



North/West Lower Michigan Synod

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Keeping Time

The way we use our time is a good indication of what we consider to be of prime importance in life. We can always be counted on to find time for those things we consider most important though we may not always be willing to tell others, or even ourselves, what our real priorities are. Not only does our use of time show what is really important to us but it also indicates who or what is most significant to our lives. The same is true of the church. The church shows what is most important to its life by the way it uses time. One answer to the question of what Christians and the church believe could be found by looking at how Christians and the church keep or spend time.

During this leg of the pandemic journey (it is too soon to call the race against the virus won), many people are re-examining their priorities by reconsidering how they keep, use, and spend their time. The priorities they set and the choices they make will directly impact congregations and the church. Congregations and the church would therefore likewise do well to re-examine our own use of time. Jesus says, "What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops" (Matthew 10:27). In this spirit, I share what I am hearing, both in prayer and from others.

First, *people have a renewed appreciation of time as a gift from God.* Every Sunday for many years, congregations prayed this offertory prayer: "We offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us – ourselves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." Regarding time as God's gift to us, people want to cherish rather than waste it. Many are considering new careers so they do not need to commute or sit in an office. Many are pushing for flexible hours and the ability to work from home. Many, including pastors, experienced the loss of time with family so acutely that they are working to get closer to home. Congregational leaders tell me they have grown impatient with the way their congregations want to spend time—building preservation, parishioner preferences, and unending conflict. After leading the congregation this far through the pandemic, some are visiting other congregations where they are expected to do nothing more than worship God. While the gospel is worth losing our life for, the church is not worth losing our faith for. If this is where you find yourself, be honest. Tell your pastor. Don't just disappear. You will be welcomed back if and when you are ready.

We can expect some congregations will grow as others shrink. All congregations therefore would benefit from considering how much time we are spending on things like preserving buildings, satisfying every parishioner preference, and escalating conflict rather than seeking reconciliation, and whether this is really what we want to spend our time doing. We might ask if the ways we are spending time as a congregation are grateful, faithful uses of God's gift of time.

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Second, *time is finite*. For example, no one can be in two places at the same time. I always have to remind people of this when I meet with congregations who want to explore partnership. No pastor can be in two different congregations at 10 o'clock on Sunday morning. The resulting question is how much we are willing to inconvenience and even sacrifice our use of finite time for the sake of others and the common good. This is certainly a question followers of Jesus should ask. A congregational leader recently observed the congregation's future depends on their willingness to be creative and change. "Will you do it?" I asked. The leader allowed my question to hang in the air unanswered.

Third, *your time is not my time*. We are less able to expect or assume how others will or should spend their time. Pastors marking time in their offices simply to be there is likely a thing of the past; pastors are not opposed to being in the office but want to know why they need to be there. Ann Stavros, our office manager, once warned someone who wanted to call me before eight in the morning (I am not an early bird) on Monday (my day off) on a routine matter, "You could, but I wouldn't." The caller thought I should be working on Monday morning. I overcame my temptation to call him when I (a night owl) was working the next Monday morning at 1:30 AM. As everyone figures out their new normal, we can graciously check our expectations and assumptions of how others will use time. If we have questions, we can ask in an interested, rather than an accusatory, manner.

Fourth, COVID-19 taught us that *time can run out in an instant*. This is as true for churches as it is for people. The boiler breaks. The retired pastor who serves our congregation for free gets sick. The mortgage payments on the addition that seemed such a good idea just a few years ago become unmanageable. God blesses the congregation with a gifted interim pastor for a set amount of time; however, the congregation doesn't use that time to move forward. Instead, it assumes that, if God provided one interim pastor, God will provide another and another and another forever, so the congregation never has to face its future. Not so. Eventually time runs out.

Jesus' "hour" is a prominent theme in John's Gospel. Jesus' "hour of glorification" comes when he dies on the cross. Jesus' promise to us and the church is that new, abundant life will come out of death, not that we and our beloved congregation will never, ever die. Now is the time for many congregations to decide what they will do with the time they have. Can they be creative and change? Or do they want to go along as they are for as long as they can? There is no wrong answer.

Now is the time for us all to summon the faith, honesty, and courage to heed Jesus' words: "What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops" (Matthew 10:27). We can do this because Jesus entered our time as a human being, is with us in all times as crucified and risen Savior, and is drawing us to the fullness of time, when Christ will reign all in all.

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

COVID-19 Response Grants

When COVID-19 began, the ELCA created the COVID-19 Response Fund and encouraged donations. This fund has now generated over \$1.5 million. The North/West Lower Michigan Synod applied for and received distributions from this fund to assist congregations helping those in their communities.

The COVID-19 grants distributed by the Synod have totaled \$72,200 thus far. We have had 25 congregations approved for grants and it's estimated that these congregations have been touching the lives of 2,248 people a week through the pandemic. Over the summer we will be sharing some of those stories.

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

Messiah, Bay City

The Food of Faith program, hosted by Messiah, Bay City, is an ecumenical project that has been in operation since 2003. Currently, nine churches and a teacher sorority work together to serve a Thursday evening meal. Pre-COVID, meals were served at tables and would start with fellowship, recognition of birthday or anniversary celebrations, and a prayer. Since the start of the pandemic, all meals are served as take-out. Grant funds from the North/West Lower Michigan Synod have covered the purchase of take-out containers, gloves, masks, and hairnets. For this we are very grateful.

For many years, the number of people served averaged between 50 and 80. As we began 2020, we were generally serving between 70 and 90 people. By July, we were consistently serving 100+ meals per week, and at Thanksgiving we hit 160. Since then, we have dropped below 150 only once, hitting a high of 189. In June and early July of 2020 when our area was hit with flooding, which was exacerbated by the failure of two dams, there were many people left without homes and who were placed in shelters. Based on a plea from the Red Cross, our Food of Faith volunteers stepped up and provided meals twice a week (a total of over 500 meals) to those in shelters.

Over the years, the Food of Faith program has helped us develop relationships with other organizations in our community, such as our county court system and Hidden Harvest, a food gleaning organization. Pre-COVID, we served as a location for young offenders to perform community service assigned by the juvenile court and also had continuing community service workers assigned by the sobriety court. When we began our outdoor service with take-out meals, one former worker and one current worker took care of all outdoor deliveries for several months. Working with Hidden Harvest, which gleans foods from places such as restaurants, stores, or schools and redistributes them to places such as food pantries or shelters, has allowed us to hand out gallons of milk and juice, produce, breads, yogurts, and meat products to patrons along with their meals.

With our take-out service, patrons drive up through the parking lot to receive their meals and any extras. Some don't have cars, so they walk up or ride bikes. One particular gentleman has been a regular attendee for many years with his bike. Trying to carry a meal or two along with the extras, like a bag of potatoes, was a challenge on his rickety bike. A couple weeks ago, one of our community service workers presented him with a new bicycle with a large basket on the front for him to carry his belongings. It was a touching experience for all.

Serving our take-out meals has been a good experience. It takes fewer volunteers, is less work overall, and takes less time. With the increased numbers of patrons taking advantage of this service, and until things are much better under control with this virus, we will be sticking to the take-out meals, though we all miss the personal contact we had with our regulars.

Racial Justice

Can it possibly already be the middle of Summer in Michigan? We continue to experience the realities of life as we move into new, old, and different ways of being together. In the midst of all these changes, one thing remains the same: racism and injustice continue to be pernicious realities in our world. As followers of Jesus we are called to reflect on our own shortcomings in living out the reality that Paul speaks about in his letter to the Galatians: "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" (Galatian 3:28). Following are some ways that may help us continue our own journeys toward racial justice.

Newly Published Book

Letters to My White Male Friends by Dax-Devlon Ross (June 15, 2021, St. Martin's Press)

In his book, Dax-Devlon Ross speaks directly to the millions of middle-aged white men who are suddenly awakening to race and racism. *Letters to My White Male Friends* promises to help men who have said they are committed to change and to develop the capacity to see, feel and sustain that commitment so they can help secure racial justice for us all.

Ross helps readers understand what it meant to be America's first generation raised after the civil rights era. He explains how we were all educated with colorblind narratives and symbols that typically, albeit implicitly, privileged whiteness and denigrated Blackness. He provides the context and color of his own experiences in white schools so that white men can revisit moments in their lives where racism was in the room even when they didn't see it enter. Ross shows how learning to see the harm that racism did to him, and forgiving himself, gave him the empathy to see the harm it does to white people as well.

Ultimately, Ross offers white men direction so that they can take just action in their workplace, community, family, and, most importantly, in themselves, especially in the future when race is no longer in the spotlight.

Summer Reading

We often talk about Summer Beach Reading. Why not take a break from those much-loved novels and challenge yourself with one of the following books:

The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together by Heather McGhee. (2021)

Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America by Michael Eric Dyson. (2017)

Long Time Coming: Reckoning with Race in America by Michael Eric Dyson. (2020)

I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness by Austin Channing Brown (2018)

Summer Viewing

When the beach is just too hot, you can always retreat to your air conditioned living room and watch the new series on Amazon Prime Video "The Underground Railroad". It is based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Colson Whitehead. The series chronicles Cora Randall's desperate bid for freedom in the Antebellum South. This 10 part series is not for the faint of heart - but neither are the experiences of those who suffer injustice and racism.

Let us continue to pray and walk together to end the sin of racism in our world.

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

Coronavirus Resources

Updates from the State of Michigan

On June 17, Governor Whitmer announced that beginning June 22, capacity in both indoor and outdoor settings will increase to 100% and the state will no longer require residents to wear a face mask. Some epidemic orders from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) will remain in effect and public health measures will continue for reporting requirements and COVID testing. MDHHS will continue to provide recommendations to keep Michiganders safe and reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in higher risk settings and places where vulnerable populations or populations with large numbers of individuals are not yet fully vaccinated. Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3hsEVxa>

Letter from Bishop Satterlee

Bishop Satterlee has issued a letter with information about the Synod Staff's approach to returning to congregations in this new phase of the pandemic. Read Now: <https://bit.ly/2RMnaih>

Care-Filled Worship and Sacramental Life in a Lingering Pandemic

The Ecumenical Consultation on Protocols for Worship, Fellowship, and Sacraments, which the ELCA has been a partner in, has updated their guidance and protocols to help inform decision making and basic practices of Christian worship and congregational life at this stage in the pandemic. Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3wnenTe>

We continue to post updates and resources pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic on our website. View all resources: <http://bit.ly/3rL2fsF>

New Resources for Evangelism and Outreach

New and Renewed! ELCA Evangelism Resources

The Evangelism resources on the ELCA website have been recently re-written or replaced with new information. There's also an invitation to join a network of people working on the new normal for evangelism. Check it out: www.elca.org/evangelism

New Resources Added! REVIVE – The North/West Lower Michigan Synod – Congregational Vitality Initiative has online resources including videos on Growing Young, Ministry for Millennials, Faith Five, Digital Ministry, Social Media, and more! View all resources at <https://www.mittensynod.org/mission/revive>

New Book! *Becoming a Hybrid Church* by Dave Daubert and Richard Jorgensen.

Forced to scramble to go online in just a few weeks during the COVID pandemic, the church has discovered the online world is far more than a replacement for the yellow pages. This book will take the reader through an overview of several areas of congregational ministry and reflect on how to begin to move aspects of church life to dual platforms. Written by Dave Daubert, an ELCA pastor and consultant on Congregational Vitality and Richard Jorgensen, Director for Evangelical Mission in the Lower Susquehanna Synod.

New Resource! *Thriving Beyond COVID* by Jeff Linman

Helping congregations get in the right frame of mind to successfully navigate their Post-Covid challenges and come out stronger and more vital than before. *Thriving Beyond COVID* is a 3 or 4 session scripture based study resource designed to help churches release the burdens of the pandemic, promote deeper faith in the Spirit's power at work in their midst, and empower their mission going forward. It can be used by a leadership team, in existing small groups or in a 5 hour congregation retreat. Worship resources to get the entire congregation involved are also available. Download: <https://bit.ly/3qX0Yz8>

Ways to Care for Creation

By Pastor John Burow, Environmental Stewardship Task Force

At the Synod Assembly in May, voting members overwhelmingly adopted a resolution on the climate emergency that included the following: *Resolved, that this Synod declares that the climate emergency is a spiritual and moral crisis that calls for an urgent, faith-rooted response similar to the demands for justice and mercy voiced by the Hebrew prophets, by Jesus and the New Testament writers.*

The Synod's Environmental Stewardship Task Force stands ready to help individuals and congregations in their faith-rooted response. Here are five suggestions for those who want to begin or continue caring for creation:

- Let your love for and concern for creation into your daily conversation. Speak gently from your own passions and experience, for example: it could be some way that creation is wounded that leads to lament or concern over what your grandchildren will face. Listen to discover the perspectives and concerns you have in common with others.
- Make just a few changes that diminish your impact on the environment asking God to join your efforts to those of others.
- Take nourishment from the goodness, abundance, beauty and grandeur of God's good creation. Increase your sense of wonder and delight and join in all creation's praise of the Creator.
- Learn about the environment its diversity and abundance; how it is wounded and threatened, and what is necessary to limit and adapt to the current and future impact of climate change.
- The Synod's Environmental Stewardship Task Force would be delighted to suggest resources for learning and action. Contact them: Chairman Linn Kracht, ldkracht@gmail.com or one of the following members: Pr. Erick Johnson, erickj74@gmail.com, Pr. John Schleicher, johndschleicher@gmail.com, Pr. Ellen Schoepf, pellen@faithlutheranokemos.org or Pr. John Burow, pastorjburow@yahoo.com

Letter on Reducing Vehicle Pollution

The Environmental Protection Agency is expected to make an announcement about new auto emissions standards this month. Interfaith Power and Light encourages faith leaders to sign a letter calling on President Biden and EPA Administrator Regan to reduce vehicle pollution. The deadline to sign is July 15, 2021.

Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3r2TEC2>

Preaching and Climate Change

"For God so loved the κόσμος (cosmos) that he gave his only son..." (John 3:16). And the Word, through whom all things came into being and without whom not one thing came into being, became flesh and lived among us (John 1:3, 14). God's love and abundant life, revealed in Jesus Christ, transcends humankind and extends to all God's good creation.

By invitation of our Synod's Environmental Stewardship Task Force and in response to resolutions adopted at our 2021 Synod Assembly, Bishop Satterlee will present "Preaching and Climate Change", a workshop focused on strategies for including the cosmos in preaching. This workshop will not include a general lecture on climate change.

At the urging of our Synod's Environmental Stewardship Task Force, this workshop is scheduled to prepare for the lectionary "Season of Creation" (September 1-October 4), an initiative of the Lutheran World Federation. The workshop will be held on Thursday, September 9, 2021 at 1 PM ET via Zoom.

Register Now: <https://forms.gle/2z15YMPfwN4DNBZUA>

Lutheran Campus Ministries

Soon college bound students will be packing up and moving into dorm rooms and apartments. It has been a crazy year of cancelled classes, virtual classes, and hybrid learning. But this fall, it looks like most colleges, universities and tech schools will be going back to somewhat normal schedules. Through it all, Lutheran Campus Ministries has been at work supporting, connecting, and serving. With the return to campus approaching, **now is the time to connect your students with Lutheran Campus Ministries.**

Our Synod supports active campus ministries at Western Michigan, Central Michigan, Michigan State, and Grand Valley State Universities. In addition, the Southeast Michigan Synod supports Lutheran Campus Ministries at the University of Michigan and Wayne State. Additionally, the ELCA's Campus Ministry Network (LuMin) is one of the largest networks of Lutheran and Ecumenical Partner ministries in the county and includes over 230 colleges and universities across the United States.

To connect with a local campus ministry, you can use the contacts listed below or you can refer a student through the LuMin website at: <https://www.luminelca.org/ministries/>

Local Contacts

Michigan State University: Pastor Haley Vay Beaman, haley.vay@gmail.com

Western Michigan University: matrixcampusministry@gmail.com

Grand Valley State University: Pastor Kate Van Valkenberg, pastorkatevv@gmail.com

Central Michigan University: Craig Torgensen, office@immanuelmp.com

University of Michigan: Pastor Elizabeth Friedman, pastorelizabeth.lcm@gmail.com

Autumn Leadership Event

Rostered Ministers are invited to gather for the Autumn Leadership Event on October 26, 2021 from 10am-3pm ET at Immanuel, Mt. Pleasant. This one day event will include a Service of Remembrance and Loss with All Saints overtones, opportunity for conversation, a boxed lunch, and a presentation by Bishop Satterlee, "Where is Jesus when you preach?". This presentation is the basis of Bishop Satterlee's forthcoming book and has been well-received in other synods. This event is designed to be easily dismantled should COVID-19 make it inappropriate for us to come together.

Register Now: <https://tithe.ly/event-registration/#/4016533>

Registration will close October 20, 2021.

Equipping Leaders for Ministry and Mission Fall Events

Equipping Leaders for Ministry and Mission (ELMM) is excited announce their fall events! All events will be held via Zoom.

- **September 17-18:** Hebrews, James, 1 Peter with Prof. Wally Taylor
- **October 2 & 23:** Pastoral Care Assistant Training with Prof. Rosanne Swanson
- **October 15-16:** Daniel, Apocalyptic, and the Early Jewish Period with Prof. Kelly Murphy
- **November 12-13:** Revelation with Prof. Kelly Murphy

Learn More and Register: <https://elmm.org/events>

Synod Finances

Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund	June	YTD
Mission Support Revenue	108,478	589,508
Other Revenue	4,182	123,892
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0
Total Revenue	112,660	713,400
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	54,239	294,754
Other Expenses	57,253	279,748
Total Expenses	111,491	574,502
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	1,168	138,898
Beginning Fund Balance	371,928	234,198
Ending Fund Balance	373,096	373,096
Other Fund Balances		
Unrestricted-Designated		687,887
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related		1,007,492
Temporarily-Restricted		306,784
Permanently-Restricted		924,639
Total - All Funds (as of 6/30/21)		3,299,898

Stewardship

This mid-year point is a good time to review actual giving as it compares to commitments. Treasurers can provide summary information to their congregation councils, and pastors can be informed of any households whose giving to date may indicate an underlying issue or need for pastoral care.

As you provide quarterly giving statements, keep in mind the importance of a heart-felt thank you letter. The letter should celebrate the difference your ministry is making in your community and throughout the world, and encourage givers to remain faithful.

This is also a good time to begin thinking about your stewardship focus this fall. Doing some groundwork ahead of time will simplify the decision-making process as fall programs begin.

There are many resources available on the ELCA website: <https://www.elca.org/Resources/Stewardship> and on the Synod website: <https://www.mittensynod.org/mission/stewardshipmission-support/>.

ELCA Youth Gathering Updates and Information

Every three years, 30,000 high school youth and their adult leaders from across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America gather for a week of faith formation known as the ELCA Youth Gathering. Through days spent in interactive learning, worship, Bible study, service and fellowship, young people grow in faith and are challenged and inspired to live their faith in their daily lives. The next ELCA Youth Gathering will be held July 24-28, 2022 in Minneapolis, MN.

Kickoff Celebration

Join Gathering hosts Matthew and Claire for our Kickoff Celebration, which will go live on July 25 via Gathering social media. We'll hear from our host city and our partners from across the country, dive into our theme, learn what's new for the 2022 Gathering, and more. The video will also be available for congregational groups to view as they start their Gathering planning.

Mitten Synod Information Session

In preparation for the event, our Synod Coordinator Pastor Dan Schewe and our Synod Day Director Megan Floyd held an informational meeting to help plan. It is available to watch on YouTube: <https://bit.ly/3AM5hlf>

Webinars

Join Gathering leadership for a monthly webinar to prepare you for the 2022 Gathering, the Multicultural Youth Leadership Event (MYLE) and the tAble. Topics will vary each month, but all webinars will be split between a presentation and a Q&A. Learn More: <https://elca.org/YouthGathering/About/Webinars>

Volunteers

Would you like to volunteer at the Gathering and help our young people grow in faith and encounter Christ? Applications are now being accepted for Gathering Volunteer Corps and will close on July 22, 2021. Learn More: <https://www.elca.org/YouthGathering/Attend/Volunteer>

Synod Staff Video Sermons

For the foreseeable future, Bishop Satterlee, Pastor Rosanne Anderson, and Pastor David Sprang will be recording sermons for congregations to use as part of their weekly virtual worship services.

Rostered Ministers are invited to sign up to receive the sermons in advance on Wednesday afternoons. These sermons are then released to the general public on Sunday afternoons.

Sign-up: <https://bit.ly/3hnZd7A>

"God's Work. Our Hands." Sunday

"God's Work. Our Hands." Sunday is Sunday, September 12, 2021. This day is an opportunity to celebrate who we are as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America — one church, freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor.

Resources, including a toolkit and a new "God's Work. Our Hands." Sunday hymn, is available on the ELCA website.

Learn More: elca.org/dayofservice

Upcoming Events

July 25	ELCA Youth Gathering Kickoff Celebration	ELCA Social Media
July 29	Invitation to Change & Addiction Webinar	https://bit.ly/36tvMy2
August 2-6	Mediation Skills Training Institute	https://bit.ly/3r5N3qx
September 9	Preaching and Climate Change	https://bit.ly/2VAA8Bp
September 12	"God's Work. Our Hands." Sunday	elca.org/dayofservice
September 16	Entering the Narrow Gate	https://bit.ly/3yNlr7x

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)	Pastor Jim Morgan, Stated Supply / Seeking additional candidates
Christ United/Dewitt (Part-Time)	Episcopal Diocese of Michigan taking the lead in the call process.	Immanuel/Allegan (Part-Time)	Pastor Dennis Smith, Stated Supply
All Saints/Mason (Part-Time)	Pastor Erick Johnson, Stated Supply / Preparing MSP	Hope/Plainwell (Part-Time)	Pastor Kari Fast last day July 15.
Greater Grand Rapids Conference	Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean	Stony Lake Conference	Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean
		Sunrise Conference	Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean
		St. John/Haggensville; St. James/Millersburg; Trinity/Ocqueoc	Forming a cooperative ministry
		Traverse Conference	Rev. Scott Torkko, Dean