



**North/West Lower  
Michigan Synod**

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## **I Turned to Jesus**

“From that time Jesus began to proclaim, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near’” (Matthew 4:17). Repent: not so much regret as turn—turn around, turn toward the “kingdom of heaven” that comes near in Jesus, turn to Jesus, return to Jesus. My most recent turn to Jesus was Wednesday, January 25. Turning to Jesus was energizing, renewing, and uplifting. Days later those feelings have not waned.

“Follow me!” Jesus called to Simon and Andrew, James and John (Matthew 4:18–22). “Follow me!” Jesus calls to me and to us. Following Jesus is the key to moving forward as a church. Listening to Jesus is the second or third step in following, right after turning or returning to Jesus, and experiencing Jesus’s presence, love, and life. In my most recent turn, I experienced Jesus and his abundant life as my mind filled with things Jesus said that have for a long time been touchstones for me.

Jesus asked, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down” (Mark 13:2). Jesus is talking about the Jerusalem temple. I am persuaded Jesus is also speaking of his church in our time. Coming out of COVID-19, the church will not return to what it was before the pandemic and will certainly not return to what it was in our favorite decade. Stones are falling. Some are large stones, including the governance structure of the ELCA in the hope that we as a church might better participate in Christ’s mission. Some stones are precious, including congregations and Synod ministries. Some are small stones that give us comfort because we can manage or control them, including the ways we’ve “always” done things. Concentrating on these little stones can divert our attention and shield us from the fear and pain of the larger stones falling all around us.

We get to choose whether we will approach the falling stones as “gloom and doom,” as Jesus bringing new life, or something to be denied, disregarded, and delayed. I recall sharing Jesus’s words about temple stones falling with you at the 2013 bishop election and commenting, “I do not want to spend my life propping up stones Jesus has destined to fall.” That is easier to say when stones are not falling; it is no less true when they are. Propping up stones, even stones we can argue Jesus has not destined to fall, depletes us. Protecting falling stones, regardless of how precious they are to us, prevents us from perceiving the new thing Jesus is raising up. Though we may delay them from toppling, the stones are still likely to crush us, or at least to crush our faith, when they fall. So I am asking myself how much energy I spend propping up stones that are destined to fall and how much time I want to spend feeling depleted, prevented, and crushed. The simple answer is “less.” “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Indeed, the thieves opposed to Jesus’s reign and even well-intentioned folk determined to protect precious stones will use those falling stones to steal our life, kill our hope, and destroy our faith. Jesus came—Jesus comes—that we may have abundant life. I am asking myself what Jesus’s abundant life means for me, my family, and our synod. I am also focusing more of my work as bishop on what gives us abundant life and not on what steals, kills, and destroys. Please remain attentive to synod publicity for announcements of the abundant life Jesus is bringing to our synod. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

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"To another Jesus said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God'" (Luke 9:58-60). Some are not yet ready to turn to Jesus and abundant life; we still need to grieve all that we have lost. I once heard Jesus's words as harsh; now I hear them as freeing and permission-giving. Rather than convincing people to get with the program, we can graciously "let the dead bury their own dead."

The time comes when we can do nothing more for dying congregations, ministries, and beloved ways of being church. We cannot make people's grief go away, except to be the object of their blame and anger. Regardless of how hard we try or how long we wait for the church to return to what it was, death comes. We can turn to Jesus for life. So I am asking myself where the line is between caring for people who deny death or whose grief prevents them from embracing abundant life and proclaiming the "kingdom of God." Jesus calls us to proclaim the "kingdom of God," which means we cannot wait until the dead are buried and everyone is over their grief. I am heeding Pastor Sprang's advice to count the raised hands to see if we have enough to attempt something new and not count the naysayers. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Jesus said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people [some manuscripts say the cosmos] to myself" (John 12:32). Of course, Jesus is speaking of the cross. On the cross, Jesus brings abundant life out of death. Jesus does not deny, disregard, or delay death. I love Jesus's words *draw*, *all*, and *cosmos*. Jesus draws like a magnet. Jesus pulls or drags to make us come to himself. We really do not do anything. Even our faith is the work or gift of the Holy Spirit that we can nourish and treasure. Jesus draws *all* people; I hear no qualifiers in the word *all*. The word *cosmos* in some manuscript suggests Jesus's saving work extends beyond the human family to all creation, the entire universe, the cosmos. So I am asking myself how I as bishop and we as a synod lean into and not resist Jesus's "magnetic draw." Leaning in has to do with receiving, even turning to, Jesus as his gracious gift to us and resisting other forces attempting to draw us in other directions, particularly into the past. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Jesus said, "You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:48). Jesus, risen, did not give the first disciples a choice; he declared them his witnesses. In the waters of baptism, when we are joined to Christ's resurrection, Jesus does not give us a choice either. Jesus declares us his witnesses. We witness to Jesus's life, death, and resurrection and the new and abundant life Jesus brings. We witness to Jesus more than we sell or save or grow the church. Sharing the story of Jesus comes first because it is such life-giving good news. Sharing the story of Jesus is also the only way to sell, save, or grow the church. I am asking myself how much time I spend at failed attempts to sell and save the church and how much time I spend bringing good news by witnessing to Jesus. Jesus declares us his witnesses. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Moving forward, sharing the story of Jesus is our number one priority because this is the work Jesus gives us and sharing the story of Jesus is the church's future. Pastor Clay Bates lovingly reminds us that God will not bless congregations and ministries who do not name sharing the story of Jesus as their top priority. So I ask myself how whatever we are doing, want to do, or used to do shares the story of Jesus. If we cannot answer that question, we probably should not do it or we should stop doing it. More important, I am releasing my grip on stones I know will topple, turning to Jesus, experiencing his abundant life, and listening for what Jesus is saying to me. It is energizing, renewing, and uplifting. I wish this for you as well. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

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.

African Descent Ministries of the ELCA celebrates Black History Month with "Talks at the Desk," a four-part video series that explores diverse expressions of the church. A new video premieres each Wednesday in February at 8:30pm ET. Watch at <https://ELCA.org/ADM>

## Rebuilding Community

Recently a pastor asked me what resources I had that could be used for rebuilding a sense of community as we learn to live with COVID and rebuild after the pandemic. The more I thought about it, the more I came to the conclusion that we have the resources we have always had for the church to use to build community.

We start with the Gospel story. Build a community around studying the Word and learning to share it. And of course the resource that comes to mind is Bishop Satterlee's new book, *You Are Witnesses of These Things* (<https://amzn.to/3E9u46m>). Community will be built as groups of people read the book and practice telling their faith stories, sharing where they see Jesus at work in the world, and sharing favorite bible stories. Then go out and share the story of Jesus with others. We start to build and rebuild community by getting into the story of Jesus that defines and supports our life together.

Listening is a very important aspect of community. An evening of speed dating style "one on one listening" would give an opportunity for people to share who they are and what they care about. The document *One on One Relational Conversations* is a guide (<https://bit.ly/3YwddT8>).

The Synod's Adult Theological Education class with Dr. Walter Taylor has also been a great way to build community. While the class has ended, groups can still study the book of 1 Corinthians. Paul wrote it to assist the Corinthian Christians in building community, eliminating divisions, and it ends with that favorite passage on how the body of Christ can live together (1 Corinthians 13:1-13).

Thinking about some of the classic writings about Christian Community by great authors, I have found Henri Nouwen's *Here and Now* to be a very helpful reflection and it's available to download for free (<https://bit.ly/3E23DPV>). And we can't forget the great book, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*, which is also free to download (<https://bit.ly/3E4WT3y>).

Another great way to build community is to work on a project that helps others, some kind of a community outreach project. *The 90 Day Micro Mission Strategy* document will help walk through steps to build community and determine a mission and assets to plan a mission outreach (<https://bit.ly/3W0QYmo>). There is even the potential to fund it with a Thrivent Action Team Grant or use it as matching funds.

Share time together, pray together, share the stories of Jesus, listen to one another, do something for someone else. These are all ways to build community.

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

### *My Burden is Light* Preaching Retreat

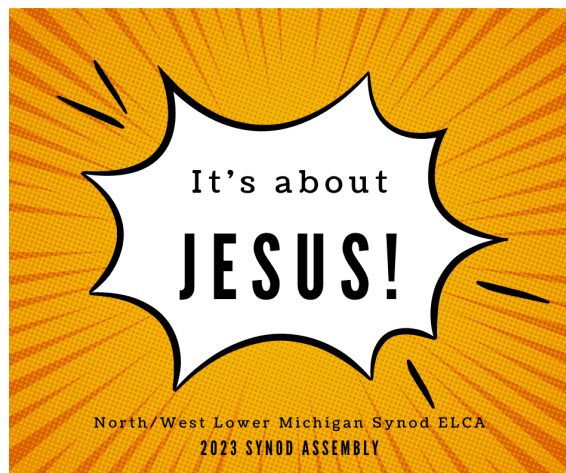
"Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30.

Bishop Satterlee invites you to join him for a preaching retreat centered on his new book, *My Burden is Light: Making Room for Jesus in Preaching*. This retreat is an opportunity to discuss the book and to intentionally reflect on both our preaching and our relationship with Jesus. Like the book, the retreat's primary audience is pastors and deacons, but lay preachers and listeners who care about preaching are also welcome to attend.

This retreat will be held in-person at the St. Francis Retreat Center in Dewitt, MI from October 16-18, 2023.

Learn More and Register: <http://bit.ly/3K5z0gc>

## North/West Lower Michigan Synod 2023 Synod Assembly



The North/West Lower Michigan Synod's 2023 Synod Assembly will be held May 7-9, 2023 at the Comfort Inn & Suites in Mt. Pleasant under the theme "It's About Jesus!" This year's Synod Assembly will be held in-person and will not be live-streamed or recorded.

All information pertaining to the 2023 Synod Assembly will be posted on the Assembly page of the Synod's website (<http://bit.ly/3E6VYzP>). Please check the website regularly as information will be updated and added in the coming months.

Event registration and hotel reservations will open on March 13, 2023. Links for the registration form and hotel reservations will be available on that date. All voting members and visitors must register for Synod Assembly in advance.

### Pre-Assembly Sessions

We will be offering Pre-Assembly Discussion Sessions and a Voting Orientation in advance of Synod Assembly. These optional sessions for voting members will be held via Zoom. Voting members will be able to register for these sessions when completing the Synod Assembly registration form.

- Pre-Assembly Discussion on Resolutions/Memorials - May 1, 2023 (6-8pm)
- Pre-Assembly Discussion on Budget/Compensation Guidelines - May 2, 2023 (6-8pm)
- Voting Orientation - May 4, 2023 (6-7pm)

### Churchwide Representative

We are excited to welcome Lori Fedyk as our Churchwide Representative! Lori has served as Treasurer of the ELCA since 2018.

### Synod Assembly Offering

Synod Council has designated two areas of support for the 2023 Synod Assembly Offering: Living Water Ministries Bridge Builder Fund and Lutheran World Relief: Crisis in Ukraine Fund. Information about these funds is available on the website.

### Assembly Book

The Assembly Book will again be a series of pdf documents published on the Synod website. All materials for the Assembly Book must be submitted to Rebecca Bossenbroek ([finance@mittensynod.org](mailto:finance@mittensynod.org)) by 5pm on March 15, 2023. Submission guidelines and requirements are available on the website.

### Nominations

The Nominating Committee is seeking nominations for 11 synod positions in the following areas: Synod Vice President, Synod Council (4 positions), Consultation Committee (2 positions), and Discipline Committee (4 positions). All nominations and completed bio forms must be submitted by 5pm on March 10, 2023 to [communications@mittensynod.org](mailto:communications@mittensynod.org). Additional information and blank bio forms are available on the website.

### Resolutions and Memorials

To be considered for the 2023 Synod Assembly, all resolutions and memorials must be submitted to the North/West Lower Michigan Synod Resolutions Committee in advance of the Synod Assembly. All resolutions and memorials must be submitted by 5pm on March 15, 2023 to Ann Stavros ([annstavros@mittensynod.org](mailto:annstavros@mittensynod.org)). Guidelines and requirements for submitting a resolution or memorial are available on the website.

### Display Tables, Workshops, and Greetings

ELCA Ministries or Synod committees or budget support areas are eligible to apply for a display table, workshop, or greeting. Due to limited time and space, submitting an application does not guarantee a display table, workshop, or greeting. Additionally, all display tables, workshops, and greetings must be directly tied to proclaiming Jesus. All applications must be submitted by 5pm on March 3, 2023. Additional information and applications are available on the website.

<b>Synod Finances</b>		
	<b>January</b>	<b>Year to Date</b>
<b>Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund</b>		
Mission Support Revenue*	84,608	1,194,638
Other Revenue	18,065	132,291
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>102,673</b>	<b>1,326,929</b>
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	43,133	597,319
Other Expenses	56,663	734,499
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>99,796</b>	<b>1,331,818</b>
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	2,877	(4,889)
Beginning Fund Balance	475,524	483,290
Ending Fund Balance	478,401	478,401
<b>Other Fund Balances</b>		
Unrestricted-Designated		586,758
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related*		669,165
Temporarily-Restricted		307,118
Permanently-Restricted		1,002,547
<b>Total - All Funds (as of 1/31/23)</b>		<b>3,043,989</b>

\*Mission Support Revenue = contributions received in the Synod Office and/or processed electronically by January 31

\*January 31 Endowment Fund Statements were not yet published at the time of this summary.  
The amount shown here reflects balances as of 12/31/22.

### Congregational Mailings

In the coming weeks, a large sampling of congregations will receive a request from our auditors to verify their mission support contributions as shown in our records. We appreciate you returning these requests in a timely manner. Thank you!

As a reminder, the Synod Office's mailing address is:

North/West Lower Michigan Synod ELCA  
P.O. Box 517  
Dewitt, MI 48820

All mail and checks will reach us sooner if they come directly to our current mailing address rather than through the USPS forwarding service.

## Publicly Engaged Church

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod's Publicly Engaged Church Table recommends the ELCA Social Statements as teaching and policy documents that provide broad frameworks to assist us in thinking about and discussing social issues in the context of faith and life. In the coming months, we will be highlighting each of the ELCA's social statements for discussion.

This month, we lift up the ELCA's social statement on Race, Ethnicity and Culture, which expresses the ELCA's calling to celebrate culture and ethnicity. This calling commits the ELCA to confront racism, to engage in public leadership, witness and deliberation on these matters, and to advocate for justice and fairness for all people.

Read Now: <http://bit.ly/3YywiUO>

## Shooting at Michigan State University

We are heartbroken to learn of the shooting at Michigan State University on February 13, 2023. We grieve with the Michigan State Community and continue to keep them in our prayers.

Read Bishop Satterlee's statement:  
<http://bit.ly/3YuaFF3>

*God, our healer and refuge, we pray for all who suffer from gun violence. With your mercy, bind up their wounds, restore their bodies, and heal their hearts. Comfort the mourners and embrace the lonely. With your might, empower us to change this broken world. Make us advocates for a stable society, alive with hope in you. We ask this through the one once wounded for our transgressions and now standing in our sorrows, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. (ACS p.49)*

## Praying with (and for) Creation

Pastor John Burow, Member of the Environmental Stewardship Task Force

*Let heaven celebrate! Let the earth rejoice! Let the sea and everything in it roar! Let the countryside and everything in it celebrate! Then all the trees of the forest too will shout out joyfully before the Lord because he is coming! (Psalm 96:11-13a CEB, see also Psalm 66:4; Psalm 148:1-14 and Revelation 5:13)*

Just out my window I can see scores of trees, their bare limbs uplifted in silent songs of praise, in spite of cold winds. The trees instruct me that my own praises are not to be stifled by whatever distress I might experience. I am also reminded that by joining the forest in worship, I am drawn to the presence of Christ in awe and gratitude for the beauty, abundance and sacred goodness of all creation. Luther taught that as Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father he becomes present everywhere, even, Luther once wrote, in a peasant's pea soup.

My pondering continued: might a multitude of dead branches and fallen trees be due to the rising winds of climate change? Is the growing number of invasive plants also the result human activity? So, praise and delight shifts to concern and intercession; confession of complicity and lament for the deep wounds we humans have inflicted on God's good creation. My pondering ends with this question from the forest, from God: "John, how might you respond?"

If you'd like more information about environmental stewardship reach out to the North/West Lower Michigan Synod's Environmental Stewardship Task Force's chair Linn Kracht at [ldkracht@gmail.com](mailto:ldkracht@gmail.com).

## Upcoming Events

February 15	Companion Relationships and Our Honduran Partners	Learn more: <a href="http://bit.ly/3YU4vy9">http://bit.ly/3YU4vy9</a>
February 16-18	Living Faithful: WELCA Leadership Event	Learn more: <a href="http://bit.ly/3KcqPip">http://bit.ly/3KcqPip</a>
February 21	Trauma and Its Healing Learning Event	Learn more: <a href="http://bit.ly/3S0Bn5L">http://bit.ly/3S0Bn5L</a>
February 22	Ash Wednesday	
February 25-27	Signs Along the Way Discernment Weekend	Learn more: <a href="http://bit.ly/3XqxUi1">http://bit.ly/3XqxUi1</a>
February 26	Martin Luther on the Holy Spirit and the Christian Life	Learn more: <a href="http://bit.ly/3Ilxbue">http://bit.ly/3Ilxbue</a>

## 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>
Messiah/Bay City	Pastor Dan Stonebeck, Interim / Preparing MSP
St. Matthew/Bridgeport (Part-Time)	Pastor Rheanna Goodrich to New England. Last Day February 22.
Zion/Freeland	Pastor Andreas Teich, Interim / Interviewing
Trinity/Midland	Pastor Dennis Smith, Specialized Supply Pastor / Interviewing
Faith/Saginaw	Pastor Rheanna Goodrich, Stated Supply through February 22 / Interviewing
Our Savior/Saginaw (Part-Time)	Pastor Andreas Teich, Interim / Interviewing
Resurrection/Saginaw (Part-Time)	Seeking a partnership or quarter to third time pastor

<b>Capital Area Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean</b>
Trinity/Hillsdale	Supply Pastors / Interviewing
Faith/Okemos	Pastor Ellen Schoepf retiring. Last Sunday April 30.

<b>Greater Grand Rapids Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean</b>
Zion/Woodland (Part-Time)	Pastor Rebecca Ebb- Speese retiring. Last Sunday June 18.

<b>Kalamazoo Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Joan Oleson, Dean</b>
Lutheran Church of the Savior/Kalamazoo	Supply Pastors / Suspending Call Process

<b>Stony Lake Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean</b>
Edgewood/Fruitport	Pastor Len Dahlgren retiring. Last Sunday May 29 / Interviewing
Harbor of Grace/Muskegon	Pastor Jack Ferra, Interim / Preparing MSP

<b>Sunrise Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean</b>
St. Paul/Alpena	Seeking a part-time assistant pastor

<b>Traverse Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Jonathan Reid, Dean</b>
Feast of Victory/Acme (Part-Time)	Pastor Ruth Overdier, Stated Supply / Seeking candidates
St. Paul/Reed City	Supply Pastors / Preparing MSP