



**North/West Lower
Michigan Synod**

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mittensynod.org**

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“Bishop, what are you thinking about COVID-19?”

COVID-19 is the last thing I want to be writing about. We had all hoped that by this time we would be closer to or even at the end of the pandemic. However, COVID-19 is still very much present in our lives and does not seem to be going away anytime soon. In fact, recent data shows that the virus is spreading faster than ever.

On January 5, Michigan recorded its highest daily confirmed case rate since the pandemic began, adding 27,346 cases over two days and 277 deaths from the virus. The state averaged 13,673 new cases per day over Tuesday, January 4 and Wednesday, January 5. The additions bring the state totals to 1,595,919 confirmed cases and 27,563 deaths since the pandemic began in March 2020. Of these deaths reported, 165 were identified during a vital records review, state health officials noted.

So, I am again writing about COVID-19. While some worry that my comments on COVID-19 and how to navigate the ongoing pandemic are undermining their congregation, it is my responsibility as bishop to provide guidance to those in our synod. At the top of my list of constitutional responsibilities as bishop, I am “to have primary responsibility for the ministry of Word and Sacrament in this synod and its congregations” (*Constitution for Synods*, ¶8.12.b.). More important, I continue to speak on COVID-19 because pastors and congregational leaders ask me questions and seek my counsel.

One of the main things I continue to recommend to congregations is to have a plan for responding to COVID-19. Churches are not immune to the virus and having a plan allows congregations to better protect their members and quickly respond when COVID-19 comes to their church community. The plan should address face coverings, social distancing, singing, sacraments, fellowship, food, and when to return to online worship. If your congregation does not have a plan for responding to the virus, it is not too late to make one. If your congregation has a plan, this is not the time to abandon it.

In addition to advising congregations on their COVID-19 plans, I am often asked for guidance on specific topics. Recently those topics included Holy Communion, mask wearing, and vaccines. As I’ve stated before, my guidance on these topics is not mandatory and I cannot force pastors, deacons, or congregations to follow it. However, I offer my thoughts on these topics as a way to help pastors, deacons, and congregational leaders make decisions for their communities.

I shared my thoughts on Holy Communion early in the pandemic (<https://bit.ly/31OzxQ3>) but I will briefly touch on it again. We can worship without celebrating Holy Communion. While it is now common to receive the Lord’s Supper every week, a lot of us remember the time when receiving the Lord’s Supper once a month was the norm. And so, as we believe Jesus is present in the Word in the same way Jesus is present in the Sacraments, we are able to experience Jesus’ love and be renewed in the proclamation of the Word. Preachers can make the sermon a feast by preaching lavishly about Jesus. My spiritual diet changed in the pandemic—more Word, less Sacrament – and I have never been more satisfied.

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In the past few weeks, questions about mask wearing and vaccinations have become more prominent. As we have heard from public health officials, including the CDC and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, wearing a mask and getting vaccinated are the best ways to protect yourself and those around you. As Christians, we are called to love, protect, and care for our neighbors and we must remain vigilant in reducing the spread of this virus. Wearing masks and getting vaccinated are ways we embody Jesus' love and care for one another.

A doctor in the World Health Organization recently stated that COVID-19 will be a threat until 70% of the people in every nation are vaccinated. ELCA leaders have encouraged getting vaccinated against COVID-19 as both Lutheran heritage and ELCA teaching encourage participation in public health efforts. I have received questions about whether our pastors and deacons can provide a religious exemption for vaccination and while there is no ELCA policy resolution dedicated to vaccination, a basis in Lutheran tradition and ELCA teaching for religious exemption is virtually non-existent.

While the Synod, and even the ELCA, cannot mandate that congregation members be vaccinated against COVID-19, Congregation Councils can require church employees and the pastor to be vaccinated. I know of congregations that are asking their pastor, church staff, and members for proof of vaccination as people feel more comfortable returning to church when they know everyone is vaccinated. I certainly appreciate congregations who tell me this and that they will be wearing masks when they invite me to come and preach.

In recent weeks, there have been some questions about what it means to be vaccinated. Given the current pandemic, what people mean when they ask "Are you vaccinated?" is "Are you fully vaccinated against COVID-19?". To be fully vaccinated means that you have received two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine. As boosters become available to more people, currently those 12 and older, "Are you boosted?" has become a common follow-up question. To be boosted means that you are fully vaccinated and have received the booster dose of the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

When people ask these questions, they are trying to get information to help them make decisions about their own health and safety. Christians, and especially pastors and deacons, tell the truth. Or we say that we're not going to answer the question. But we cannot answer that we are vaccinated if we are not. We cannot say that we thought we were being asked about childhood diseases. A response that is evasive or untrue undermines and even breaks trust. "Dishonesty, deception, duplicity, or the manipulation of others for personal benefit or gain is conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office" (Definitions and Guidelines B.2, "Integrity").

As we have experienced throughout the pandemic, tensions and emotions are running high. In my conversations with pastors and deacons, I continue to hear how hard it is for them to make decisions to keep themselves and their congregation members safe when those decisions and safety precautions are then ignored by those in their congregation. I therefore encourage congregations and their councils to think carefully about what they might require of their pastor and staff and what they refuse to do themselves. In early 2021, the Great Resignation or the Big Quit, an economic trend in which employees voluntarily resign from their jobs en masse, began. Churches have not escaped this trend and I am heartsick every time a former student, who is a good pastor, tells me that, while they love Jesus, they have lost their capacity to respond to parishioners who treat them disrespectfully, even threaten their livelihoods, as they try to keep the congregation safe. So, they are leaving ministry and embarking on new careers.

While we are not where we hoped to be in this pandemic and the situations and decisions we are currently facing are difficult and stressful, may we take comfort in knowing that God is with us through all of it. As we work our way through this pandemic, I invite you to consider these words: "If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..." (Philippians 2:1-5).

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

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)

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/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

Mission Partners

Mission Partners are congregations which are New Congregations Under Development, Synodically Authorized Worshiping Communities, Campus Ministries, and Strategic Congregations serving communities of color or poverty where they need extra support for ministries in their community. Mission Partner congregations primarily show support by giving one time or monthly financial gifts (many use noisy offerings). In addition, Mission Partners often show support by exchanging visits and or the pastors exchanging pulpit, doing acts of service together, and sending letters and prayers of support. There could be other creative ways for congregations to be Mission Partners. Mission Partners are an outward sign of the Synod working to be the body of Christ together.

2022 Mission Partners

Strategic Congregations

Trinity, Battle Creek - Providing support to the poorest neighborhood in the city

2055 Columbia Ave., Battle Creek, MI 49014, office@tlcbattlecreek.org, 269-963-5356

Zion, Saginaw – Working on becoming a multicultural neighborhood church caring for the an inner-city neighborhood

1209 Hancock Street, Saginaw, MI 48602, zionsaginaw@yahoo.com, 989-792-7713

Sudanese Christ Lutheran Community, Wyoming, Michigan – Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community – Mission community serving the South Sudanese in the Grand Rapids Area (Christ Lutheran Church – Fiscal Agent)

2350 44th Street SW, Wyoming, MI 49519, paulmawut1985@gmail.com, 616-532-2774)

Campus Ministries

One Community – University Lutheran Church, East Lansing - Michigan State University

1020 South Harrison Road, East Lansing, MI 48823, ulc@ulcel.org, 517-332-2559

Immanuel, Mt. Pleasant – Central Michigan University – Lutheran Campus Ministry

320 South Bradley Road, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858, office@immanuelmp.com, 989-773-4204

Matrix – Western Michigan University – Lutheran Campus Ministry – Trinity and Lutheran Church of the Savior, Kalamazoo, Prince of Peace, Portage, and Trinity and St. Peter, Battle Creek (Trinity, Kalamazoo – Fiscal Agent)

504 South Westnedge Ave., Kalamazoo, MI 49007, trudi@tlckzoo.com, 269-344-6181

United Campus Christian Ministry – Grand Valley State University, Allendale, Michigan - Bread of Life Lutheran Church

7510 36th Ave., Hudsonville, MI 49426, pastorkatevv@gmail.com, 574-215-5327

Camp Availability

St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in Alpena, MI owns a camping area located on Lake Huron in the town of Ossineke. They desire the property to have greater usage and benefit and are extending an offer to all clergy and their immediate family members serving in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod. Synod clergy and their families are invited to stay at the camp, free of charge, from May through October. The camp has six to eight hook ups for campers and places for tent camping. There is also a bathhouse with toilets and a shower. Additional information, including maps and camp guidelines, is available on request. St. Paul Evangelical also offers worship at the camp during the summer, which is open to all. It is their hope that clergy in our synod will be able to take advantage of this gift of relaxation and enjoy the beauty of God's creation. If you are interested in reserving a day, a week, or weekend at the camp, please contact St. Paul Evangelical at nena@stpaul.org or jackie@stpaul.org.

Yes, What We Do Matters

By Rich Weingartner, Faith Lutheran Church, Okemos

Often times, I personally wonder if all the work our congregation does is worth it. If all the meetings and planning will make a difference. If what we do even gets noticed by anyone. I know it shouldn't matter how people view us, but at times I wonder, do we really make a difference in the world?

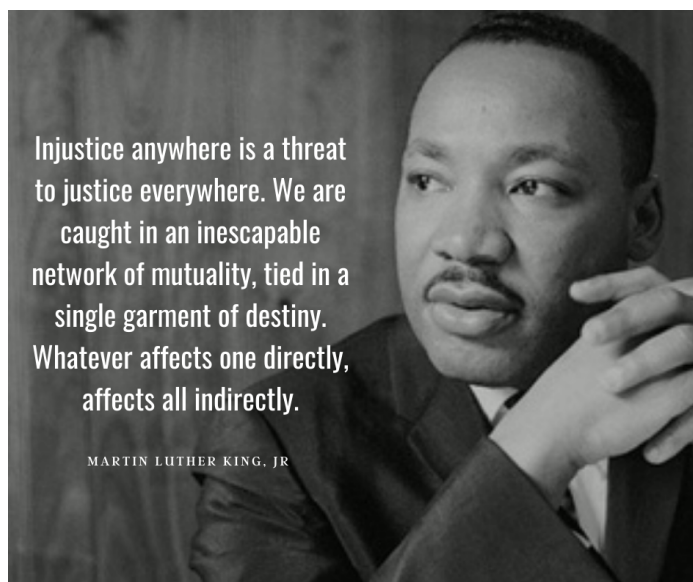
Now, a bit of background information. Faith Lutheran in Okemos was contacted by the Okemos Public Schools early this school year to see if our church would be a COVID testing site for them. They use it in the morning to do rapid tests for students, so they can still attend in-person classes if they are negative, instead of having to quarantine at home for 2 weeks if they had possible exposure to the virus. Our church immediately said yes and for months now we have provided our facility along with some volunteers to help run the testing program. It is this testing service we provide for the schools, that prompted this thank you email to our congregation:

I am a local parent of a daughter that utilized your COVID testing program this week due to a close contact that occurred at her school. I am also from a Christian upbringing, but now non-religious, due, at least in part, to being jaded by what I have witnessed many American Christian churches become. I am still a supporter of what Jesus taught - however, I unfortunately do not see those teachings being followed by many churches and so-called Christians.

I am writing this email, and I never would have thought I would be doing so, to your church and your congregation to both thank you for the service you provided my daughter and the youth of this area, but more importantly, to let you know that I drive by your church nearly every day, and have observed many of the activities (LGBTQ outreach, environmental concerns, food pantry, racial inclusion, etc.) that your church has took part in over the last few years - and they have not went unnoticed. It is incredibly refreshing to see a church and its parishioners that show love to its community instead of divisiveness, that act out the golden rule, and that seemingly exemplify those qualities that Jesus actually taught.

Thank you to those that volunteer in your congregation and for those that assist in the COVID testing program. Thank you for being a church that has shown a jaded, former Christian that there are still true followers of Jesus out there and that "love your neighbor" is not just something taught in Sunday School to children, but is in fact, actually being practiced.

So, this is a good reminder that, yes, what we do matters. While we may get burned out at times, or have internal struggles in our congregations, when we do the work of God for the benefit of our community, people notice the positive impact to our community, even if we aren't always aware of how much of an impact we have.



Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

On January 17, we remember the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We pray that his life, ministry, sacrifice, and activism will inspire our own commitment and persistence in working for racial justice and advocating for the rights and well-being of all people who suffer injustice, mistreatment, neglect or oppression.

On January 18, the ELCA will observe an annual day of repentance for racism. Following Martin Luther King Jr. Day, this date is observed by several organizations as the National Day of Racial Healing to encourage acts of service and raise awareness of racial justice. Worship resources are available: <https://bit.ly/3fftVMY>

John D. Schleicher Care of Creation Grants

In response to the resolution on responding to the climate emergency at the North/West Lower Michigan Synod's 2021 Synod Assembly, Synod Council approved the establishment of the John D. Schleicher Care of Creation Grants. These grants are established using funds given by Calvary, Lansing to be used at the Synod's discretion.

The purpose of the John D. Schleicher Care of Creation Grants is to inspire and assist congregations (or a group of congregations) of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod to respond to climate change as a matter of faith and discipleship. The grants are named to honor Bishop Emeritus John D. Schleicher for his commitment to and leadership in care of creation.

Three one-time grants of \$750 will be awarded to congregations who initiate a project that responds to care of creation, earth-keeping ministry, or climate change.

Congregations must design a project and plan of implementation that responds to care of creation, earth-keeping ministry, or climate change as part of the life and mission of Jesus and equips the congregation to fulfill their calling, as followers of Jesus, to be wise, engaged, and faithful citizens. Education, conservation, and/or advocacy are appropriate foci for the project. The Synod's Environmental Stewardship Task Force is available for consultation and coaching.

Full application instructions are available on the Synod website: <https://bit.ly/3qjDFRu>

Grant applications and required documents must be submitted to Bishop Satterlee by May 1, 2022.

COVID-19 Resources

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is currently monitoring the spread of the Omicron variant, which has been detected in most states and spreads more easily than the original COVID-19 virus. The CDC is expecting a surge of COVID-19 cases in the coming days to weeks and 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. 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/3lWhuY8>

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>

Synod Finances

Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund	December	YTD
Mission Support Revenue	102,606	1,204,492
Other Revenue*	6,071	232,392
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0
Total Revenue	108,677	1,436,885
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	51,303	602,246
Other Expenses	58,590	625,919
Total Expenses	109,894	1,228,165
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	-1,216	208,719
Beginning Fund Balance	444,132	234,198
Ending Fund Balance	442,916	442,917
Other Fund Balances		
Unrestricted-Designated		685,041
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related		1,026,965
Temporarily-Restricted		327,713
Permanently-Restricted		924,639
Total - All Funds (as of 12/31/21)		3,407,275

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

Thank You

Thank you for your faithful and consistent giving throughout 2021!

Congregation treasurers should have received third quarter (Aug-Oct) giving statements via U.S. Mail in November. In that package were a supply of transmittal forms (to be enclosed with your contributions), a 2022 Statement of Intent Form (due in the Synod Office by 2/15/22) and a Certificate of Financial Compliance Review of Congregation Records form (due in the Synod Office by 4/30/22.) If you did not receive this packet, contact Rebecca Bossenbroek at finance@mittensynod.org and we will send another.

As mentioned last month, the Synod's fiscal year ends on January 31. Gifts received in the Synod Office and transactions processed electronically on or before January 31 will be recorded as January receipts and reflected on fourth quarter (Nov-Jan) giving statements. We appreciate your generosity and your commitment to supporting ministry in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and around the world.

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>

Equipping Leaders for Mission and Ministry

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

Pastoral Care Assistant Training

Dr. Rosanne Swanson
February 12, 2022

Genesis 12-50 Our Faith Ancestors

Dr. George Heider
March 11-12, 2022

Course descriptions and registration information is now available at elmm.org/events

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>

Afghan Refugee Resettlement Webinar

Need is growing following evacuation of thousands of Afghan refugees to the United States, and we hear the call to bear witness to God's love with Afghan newcomers who have lost their homes and must make new beginnings.

On February 8, Lutheran Disaster Response, the ELCA AMMPARO network, and ELCA Witness in Society will be holding an informational webinar to help congregations and individuals answer the call to engage in co-sponsorship, financial support and advocacy meaningfully and effectively.

The webinar will be held at 7:00pm ET via Zoom.

Register Now: <https://bit.ly/3zTt1Uy>

Upcoming Events

January 17	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	Synod Office Closed
January 20-21	Nelson W. Trout Lectures	Learn More: https://bit.ly/3a4liWY
February 8	Afghan Refugee Resettlement Webinar	Learn More: https://bit.ly/3zTt1Uy
February 8-10	Ignite the Church Conference	Learn More: https://bit.ly/336rij2
February 12	ELMM: Pastoral Care Assistant Training	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	Kalamazoo Conference	Rev. Joan Oleson, Dean
Capital Area Conference	Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean	St. John/Baroda (Part-Time)	Deacon Deno Sorrels, Stated Supply / Interviewing
Christ United/Dewitt (Part-Time)	Episcopal Diocese of Michigan taking the lead in the call process / Seeking a candidate	Immanuel/Allegan (Part-Time)	CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Christopher Laughlin. Installation January 16
All Saints/Mason (Part-Time)	Pastor Erick Johnson, Stated Supply / Seeking a candidate	Hope/Plainwell (Part-Time)	Pastor Julie Winklepleck, Stated Supply / Interviewing
Trinity/Hillsdale	Supply Pastors	St. Peter/Battle Creek	Pastor Cheryl Johnson and Pastor Michael Anton, Stated Supply
Greater Grand Rapids Conference	Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean	Messiah/Constantine (Part-Time)	Pastor Maria Rutland, Stated Supply
Immanuel/Big Rapids (Part-Time)	Supply Pastors	Stony Lake Conference	Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean
Our Savior/Edmore	Pastor John Audio (Faith/Sidney), Stated Supply	Sunrise Conference	Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean
Christ/Wyoming	Pastor Jack Ferra, Interim / Preparing MSP	Traverse Conference	Rev. Jonathan Reid, Dean
St. Luke/Grand Rapids	Supply Pastors		
Trinity/Grand Rapids	Assisting Pastor (part-time): Congregational Vote January 16		