



## North/West Lower Michigan Synod

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## Church 101

Two other hymns have become precious to me since I became a bishop: “The Church’s One Foundation” (listen here: <https://bit.ly/3o3P1a9>) and “Built on a Rock” (listen here: <https://bit.ly/3uOOE7k>). The church’s one and only foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord. The church is Christ’s creation by water and the word. On this rock, the church will stand even when steeples fall, congregations close, synods struggle, and denominations are divided. As we prepare for the Churchwide Assembly in August, and respond to conflicts occurring in our congregations, a reminder of the way we, as the ELCA, have determined to be church seems in order.

First, as a Lutheran tradition, we are a confessional church. If you have not done so, or done so in a while, I encourage you to read the Augsburg Confession (available here: <https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession/>). We believe that we are justified, made right with God, or saved by God’s grace through faith, for Christ’s sake, apart from anything we do or fail to do. We also believe that God instituted the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments to obtain faith when the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed. So, preaching and teaching that we have to do something or decide something to be saved, teaching and preaching that we can lose God’s love, or turning the pulpit into an occasion to talk about something other than Jesus, are inconsistent with the Lutheran confessions. Of course, preaching about Jesus empowers us to preach about everything else, the question is how.

Second, we are a constitutional church. Bishops, pastors, and deacons promise to carry out their ministries in harmony with the constitutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and congregational leaders and congregations themselves are expected to do the same. This means, for example, that I cannot do whatever I want or whatever you want with the stroke of my pen, and neither can your pastor or Presiding Bishop Eaton. So, it is inappropriate to yield to either what we might think are direct interventions of the Holy Spirit or pressure from people who consider themselves special. Since we are a constitutional church, it is important that congregations keep their constitutions up-to-date and in order. When was the last time you took a look at yours?

Third, we are in interdependent church. We do not function hierarchically. We have three “expressions” of the church – congregation, synod, and churchwide organization. One expression really cannot tell another what to do or not to do. Constitutionally, we agree that there are things we will do or not do. So, a synod cannot unilaterally decide to close a congregation and the churchwide organization cannot order a synod to do something that a member of a congregation wants. As a rule, the people closest to a decision make the decision.

Finally, we are a democratic church, which is why we have congregational meetings, synod assemblies, and churchwide assemblies, and why we elect councils at all three levels to lead between these assemblies. The assemblies, which are more than annual meetings but are, in effect, the highest legislative authority in our church, make decisions that congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization implement. So, if the churchwide assembly in Columbus in August makes a decision you don’t agree with, neither your pastor, Bishop Eaton, nor I can undo it.

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When it works well, being a confessional, constitutional, interdependent, and democratic church works really well. And when it doesn't, things get messy and even ugly. That's when we need to remember that the church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord and, built on this rock, Christ's Church will stand, even when steeples are falling.

Peace be with you!

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

### 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly

The ELCA Churchwide Assembly, the primary decision-making body of the church, is a process of communal spiritual discernment. When the ELCA Churchwide Assembly convenes, its voting members meet with confidence in God's grace around word and water, wine and bread, to carry on their work on behalf of the entire church.

The 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly will be held in Columbus, Ohio, August 8-12, at the Greater Columbus Convention Center. It will also be live-streamed. The 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly gathers under the theme, *Embody the Word*. Over the course of the assembly, voting members:

- Hear reports and review the work of churchwide officers, leaders and units;
- Receive and consider proposals from synod assemblies;
- Elect officers, board members and other leaders as specified by the constitution or bylaws;
- Establish ELCA churchwide policy;
- Worship together;
- Adopt a budget; and
- Conduct other business related to the ELCA churchwide organization.

Learn More: <https://www.elca.org/churchwideassembly>

### Searching for Lost Lutherans

Recently, The Rev. Dr. Chris Suehr delivered a keynote presentation, "Searching for Lost Lutherans: Realities of Mainline Decline" as part of the Lower Susquehanna Synod's 2022 Synod Assembly. Drawing on his recent dissertation research, Pastor Chris addresses some of the common thoughts and questions about the changing church. Building upon decades of sociological research and trends with ELCA data and interviews with former ELCA Lutherans, Pastor Chris discusses our situation today and addresses some of the prevalent and worrisome ideas that haunt church leaders. Bishop Satterlee recommends all pastors and church councils watch this video together.

Watch Now: <https://youtu.be/9MAj0WCoYzI>

## Take Time to Think About Mission

Since the end of winter, I have had a steady stream of requests to come to congregations to help with setting goals for mission. The COVID-19 Pandemic pretty much ended any mission plans made by congregations in 2019 or 2020. As we learn to live with COVID and the way the world has changed, no one I know is making any long-range plans.

Most congregations are using this time of emerging from isolation and moving slowly forward to re-evaluate everything except the core of our faith. In fact, many are going back to the core to rebuild. It says it very well in our synod mission statement: *"Prayerfully participating in Christ's own work of reconciling the world to God's very self."*

Here are some helpful suggestions and resources that might help along the way.

- Take time to talk about grief. Think about the different stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance) and relate them to the pandemic, to vaccines, to masks, and to things and people that were lost in the pandemic both inside of the church and in our personal lives.
- Listening is always vital to the life of a church. One of our congregations that I visited recently was embarking on a time of listening. The church council divided up the membership list and each of them committed to calling and listening to ten church families. To be COVID safe, they agreed to do it by phone now and at a time in the future they would actually meet in person. Guidelines for this One on One Relational Listening are available here: [www.mittensynod.org/mission/revive](http://www.mittensynod.org/mission/revive)
- Last year, the ELCA gave Open Door Grants to congregations. They created a webpage of ideas that congregations are using to connect or reconnect with the community: <https://bit.ly/3J0F727>. Our synod is still offering Connect Grants to help congregations connect with their community. Contact me or visit the Synod's website to learn more: <https://www.mittensynod.org/news/connect-grants/>
- Check out some resources: *When God Speaks Through Change* by Craig Satterlee; *We Shall be Changed*, edited by Mark Edington; *Becoming a Hybrid Church* by David Daubert; *LEAD Playbook – a handbook on Congregational Vitality* and *The Post Quarantine Church*, by Thom Rainer.
- The Congregational Vitality Survey has been retooled into a conversation starter about vitality, mission, and sustainability called The Congregational Vitality Assessment. The digital survey is free to ELCA congregations. For more information, contact me.
- Take time for discipleship using the tools of prayer, Bible Study, worship, and talking about Jesus.

We are at a critical junction in the life of the church. The crossroads were on the horizon and the pandemic brought them into focus much quicker than we thought. Do we intend to be a private club or is the Good News for everyone? The mission of the church was spelled out in the Gospel lesson from July 3: "Let them know the kingdom of God has come near; heal the sick, and bring peace." And Jesus sent them out. It is a critical time for the church to follow Jesus out into the community so that we might announce the kingdom to those in need. The text from Luke 10 says, "he sent them out ahead to places he intended to go." Jesus goes ahead of us into our communities and calls us to follow.

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

## Synod Finances

	June	Year to Date
<b>Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund</b>		
Mission Support Revenue	110,114	507,674
Other Revenue	10,418	43,203
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>120,533</b>	<b>550,878</b>
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	55,057	253,837
Other Expenses	58,488	297,948
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>113,545</b>	<b>551,785</b>
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	6,987	(908)
Beginning Fund Balance	475,395	483,290
Ending Fund Balance	482,382	482,382
<b>Other Fund Balances</b>		
Unrestricted-Designated		646,378
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related*		812,688
Temporarily-Restricted		305,079
Permanently-Restricted		1,002,547
<b>Total - All Funds (as of 6/30/22)</b>		<b>3,249,074</b>

\*June 30 Endowment Fund Statements were not yet published at the time of this summary. The amount shown here reflects balances as of 5/31/22.

## Summer Giving

Years ago, congregations anticipated decreases in giving through the summer months. This was due to givers being on vacation and the relationship between worship attendance and financial contributions.

Some congregations experience less variance in the summer as many givers now give electronically. This may be a good time to evaluate your congregation's use of tools provided by VANCO and Tithe.ly.

Learn more about VANCO: <https://www.vancopayments.com/egiving>

Learn more about Tithe.ly: <https://get.tithe.ly/>

## ELMM Fall Events

Save the date for Equipping Leaders for Mission and Ministry (ELMM)'s fall events! All events will be held via Zoom. Learn more: <https://elmm.org/events>

### Exodus, Covenant, and Wilderness

Professor Rachel Wrenn  
September 16-17, 2022

### Prophets Before the Exile

Professor George Heider  
October 14-15, 2022

### A History of God's People

Professor George Heider  
November 11-12, 2022

## COVID-19 Resources

Everyone aged 5 and older is eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Everyone aged 12 and older is eligible for a booster. Those ages 50 and up or those immunocompromised may choose to receive a second booster.

Learn more: <https://bit.ly/3iDnU3V>

We continue to post updates and information pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic on our website.

View all resources: <http://bit.ly/3rL2fsF>

## Indian Boarding Schools: ELCA Truth-Seeking and Truth-Telling

The ELCA is beginning a coordinated effort to research Lutheran involvement in Indian boarding and day schools dating back to the 1820s. We are seeking both clergy and lay people who want to be part of this initiative. All are welcome, with a particular need for people with skills in research, data collection, organizing, and education. The goal is for our church members to know the history of church-sponsored Indian boarding schools and their devastating impacts on Native communities, and to participate in an ongoing truth and healing process. Learn more and to join the work of this initiative: <https://www.elca.org/truthandhealing>

## 2022 Season of Creation

by Pastor John Burow, Member of the Environmental Stewardship Task Force

Christians around the world will again celebrate The Season of Creation and set aside five Sundays from September 4 to October 2 to worship the Creator and to find our place within creation with joy, gratitude and care taking. This year's theme focuses on wisdom and includes scripture readings and liturgical materials for *Ocean*, *Animal*, *Storm* and *Universe Sundays*. The Season of Creation concludes with the Feast of St. Francis on October 2.

Pastor Marcy Wieties, support pastor at Emmaus Lutheran Church in Racine Wisconsin, has developed extensive resources for each Sunday. These can be found at [letallcreationpraise.org](http://letallcreationpraise.org). In the sidebar on the left click on Wisdom Series (C-2022).

At our last two Synod Assemblies the voting members with overwhelming majorities have expressed their concern for our wounded Creation. These five Sundays offer our people opportunities to celebrate creation and to ponder their place in protecting and sustaining the wellbeing or *shalom* of God's awesome handiwork.

## Upcoming Events

July 21	End Gun Violence Michigan: July Teach-In	Learn More: <a href="https://bit.ly/3Rx7NnT">https://bit.ly/3Rx7NnT</a>
August 8-12	ELCA Churchwide Assembly	Learn More: <a href="https://elca.org/cwa">https://elca.org/cwa</a>
August 29	ELCA World Hunger: Housing and Hunger Webinar	Learn More: <a href="https://bit.ly/3Hbdtzf">https://bit.ly/3Hbdtzf</a>
September 11	"God's work. Our hands." Sunday	Learn More: <a href="https://elca.org/dayofservice">https://elca.org/dayofservice</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>
Faith/Saginaw	Pastor John Soyster, Interim / Interviewing
Messiah/Bay City	Pastor Andreas Teich retiring. Last Sunday October 30.
Our Savior/Saginaw (Part-Time)	Pastor Dan Stonebeck, Stated Supply / Preparing MSP
Trinity/Midland	Interviewing
Zion/Freeland	Pastor Dan Stonebeck, Stated Supply / Preparing MSP

<b>Capital Area Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean</b>
All Saints/Mason (Part-Time)	Pastor Erick Johnson, Stated Supply / Congregational Vote August 21
Christ/Michigan Center	Pastor Michael Anderson, Stated Supply / Preparing MSP
Trinity/Hillsdale	Pastor Dennis Smith, Interim / Interviewing

<b>Greater Grand Rapids Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean</b>
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<b>Kalamazoo Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Joan Oleson, Dean</b>
St. John/Baroda (Part-Time)	Pastor Vicky Blough, Stated Supply / Congregational Vote July 17
Lutheran Church of the Savior/Kalamazoo	Supply Pastors / Preparing MSP
Messiah/Constantine (Part-Time)	Pastor Tom Pederson, Stated Supply / Seeking a candidate
St. Peter/Battle Creek	Pastor Cheryl Johnson and Pastor Michael Anton, Stated Supply / Interviewing

<b>Stony Lake Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean</b>
Harbor of Grace/Muskegon	Pastor Jane Mountain Last Sunday July 17. Pastor Jack Ferra, Interim

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

<b>Traverse Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Jonathan Reid, Dean</b>
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