



North/West Lower Michigan Synod

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Our Disabled God¹

I am gratified that Synod Council chartered a task force, under the leadership of Pastor Clay Bates, to partner with congregations seeking to minister alongside people who live with disabling conditions. The task force has met for several months, including four training sessions, and is currently planning its "launch." More compelling to me than even my personal connection to this ministry is the awareness that, if we are fortunate enough to live long lives, all of us will one day also live with managing a disability.

So why is ministering alongside people who live with disabilities a matter of faith and a concern of the church? From the perspective of a theology of disabilities, the cross and resurrection of Jesus reveals the image of the Disabled God. Jesus as Disabled God makes sense of the "normal" experience of embodiment of people who live with disabilities. For example, not seeing is "normal" for me. Jesus as Disabled God also supports and participates in the struggle for liberation in which people who live with disabilities engage every day.² Nancy Eiesland argues that traditional images of God, especially those that lead to views of disability as either a blessing or a curse, are inadequate. The Disabled God is neither an omnipotent and self-sufficient, nor a pitiable suffering servant. God is a survivor, as one of those whom society would label "not feasible," "unemployable," with a "questionable quality of life."³

We encounter the image of Jesus as Disabled God in Luke's account of the resurrected Jesus' appearance to his disciples; Jesus reveals himself by showing the disciples his injured hands and feet.⁴ Jesus, risen, comes to his disciples "embodied, as we are—disabled and divine."⁵ Eiesland suggests that Jesus reveals the Disabled God and shows that divinity (as well as humanity) is fully compatible with the experience of disability. The *imago Dei* includes pierced hands and feet and side.

As evidenced in Jesus' answer to the disciples' question about the reason the man was born blind,⁶ the Disabled God rejects the notion that disability is in any way a consequence of individual sin. Jesus did not sin; yet, on the cross, Jesus became disabled. The invitation to touch Jesus' hands and side shows that taboos against disability are to be rejected as well.

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¹ This article is based on Craig Alan Satterlee, "Preaching Yoked to Jesus," unpublished manuscript (2021), pp. 113-115. Do not share without permission of the author.

² Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abington, 1994).

³ Nancy L. Eiesland, "Encountering the Disabled God," *The Other Side* (September/October 20Ris), p. 13.

⁴ Luke 24:36-39

⁵ Eiesland, "Encountering the Disabled God," p. 14.

⁶ John 9:2-3.


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The accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection lead Eiesland to reject the notion that God has absolute power; she argues instead that God is in solidarity with people with disabilities and others who are oppressed. Jesus reveals a God who has experienced and understands pain and rejection. Eiesland suggests that the Disabled God emphasizes relationality over hierarchy, values embodiment in all its diversity, and provides a profound example of inclusion, love, and acceptance.

The resurrected Christ is seldom recognized as a deity whose hands, feet, and side bear the marks of profound physical impairment. "Christians do not have an able-bodied God as their primal image. Rather, the Disabled God promising grace through a broken body is at the center of piety, prayer, practice, and mission."⁷

I am grateful to our Synod's task force for guiding and accompanying us into this new way of understanding disability and experiencing Jesus and God's grace.

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



Pride Month

This month, we celebrate the vibrant LGBTQIA+ community and the valuable contributions of our LGBTQIA+ siblings.

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton gives thanks for the blessings of our LGBTQIA+ siblings and prays that we will all have a sense of pride in being part of this fearfully and wonderfully made family.
Watch Now: <https://youtu.be/QSvw2YuxbPk>

The ELCA and *Living Lutheran* also provides a collection of resources and stories. Learn More: <https://www.elca.org/lgbtqia>

⁷ Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, p. 11.

COVID-19 Response Grants

When COVID-19 began, many congregations were already serving their communities in a variety of ways. There are food pantries, personal needs pantries, baby pantries, Feed America Food Bank – Food Distributions, support of homeless shelters, shelters for those in abusive situations, and many, many more. It is estimated that congregations in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod were helping about 1,000 people in some way each week across the territory.

Since that time, many congregations have stepped up their assistance to communities to meet the need and be God's Hands. The ELCA created the COVID-19 Response Fund and encouraged donations. I thought it might generate about \$100,000. As of the last distribution, which was number seven, the fund had generated over \$1.5 million. Synods were encouraged to apply for each round of distributions. We applied and got distributions in all seven rounds along with a grant from Lutheran Disaster Response. The COVID-19 grants have totaled \$72,200 thus far. We have had 25 congregations approved for grants. It is estimated that these congregations have been touching the lives of 2,248 people a week through the pandemic. Other congregations have also been helping people using their own resources. Over the summer we will be sharing some of those stories.

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

Immanuel, Mt. Pleasant

It is a gift to be partnering with the synod to care for our communities during this rare pandemic reality. My favorite stories always seem to come when God surprises me. Early on in the pandemic, recycling places were closed. The recycling I returned when everything opened back up literally filled my SUV. I was happy to get the space back in the garage, but I did put off returning those cans and bottles. I, like many, do not enjoy standing in front of those machines putting in each can.

I finally got motivated months later and loaded up my vehicle with 3 of the 5 bags I had accumulated. I went to the local grocery store and started my can return. There was another woman back there inserting her cans. I, out of annoyance (not out of a grateful heart), offered the other woman one of my bags. I told her that she could keep the money if she inserted the cans. Her response was unexpected. It was as if I had offered to feed a starving family. That's the amount of exuberance she shared in her gratitude.

Witnessing that response, I decided to offer her more bags – this time not out of annoyance but out of a grateful heart. I was grateful that we happened to be there at the same time. We had a heartfelt conversation. She was out of work because of COVID-19. She is a single mom with two children. She had a great job at a gym, but they were closed to the public and therefore she and her children were without a paycheck. She explained that she was going to use the extra deposit money to help pay for her car insurance.

I decided to invite her to my house to get the other 2 bags I had left behind. As she was following me home, I thought about the North/West Lower Michigan Synod COVID-19 Response Grant Immanuel had received. I felt moved to offer to pay for a month's car insurance for her so she could use the can deposits for her rent, food, auto payment or other necessities. When I offered, she didn't believe this could be happening to her. It became clear in our conversation that she left my house that day knowing God was present. God offered her some much needed love.

In the church we often help those who call or walk through our doors asking for assistance. We participate in the helping agencies with funding and volunteerism. All of these avenues are priceless ways to support the community, but sometimes it is the random encounters that end up moving hearts. I am still in touch with the woman from that day, and we both share joy that Christ showed up at the can machines!

Pastor Dana Hendershot

Racial Justice

With the beginning of Summer in Michigan, we are experiencing the new realities of life as we move into new, old, and different ways of being together. In the midst of all the changes we are experiencing, 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."

Summer time is an ideal time to take the opportunity during our prayer and reflection time to avail ourselves of the many resources available that can deepen our understanding of the pervasiveness of racism and injustice that many experience in our world. Hopefully, some of the following materials will be helpful as we continue working toward racial justice and an end to systemic racism.

Many people had no awareness of the Tulsa race massacre that took place one hundred years ago in Tulsa, Oklahoma until it became part of the national news a couple weeks ago. I know that it was never a part of any history course I ever took. You can find "A Proclamation on Days of Remembrance: 100 Years After The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre" issued by President Biden on May 31, 2021 on www.whitehouse.com.

Two resources that were issued by the ELCA in 2019 help us in the understanding of our call as church to be people of racial justice. "Declaration of the ELCA to People of African Descent" was adopted on June 27, 2019 by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. "How Strategic and Authentic Is Our Diversity: A Call for Confession, Reflection and Healing Action" was adopted by the 15th triennial Churchwide Assembly on August 9, 2019 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Both resources are found on www.elca.org/resources

Juneteenth

June 19 is set aside each year as Juneteenth. It is also known as Freedom Day, Jubilee Day, Liberation Day and Emancipation Day. It was originally a holiday celebrating the emancipation of those who had been enslaved in the United States. Today we celebrate Juneteenth as a call to pay attention to all those places and situations where people are still not free - free from racism and all of its root causes. The ELCA has provided some worship resources for congregations to mark this day: <https://bit.ly/3gh6XLD>

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 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

Hunger and Climate Change Webinar

"For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God..." (Romans 8:19)

God's handiwork ties us together with all of creation, from the abundant blessings we enjoy to the many ways we depend on the health of the land and water. As our climate continues to change, more frequent and more severe droughts, flooding, and changing growing seasons all remind us of this relationship and the threat that a changing climate poses for communities around the world. This threat is expected to drive nearly 100 million more people into poverty this decade alone.

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod's Hunger Team and Environmental Stewardship Task Force will be joined by Ryan Cumming, Ph.D., Program Director for Hunger Education with ELCA World Hunger for a conversation about climate change, poverty, hunger — and the many ways God is at work in the United States and around the world. This webinar will be held Thursday, June 24 at 6:30pm.

Together, we will learn more about the climate's impact on hunger and poverty; hear stories of ministries accompanying farmers, migrants, and others impacted by climate events; and share ways the church can work together for a just world —including climate justice — where all are fed.

Register Now: <https://bit.ly/3a8Ktss>

They Are Us: A Book Study with Michigan Refugee Hope

Pastor Ryan Prondzinski, President of Michigan Refugee Hope and Pastor Erick Johnson, board member, will be leading a five-week Book Study on the book *They Are Us: Lutherans and Immigration* by Bishop Stephen Bouman. It is available on Amazon: <https://amzn.to/2TjH5FK>

In this second edition of the book, authors Stephen Bouman and Ralston Deffenbaugh observe that ten years after they wrote the first edition of this book, immigration is an even more contentious issue in society and the church, and immigrants are much more vulnerable, mistreated, and blamed than ever before.

They Are Us encourages congregations to engage in the public space with grace and to offer hospitality in an often-alien world. The authors propose that the church, at every level, from local to national to global, work to transform our present polarization and fear and lead to real change. They envision a community that offers a haven for every refugee, a job for every migrant, a home for every immigrant—a vision that is profoundly biblical and deeply faithful.

Through stories of crisis and hope, *They Are Us* helps Christian communities understand themselves and their ministries as part of God's narrative of love and hospitality for the little, the lost, the last, and the least. These stories show there is no greater power to unite our divided, angry, and fearful church and society than the presence of the crucified and risen Christ among us.

We invite you to join us for this Book Study sponsored by Michigan Refugee Hope. The study will be divided into five sessions via Zoom, meeting weekly on Wednesday evenings at 7:00 PM ET, beginning Wednesday, July 7 and concluding on Wednesday, August 4.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://luthersem.zoom.us/j/99888456241>

Meeting ID: 998 8845 6241

If you have any questions, please contact: ryan.prondzinski@gmail.com, erickj74@gmail.com, or prellen@faithlutheranokemos.org

Coronavirus Resources

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>

On Wednesday, June 16 at 7:30pm ET, the consultation will host a webinar titled "Leading the Church in a Lingering Pandemic", a roundtable discussion with public health experts and pastors in a time of progress and uncertainty concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. Register Now: <https://bit.ly/2U15wrZ>

#Faiths4Vaccines

#Faiths4Vaccines, which the ELCA has been active in from the start, is an interfaith campaign seeks to ensure equitable vaccine distribution in the US and worldwide. They have provided resources and tips for how congregations can participate in this campaign – i.e. through messaging in sermons, announcements in church bulletins and newsletters, and on social media. Learn More: <https://faiths4vaccines.org>

This month is the National Vaccine Month of Action. Beginning June 4, this month-long mobilization effort is supporting the Department of Health and Human Services' We Can Do This campaign to ensure as many people as possible receive at least one COVID-19 vaccine shot by July 4. Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3izAbXu>

Additionally, the White House through the HHS published a toolkit for how organizations – including houses of worship – can work directly with vaccine providers to set up vaccination clinics in locations that people know. Learn More: <https://wecandothis.hhs.gov/onsite-vaccination-clinic-toolkit>

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

REVIVE Resources

Congregational Vitality is all the things we do and learn to keep our mission with Jesus alive and moving. Our Synod's Congregational Vitality Team: REVIVE, has been sharing resources on the Synod's website for use by congregations working on vitality.

There are currently resources for evangelism, community engagement, growing young, faith formation, and spirituality, with more resources being added soon!

View all resources: www.mittensynod.org/mission/revive

Synod Finances

Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund	May	YTD
Mission Support Revenue	111,140	481,164
Other Revenue	13,354	119,710
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0
Total Revenue	124,494	600,873
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	55,570	240,582
Other Expenses	62,015	220,250
Total Expenses	117,585	460,832
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	6,909	140,042
Beginning Fund Balance	367,331	234,198
Ending Fund Balance	374,240	374,240
Other Fund Balances		
Unrestricted-Designated		681,253
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related		980,506
Temporarily-Restricted		322,422
Permanently-Restricted		924,639
Total - All Funds (as of 5/31/21)		3,283,060

Handling Congregational Income

In March, we mentioned a few congregational finance resources available at www.elca.org. The summer months can be an opportunity to update some of our procedures. This month, we look at handling congregational income.

Normal handling of funds in the congregation involves several steps. Some general principles:

1. No individual should be required or allowed to handle the congregation's income alone at any time.
2. It is preferred that no cash be stored in the church.
3. Several people should be involved on a rotating basis in handling income.
4. All income transactions (receipts and disbursements) should be properly recorded and verifiable.
5. It is understood that the recording of income or gifts from individuals of the congregation is a confidential matter and such records are only available to the pastor, financial secretary and the stewardship committee, when required.
6. The pastor should not serve in the position of treasurer and should not have check-signing authority over any church account.
7. It is preferable for all funds under the direction of the congregational council to be in a single checking account and investment program. Congregational auxiliaries and organizations may wish to be included in this system, authorizing disbursement of funds through the congregational treasurer with vouchers for payment.
8. Financial reports to the council and the congregation should include all funds, accounts and investments of the congregation and its auxiliaries and organizations. No information should be withheld. These should be reviewed and reported on a consistent basis.

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.

Mitten Synod Information Session

In preparation for the event, we invite you to join our Synod Coordinator Pastor Dan Schewe and our Synod Day Director Megan Floyd for an informational meeting to help plan.

This informational meeting will be held June 17 2021 from 3-4pm at Trinity Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids (2700 Fulton St. East, Grand Rapids, MI) and on Zoom.

The session will be recorded and available on YouTube for those who cannot attend. If you're interested in attending the meeting via Zoom, contact dan.schewe@tlcgr.org to receive the link.

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>

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>

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>

Remembering the Emanuel Nine

As part of the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, voting members adopted a resolution designating June 17 as a commemoration of the martyrdom of the Emanuel Nine — the nine people shot and killed on June 17, 2015, during a Bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC.

The ELCA has provided a collection of resources to help congregations mark this commemoration. These resources can be adapted for virtual worship, online conversation, or individual reflection and devotion.

Learn More: <https://elca.org/emanuelnine>

Upcoming Events

June 17	Commemoration of the Emanuel Nine	
June 17	ELCA Youth Gathering Information Session	Trinity, Grand Rapids and Zoom
June 19	Juneteenth	
June 24	Hunger and Climate Webinar	Zoom
July 4	Independence Day	

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 / Interviewing
Christ United/Dewitt (Part-Time)	Pastor Terry Williamson last Sunday, June 17. Episcopal Diocese of Michigan taking the lead in the call process.	Immanuel/Allegan (Part-Time)	Pastor Daniel Ward last Sunday, June 27.
All Saints/Mason (Part-Time)	Pastor Erick Johnson, Stated Supply / Preparing MSP	Stony Lake Conference	Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean
Greater Grand Rapids Conference	Rev. Julie Schneider- Thomas, Dean	Sunrise Conference	Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean
		Traverse Conference	Rev. Scott Torkko, Dean