



**North/West Lower
Michigan Synod**

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In this Issue:

Living Stones 2023 - 2025

Planning for the Future

Upcoming Events

Congregations in Transition

Living Stones 2023 - 2025

Living Stones, which Synod Council endorsed in December 2018, provided a framework for our strategic initiatives for the last three-year period (2020/21-2022/23). We have found this framework helpful in directing and communicating the Synod's mission and the work of the Synod Staff, even during the pandemic years. We therefore provide a renewed Living Stone initiatives for the period of January 2023 through August 2025, which Synod Council endorsed at its December 2022 meeting and I am pleased to share with you.

Sharing the Story of Jesus: In response to the churchwide organization making vitality training free and online, our REVIVE team is providing online resources and consultation, and shifting our focus to sharing the story of Jesus.

- We will provide workshops, both in-person and via Zoom, to equip leaders to use the book, *You Are Witnesses of These Things: Sharing the Story of Jesus* (<https://bit.ly/3DXlk2e>). This will also be the focus of the 2023 Synod Assembly, which is themed "It's About Jesus!"
- We will continue to support our Sudanese worshiping community and our campus ministry in Grand Rapids, and remain vigilant to opportunities for other synodically authorized worshiping communities.
- We will continue to actively pursue opportunities to engage Latino and Native American communities on the territory of our synod in the hope that we experience the love of Jesus through our listening to and learning from them.

Call Process: We anticipate an increasing number of congregational vacancies as many of our pastors are approaching retirement and, in the aftermath of the pandemic, pastors are desiring to move closer to family, and congregations are seeking a change in pastoral leadership because of irreconcilable differences with their current pastor. We will need to attract candidates to our synod and help congregations re-calibrate their expectations to attract a pastor.

Sustainability: Struggling congregations and synod ministries receive accompaniment and assistance to realistically assess their sustainability and, where appropriate, to either partner with neighboring congregations, both ELCA and full communion partners, or to move toward holy closure.

Adult Theological Education: We will provide a six-week course via Zoom for adults (lay and rostered) in each of the next five "semesters." Our first course on the Corinthian Correspondence with Dr. Walter F. Taylor, Jr. began January 10. We are excited at the overwhelming interest in the course, with 96 people registering. The Fall 2023 course will be on Luther's Small Catechism and will be taught by Dr. Kit Kleinhans.

Candidates for Public Ministry: 20 candidates for rostered ministry are identified, accompanied, and supported. With the elimination of the first call "draft," the first call pastors we receive in our synod will be the ones we produce. We have generous scholarship money available for seminarians and need to find ways to better identify and invite people, especially young adults, to consider a call to public ministry. I would like to hold such an event in the next 18 months.

Continued from page 1

Rostered Minister Debt Reduction: Rostered ministers are relieved of some measure of educational indebtedness. This is the most successful of our original Living Stones initiatives. The program will continue as long as there is a need and available funds.

Saying Thanks: Congregations leading and growing in their mission support of our synod, together with individuals committed to the Living Stones financial initiative, are honored and thanked at Mission Support Dinners.

Welcome: Our synod makes a renewed commitment to discuss ways to welcome all God's people.

- Building on the 90 people who participated in the Introduction to Social Justice course and the group who participated in the White People Doing their Work course, we will develop and implement a plan for helping our Synod address racial justice.
- Our Ministry with Persons with Disabilities Task Force will offer additional training and consultation with congregations. The Task Force is also applying for a holy innovations grant to help us address issues related to ministry with persons who live with disabilities.
- We will encourage and facilitate our synod's participation in the churchwide review and revision of the ELCA social statement, "Human Sexuality Gift and Trust." Our "Open Hearts, Open Church" Task Force is available to consult with congregations considering becoming Reconciled in Christ.

Youth:

- We will continue to support Living Water Ministries, and their summer camps and other youth events, as the foundation for youth ministry in our synod. We will also work to help our synod better understand that our primary way of supporting youth ministry throughout the Synod is through Living Water Ministries.
- We will encourage and facilitate our congregations' participation in the 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans, including MYLE, the tAble, and the Young Adult Gathering.

Living Stone Contributors:

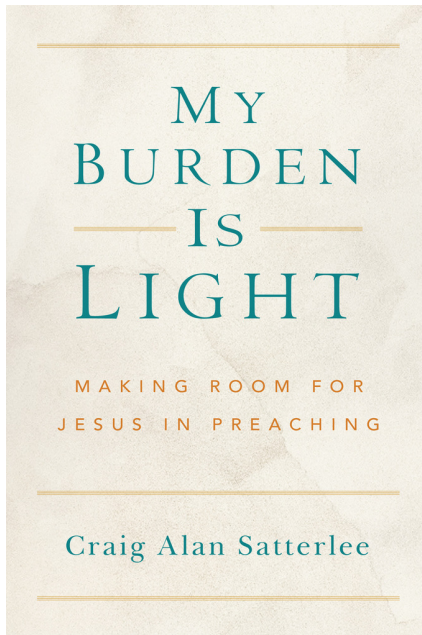
- Synod Council and I are very grateful for the commitment and generosity of individuals who financially contributed to the original Living Stone initiatives. We are even more inspired by those who have communicated their intention to continue to financially support our synod directly, in addition to giving to their congregations. This is certainly Cathy's and my intention. We understand that these are financially challenging times for congregations and families. Therefore, rather than set a goal, we will provide regular invitations and opportunities for individuals to contribute directly to the work of our synod and these initiatives.

After a season in which my primary, even exclusive, synod work was addressing COVID-19 and congregational conflict, the Synod Staff and I are excited for this work. We look forward to the new year and serving alongside you as together we prayerfully participate in Christ's own work of reconciling the world (all creation?) to God's very self.

Peace,

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

My Burden is Light: Making Room for Jesus in Preaching Bishop Craig Alan Satterlee



We are excited to announce that Bishop Craig Alan Satterlee's new book *My Burden is Light: Making Room for Jesus in Preaching* is now available!

My Burden Is Light: Making Room for Jesus in Preaching invites preachers to reclaim proclaiming Jesus as the goal of preaching. Too often, Satterlee observes, we usher Jesus to the back of the pulpit, invite him to make a cameo appearance, or even excuse him from the sermon altogether. With the author's guidance, readers imagine the ways Jesus is present in their favorite liturgical space and explore ways they can make room for Jesus in preaching and experience abundant life for themselves and for their people.

Satterlee argues that by preaching the mystery of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection as good news for God's people, the church, and the world—all of whom long for salvation, we powerfully address the issues we face, including pandemic, climate change, assaults on democracy, social justice, and division. Drawing on his lifetime of experience learning, preaching, and teaching the gospel, this book is foundational for preaching courses and a balm for preachers needing nourishment and renewal.

My Burden is Light: Making Room for Jesus in Preaching is available on [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), [Fortress Press](#), and other booksellers nationwide.

Endorsements

More than a primer on preaching, these pages offer countless and vivid examples of how God is with us, Christ is in us, and the Spirit is all around us. - Rev. Abraham D. Allende, Bishop Emeritus, ELCA Northeastern Ohio Synod

With humility and grace, Satterlee gives practical suggestions for keeping Jesus at the center of our proclamation. Reading this book is balm for a weary preacher's soul. - Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew, ELCA New Jersey Synod

In words both passionate and profound, Satterlee calls us back to our vocation as preachers of the gospel, "showing forth Christ" at every turn, and setting an example each of us will feel as a challenge and an aspiration. I cannot imagine a more faithful or trustworthy guide to help us re-center ourselves on Jesus. - Rev. Dr. R. Guy Erwin, President, United Lutheran Seminary

This book is a valuable resource not only for preachers and teachers of homiletics, but for all who are concerned about the quality of Christian preaching today. - Dr. Mary Catherine Hilker, O.P., Professor of Theology, University of Notre Dame

This book more than any other helped shape my preaching for this time and context. It gave me, as a parish pastor, support to stay committed to the central message of the church's proclamation: Jesus Christ crucified and risen. - Rev. Betsy Jansen Kamphuis, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Greenville, MI

Jesus fills these pages. Buy this book to improve your preaching. Read this book to meet Jesus. - Rev. Kurt Kusserow, Bishop, ELCA Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod

Videos

The Rev. Dr. R. Guy Erwin, President, United Lutheran Seminary, discusses *My Burden is Light*: <https://youtu.be/vFZuMmUvyTs>

Bishop Craig Alan Satterlee discusses *My Burden is Light*: <https://youtu.be/JEGuZ3SY--4>

Planning for the Future

Visioning and doing mission and vision planning for the future has been part of my job description since I came into the role of Assistant to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission. For years I have worked with congregations on developing mission statements, core values, guiding principles, and goal setting. Often this has provided a missional plan for several years into the future. Then, we moved into the era of COVID and everything changed—the church, the world, our lives, and our plans.

We hold fast to our faith knowing that God in Jesus is still present in our world and will not abandon us. Knowing that, future planning and goal-setting is all different now. Gone are the days of developing a mission master plan of 3-5 years. As we slowly learn how to cope and live with COVID and all the changes in the world, we are in a new normal. It is very difficult to predict the future, what will work and what will not. So, we start simple.

If your congregation has not done so, start with using Bishop Satterlee's book, *You Are Witnesses of These Things* (<https://bit.ly/3DXlk2e>). This book will revive and give meaning to what evangelism and mission are all about. It provides a step-by-step process for the people of the church to learn and model evangelical behavior and gain confidence in sharing Jesus. It helps the planning process focus on Jesus.

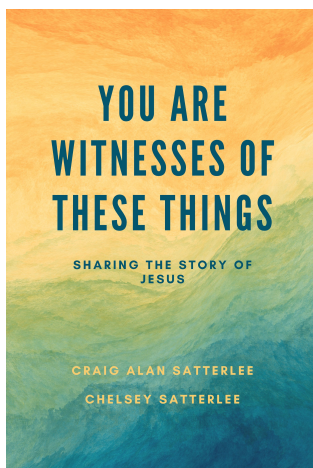
Then begin to work on a plan. Not a big elaborate plan, but simple things that will move the mission of the church forward with sharing Jesus at the heart. Anything that sounds like saving the church, funding the budget, getting more volunteers, or taking things back to the way they were will not fly. If it is not about sharing Jesus, then it is not evangelical outreach.

Here are some concrete suggestions:

- Take some time to reflect on what the core values or guiding principles of the congregation are. Make sure that they are immersed in proclaiming and sharing Jesus and not preserving the church. Guiding principles and core values direct us in the decisions we make so keep Jesus as the center. Samples could be:
 - God is present in our world in Jesus
 - We believe we are saved by God's grace
 - Everyone is welcome and invited, and we mean everyone
 - We look for ways to share Jesus in all we do
 - The congregation is committed to be a supporting and contributing member of our community
- Use the 90 Day Mission Micro Strategy Tool, which is available on the Synod's webpage: <https://bit.ly/3W0QYmo>.
- Begin to have conversations with folks in the church and in the community as to current needs.
- Consult with me on a MissionInsite profile to learn about the current demographics of your community and 5–10-year future projections for demographic trends.
- Spend some time brainstorming things the congregation could do to meet the needs of the community. Then prioritize the list as to ability to fund the project, availability of volunteers to make it happen, and the need. Pick one project and use the 90 Day Mission Plan resource on the Synod's webpage (<https://bit.ly/3D6Ndp5>) to carry it out. Evaluate the project. If it worked, keep doing it. If not, go back and try something next on the list.

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

You Are Witnesses of These Things



With all that is happening in society, the world, and their lives, people are open, even eager, to receive the story of Jesus and the good news that God is working to bring unconditional love and abundant life to all creation. In fact, the only reason new people will join the church is because they received the story of Jesus, want to learn more about Jesus, and experience the church actively following Jesus.

You Are Witnesses of These Things: Sharing the Story of Jesus equips and empowers Christians to share the story of Jesus with people for whom it is new for no other reason than because Jesus is such life-changing, world-shaping good news. This book brings the good news to people who do not yet know Jesus and helps people who know Jesus to be comfortable and confident sharing this good news with others.

Now available on Amazon: <https://bit.ly/3DXlk2e>

Synod Finances

	December	Year to Date
Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund		
Mission Support Revenue	111,417	1,108,371
Other Revenue	7,158	113,595
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0
Total Revenue	118,575	1,221,966
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	55,709	554,186
Other Expenses	62,810	677,763
Total Expenses	118,518	1,231,948
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	57	(9,982)
Beginning Fund Balance	473,251	483,290
Ending Fund Balance	473,308	473,308
Other Fund Balances		
Unrestricted-Designated		604,177
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related*		735,885
Temporarily-Restricted		330,043
Permanently-Restricted		1,002,547
Total - All Funds (as of 12/31/22)		3,145,960

*December 31 Endowment Fund Statements were not yet published at the time of this summary.
The amount shown here reflects balances as of 11/30/22.

End of Year Giving

As we head toward the end of the Synod's fiscal year, we remind congregations that gifts received in the Synod Office or processed online **on or before Tuesday, January 31, 2023**, will be recorded as January transactions and included on 4th Quarter and year-end giving statements.

We have seen an increase in the amount of mail coming to our current mailing address at P.O. Box 517, Dewitt, MI 48820. Thank you! We appreciate your faithful and generous support of the ministry we do together.

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 The Death Penalty, which acknowledges the existence of different points of view within the church and society on this question and the need for continued deliberation, but it objects to the use of the death penalty because it is not used fairly and has failed to make society safer.

Read Now: <http://bit.ly/3CN3W0t>

Synod Office Mailing Address

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

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

Please update all your relevant records to this new address, including those in your accounting software.

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

Environmental Stewardship Task Force

Linn D. Kracht, Member of the Environmental Stewardship Task Force

It is 2023. It is a new year; a time to consider some possible changes to my life. We know that the climate is changing and that these changes are causing some major changes in the weather that result in damage and loss to many, many people. Global warming is real. So, what will I do about it? What personal changes can I make that will cause less damage to the creation?

Is this the year that I purchase a hybrid or all electric car? Will I be more diligent in taking a cloth bag into every store when I shop? Can I do a better job at recycling both at home and at church? What can I do to reduce my overall use of plastic? Will I be willing to contact local, state, and federal officials regarding reducing the use of fossil fuel and switch to an alternative energy source? What steps can I take to reduce my personal use of water? Is this the year when I either buy and plant trees or give money to an organization whose goal is to plant trees? I have heard that it helps the environment if I reduce my beef intake. Can I plan to eat less beef? Will I replace burnt out light bulbs with new LED bulbs?

The above list is probably not new to any of us. Many of us may already have done many of the things listed. I know there are items from the above list that I don't or haven't done. So as the new year starts, I need to commit to doing something new; something that will reduce my carbon footprint. Let's all try to add one more energy saving item as we seek to care for the creation.

If you'd like more information about environmental stewardship or would like to be more involved in caring for creation, reach out to the North/West Lower Michigan Synod's Environmental Stewardship Task Force's chair Linn Kracht at ldkracht@gmail.com.

Upcoming Events

January 16	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
February 20	Presidents' Day
February 22	Ash Wednesday

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 Rheanna Goodrich, Stated Supply / Interviewing
Messiah/Bay City	Pastor Dan Stonebeck, Interim / Preparing MSP
Our Savior/Saginaw (Part-Time)	Pastor Andreas Teich, Interim / Interviewing
Trinity/Midland	Pastor Dennis Smith, Specialized Supply Pastor / Interviewing
Zion/Freeland	Pastor Andreas Teich, Interim / Interviewing

Capital Area Conference	Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean
Christ/Michigan Center	Pastor Michael Anderson, Stated Supply / CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Robert Martin. Installation 2/5
Trinity/Hillsdale	Supply Pastors / Interviewing

Greater Grand Rapids Conference	Rev. Julie Schneider- Thomas, Dean
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Kalamazoo Conference	Rev. Joan Oleson, Dean
Lutheran Church of the Savior/Kalamazoo	Supply Pastors / Preparing MSP

Stony Lake Conference	Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean
Harbor of Grace/Muskegon	Pastor Jack Ferra, Interim / Preparing MSP

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

Traverse Conference	Rev. Jonathan Reid, Dean
Feast of Victory/Acme	Pastor Ruth Overdier, Stated Supply / Preparing MSP
St. Paul/Reed City	Supply Pastors / Preparing MSP