughout the month of February you will find social media, television, radio and news outlets featuring prominent figures in Black history. As faithful Christians we are called to proclaim and embody racial justice in our everyday life. As we celebrate Black History Month, let us renew our endeavors to learn about the African Americans who have contributed so much to our life together.

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

Introduction to Social Justice

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod and Justice Leaders Collaborative are partnering 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.

The course will be held via Zoom on Tuesday evenings from 6:00-8:00pm ET, beginning March 1, 2022 and running through April 5, 2022. The course is open to anyone in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod who wishes to participate, but is limited to 30 people.

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/3DZeszg>

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

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.

Our Generous History

I have been thinking a lot about generosity lately, especially as I celebrate my 8th anniversary of being called as Assistant to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission in this synod. Working together as a synod staff, visiting congregations, and hearing stories of ministries have had an effect on my thinking about generosity. In the past 8 years, I've observed a history of generosity. Even though our synod has sometimes been thought of as "frugal", we have actually grown to be very generous. The numbers, in part, help to tell the story of generosity over the last 8 years.

- In the last 8 years, the Synod has received about \$10 million from congregations.
- As we have pledged, 50% of that was sent through the ELCA Churchwide organization for work nationally and around the world.
- We have funded local ministries like Living Water Ministries (camps), Samaritas, Capital University and Trinity Seminary with over \$500,000 in support.
- We have directed \$145,000 from the ELCA and \$250,000 of budgeted funds to new congregations and worshiping communities.
- We have directed \$400,000 from the ELCA and \$395,000 from Synod budgeted funds to support congregations redeveloping and congregations ministering to communities of color, communities in poverty, and multi-ethnic communities.
- Through the Synod's Publicly Engaged Church Table, a total of \$160,000 in grants have been given to congregational food pantries and neighborhood ministries (much of this from a special individual gift).
- We have generously supported Lutheran Campus Ministry with \$400,000 for ministries at MSU, WMU/ Kalamazoo College, CMU and now our new ministry at Grand Valley and Grand Rapids Community College.
- Our Synod Disaster Fund was started with a Synod Assembly offering a few years ago. Since that time, we have given gifts to the Texas-Gulf Coast Synod and Indiana-Kentucky Synod equaling \$15,000 and supported flood recovery efforts in our own synod totaling \$35,000, including special grants/gifts we received of \$27,000.
- We applied for and received a total \$65,000 through the ELCA's COVID-19 Response Fund. These funds were distributed through 24 congregations that applied for grants and we have been touching the lives of about 2,000 people per week during the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Bishop Satterlee created an opportunity for individuals to give extra gifts beyond their congregation to support the ministries of the Synod. Living Stones was born, and in the three years of its existence, \$57,000 has been given as an extra measure of generosity for the work of the Synod.

Part of the work of the Synod is to partner in God's work in our territory and to assist congregations in fulfilling that vision as they carry out their mission in the communities they serve. It is all about participating in God's work in the world. Each dollar that passes through the Synod is part of a story. The story of touching our lives and the lives of others with the love of Jesus. The money might assist a congregation in finding a new pastor, in giving guidance to resolve a conflict, in starting a new outreach, in providing shelter in the church building for the homeless, and so much more.

Our generosity gives us the opportunity to share the story of Jesus in word and deed. It invites us into relationships where we can change the lives of others and by so doing, we are changed. Our own generosity and the generosity of the Synod is based on and flows from God's generosity. God's generously gives forgiveness, love, grace and so much more. We are a generous synod and it is an honor and privilege to be called to serve in this ministry.

How has the work of the Synod touched your life?

How has the life and mission of your congregation made an impact on you?

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

North/West Lower Michigan Synod 2022 Synod Assembly

After much prayer, conversation, and discernment from many perspectives, the North/West Lower Michigan Synod's Conference Deans and Executive Committee unanimously recommended and the members of Synod Council present at the February 2022 meeting unanimously decided that the 2022 Synod Assembly will be held virtually on Saturday, May 14, 2022 via Zoom.

Determining how to hold this year's Synod Assembly was a challenging decision as the people of our synod have long-standing, differing opinions on the purpose, duration, and frequency of synod assemblies. These differences were only exacerbated by the realities of and our synod's varied opinions on the COVID-19 pandemic. After discussing a variety of options and reviewing the on-going COVID-19 risks in indoor, large group settings, we do not feel it is appropriate or safe for us to gather for an in-person Synod Assembly this year.

We know that this decision will be welcome for some and disappointing for others. We had all anticipated that by this time the COVID-19 pandemic would be over and we would be able and willing to safely gather again in-person. However, COVID-19 is still very much present in our state, congregations, and communities and we have a responsibility to protect the health and safety of our voting members and their communities.

Similar to last year, the 2022 Synod Assembly will be primarily business focused. Therefore, only voting members will be able to register for and participate via Zoom. All non-voting members and visitors will be invited to watch the Synod Assembly via livestream on YouTube.

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

As we continue to live through the COVID-19 pandemic and adjust to the oftentimes rapidly changing situations, we know that God is with us in all that we do. We look forward to welcoming all our voting members virtually to the Synod Assembly on May 14, 2022.

A list of frequently asked questions pertaining to the 2022 Synod Assembly is available here: <https://bit.ly/34Rkx50>.

If you have additional questions or concerns, please contact communications@mittensynod.org.

2022 ELCA Youth Gathering

An Important Message from ELCA Gathering Leadership

After much prayer, conversation and tears, we have made the difficult decision to cancel the 2022 Gathering, MYLE and the tAble due to the ongoing pandemic, the recent COVID-19 surge and public health considerations.

We know there are thousands of young people who will not get to experience the Gathering, and our hearts break for them. This was not an easy decision, and we ask for your prayers and your grace. We understand the impact this decision will have on our youth, volunteers and planning teams, and we hope to return to Minneapolis for a future Gathering.

Registered congregations can visit their registration accounts starting Monday, February 7, to select their desired refund option. Please log into your accounts before March 4. For more information and FAQs, please visit elca.org/Gathering.

With God's power at work in and through us, we can do far more than we dare ask or imagine! The ELCA is fully committed to supporting the young people of our church and to seeing that the ministry of the Gathering, MYLE and the tAble continue for years to come. With that assurance, we are turning our attention toward 2024 for the next Gathering. Stay tuned to Gathering communications for a location announcement this summer.

COVID-19 Resources

Effective January 15, the ELCA Health Plan will cover up to eight individual at-home FDA Authorized COVID-19 tests, from Express Scripts' preferred list, per person enrolled in ELCA-Primary health benefits per month. Learn More: <https://bit.ly/34QERU5>

In the January 2022 Bishop's Newsletter, Bishop Satterlee released a letter discussing the current stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Read Now: <https://bit.ly/3uQDM9U>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is currently monitoring the spread of the Omicron variant, which has been detected across the US and spreads more easily than the original COVID-19 virus. The CDC continues to recommend getting vaccinated, wearing masks, and testing frequently to best protect yourself and others. Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3qk7mBM>

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' public health advisory on the use of face masks remains in effect. All persons in indoor public settings are advised to wear a face mask, regardless of their vaccination status. 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. Currently, everyone aged 12 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>

Inviting Wildlife to Church

by Laurie Swanson, Member of the Environmental Stewardship Task Force

As more land is converted into single homes and paved parking, Michigan is losing areas that had been available for birds and other wildlife. This loss of land is also a loss for humans as the pollinators needed to produce our food crops are disappearing as are the wildlife species we enjoy watching. This Spring, I encourage you to think about how you can improve the wildlife habitat in your own yard and even in the churchyard. Here are some suggestions.

- **Water:** Think about making a birdbath. All you need is a bucket for fresh water and a brush for cleaning. Freshen it three times a week to keep out mosquitos.
- **Cover:** Instead of removing downed twigs and branches, pile them in a back corner to make a brush pile. This and piles of rock provide cover for birds during bad weather. It also can protect small critters like rabbits, toads, and salamanders from predators.
- **Darkness:** Some birds need to use stars at night for migration. Bright lights from windows or skylights can throw off migration. Plan outdoor lighting that is shielded from above, and turn off lights that are not needed for safety.
- **Plants:** Choose as many different species as possible that provide seeds and fruit in different seasons. The greater the diversity, the greater the number of species that will be aided. They also mean less lawn mowing, which saves money, time, and pollution. Use only native plants in your garden as Michigan critters do not recognize species from other areas and therefore cannot eat them. Foreign plants also do not support native pollinators. Shop carefully this Spring as you choose flowers for home and churchyard.

Michigan State University Cooperative Extension's website (<https://www.canr.msu.edu/outreach/>) has lots of references to help you make any land under your control a haven for people and wildlife.

Synod Finances

Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund	January	YTD
Mission Support Revenue	105,501	1,331,158
Other Revenue*	27,567	262,978
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0
Total Revenue	133,068	1,594,136
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	52,750	665,579
Other Expenses	53,231	677,841
Total Expenses	105,981	1,343,420
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	27,086	250,716
Beginning Fund Balance	457,828	234,198
Ending Fund Balance	484,914	484,914
Other Fund Balances		
Unrestricted-Designated		701,462
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related**		1,051,730
Temporarily-Restricted		315,034
Permanently-Restricted		924,639
Total - All Funds (as of 1/31/22)		3,477,779

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

**Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related balances reflect market activity through December 31; January 31 statements will be available after February 20.

Congregation Giving Statements & Revenue Confirmations

Thank you for supporting the ministry we do together with your mission support gifts. Congregation giving statements will be mailed by mid-month. These reflect gifts received in the Synod Office or processed electronically and deposited in our bank account, on or before January 31. Please review your statement promptly. If you find any discrepancies, notify us at finance@mittensynod.org so we can make any necessary adjustments.

Later this month, our auditors, Maner Costerisan, will send revenue confirmations to several congregations based on a random sampling. Completing and returning this paperwork helps us move through the audit process efficiently. We appreciate you taking care of this at your earliest convenience.

We look forward to continued partnership with you in the coming year!

Annual Reports for Rostered Ministers

2021 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, download the form and save it to your computer before completing it.

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

Synod Staff Sermon Videos

Due to the rising number of COVID-19 cases in Michigan, many congregations are choosing to hold worship virtually.

Bishop Satterlee, Pastor Rosanne, and Pastor David will resume recording video sermons for congregations to use each week. Sermon videos will be available starting next week, for Sunday, January 23.

If you would like to receive these video sermons, please complete the form below. By completing the form, you will be signing up to receive all of the videos, but you can use as few or as many as you would like.

Video links will be emailed out the Wednesday before each Sunday. If you have additional questions, please email communications@mittensynod.org.

Sermon Video Sign-up: <https://bit.ly/3FguJR2>

Region 6 Explore Ministry Event

Are you curious where the Holy Spirit might be leading you? Are you feeling a sense of call to serve the church in a new way? Are you wondering about what it takes to become a public leader in the ELCA?

If any of these questions resonate with you, consider attending the Region 6 Explore Ministry Event to learn more about your calling and future ministry leadership.

This event will be held February 25-26, 2022 via Zoom. The registration cost is \$15 and includes a copy of *Let Your Life Speak* by Parker Palmer.

Learn more and Register: <https://bit.ly/3sGYF4p>

Boundary Training for Rostered Ministers

Boundary Training is required every three years for Rostered Ministers in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod.

Due to COVID-19, we will be offering Boundary Training as a four part series via Zoom. These 1-hour sessions will be held on Thursdays at 11am ET starting March 10 and ending March 31. Participants are expected to attend all four sessions.

We are privileged that Barbara Keller, the Misconduct Prevention Director for the ELCA, will be the presenter for the initial session on March 10. Bishop Satterlee, Pastor David Sprang, and Pastor Rosanne Anderson will lead the other sessions.

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

Upcoming Events

February 15, 17, 22	ELCA College Readiness Webinar	Learn More: https://bit.ly/3o1l0h1
February 25-26	Region 6 Explore Ministry Event	Learn More: https://bit.ly/3sGYF4p
March 1	Introduction to Social Justice	Learn More: https://bit.ly/3uPAy6k
March 10	Boundary Training for Rostered Ministers	Learn More: https://bit.ly/3oIkzmT
March 11-12	ELMM: Genesis 12-50 and Our Faith Ancestors	Learn More: elmm.org/events

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
Faith/Saginaw	Pastor John Soyster, Interim / Preparing MSP

Capital Area Conference	Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean
Christ United/Dewitt (Part-Time)	Episcopal Diocese of Michigan taking the lead in the call process / Interviewing
All Saints/Mason (Part-Time)	Pastor Erick Johnson, Stated Supply / Seeking a candidate
Trinity/Hillsdale	Pastor Dennis Smith, Interim
Christ/Michigan Center	Pastor Ryan Prondzinski called to Minneapolis Area Synod. Last Sunday March 6

Greater Grand Rapids Conference	Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean
Immanuel/Big Rapids (Part-Time)	Supply Pastors
Christ/Wyoming	Pastor Jack Ferra, Interim / Preparing MSP
St. Luke/Grand Rapids	Pastor Galen Knutson, Intentional Interim; Pastor Marcia Schultz, Pastoral Care
Trinity/Grand Rapids	CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Kari Fast, Assisting Pastor (part-time). Installation February 20

Kalamazoo Conference	Rev. Joan Oleson, Dean
St. John/Baroda (Part-Time)	Deacon Deno Sorrels, Stated Supply through February 20. Pastor Vicky Blough, Stated Supply beginning February 27 / Interviewing
Hope/Plainwell (Part-Time)	Pastor Julie Winklepleck, Stated Supply / Interviewing
St. Peter/Battle Creek	Pastor Cheryl Johnson and Pastor Michael Anton, Stated Supply
Messiah/Constantine (Part-Time)	Supply Pastors

Stony Lake Conference	Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean
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Sunrise Conference	Rev. Chrysy Bright, Dean
St. Paul/Alpena	Seeking a part-time assistant pastor

Traverse Conference	Rev. Jonathan Reid, Dean
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