



**North/West Lower
Michigan Synod**

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"It's about Jesus!"

In May, members of our synod gathered at Synod Assembly under the theme "It's about Jesus!" Those who attended were uplifted by being together and encouraged by sharing the story of Jesus with one another. A selection of videos, which can be used in congregations is available on the Synod's YouTube channel in the "It's about Jesus!" playlist: <https://www.youtube.com/northwestlowermichigansynod>

Throughout the Synod Assembly, and in the weeks after it, we have heard from many how the theme resonated with them and how sharing the story of Jesus with each other led to insightful, inspiring, and deeply meaningful conversations. We've also heard this from congregations who are currently reading and using our resource *You Are Witnesses of These Things* to become more comfortable sharing the story of Jesus with each other and their communities. We as a Synod Staff certainly agree that sharing the story of Jesus, for no other reason than because it is such good news, is inspiring, encouraging, meaningful, engaging, and fun. And we know that doing so is important and necessary as a synod and the larger church.

For our synod, "It's about Jesus!" is more than an assembly theme. It's our focus and aim to strengthen our people's relationship with Jesus so that we are all empowered and eager to share the story of Jesus with others, especially with those for whom it is new. As such, we have applied for a grant from the Lilly Endowment's Compelling Preaching Initiative to support our "It's about Jesus!" Program, which aims to make preaching in our congregations more Christ-centered and increase our proclamation of Christ beyond our congregations by motivating and empowering our people to witness to Jesus for no other reason than Jesus is life-changing, world-shaping, good news. More information on the grant and program is available here: <https://bit.ly/3JaVTgU>

In addition to the "It's about Jesus!" program, we are building upon this theme and responding to our synod's desire to gather with each other, learn together, and be inspired by holding a series of events designed to provide these opportunities. These events will begin this fall and we strongly encourage you to learn more about them and register for those designed for you.

Mission Support River Cruise: In August, we will hold our second mission support river cruise. We invite leaders from congregations that give the highest percentage to mission support or have grown the most in mission support and individuals who contribute financially to our Living Stones Initiatives. We are committed to saying thank you for your financial support. We thank Ms. Karla Chamberlain, a member of Synod Council and Grace in Lansing, for making this cruise possible. It's fun to talk about Jesus and generosity.

Autumn Leadership Event for Rostered Ministers: The theme of this year's event is "Sharing the Story of Jesus with Youth and Young Adults." The Rev. Jake Mulder, Assistant Chief of Leadership Formation at Fuller Seminary, Senior Advisor for the Fuller Youth Institute, and co-author of the book *Growing Young*, will be the keynote presenter. This event will be held on September 12, 2023 at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids. We are offering this year's event as a 1-day event to provide more flexibility and a lower cost for attendees. Those looking to extend their stay for more conversation may make their own arrangements. Registration information will be available soon!

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You Are Witnesses of These Things Retreat: On September 17-18, 2023, we will hold a two-day retreat centered on the book, *You Are Witnesses of These Things: Sharing the Story of Jesus*. This retreat is an opportunity to experience the joy and fun in sharing the story of Jesus for no reason other than Jesus is such life-giving good news. It is also an occasion to train those interested in using this book with groups in their congregations. The retreat's primary audience is the baptized, people of God, or lay people but pastors and deacons are heartily welcome. The retreat will be held at the St. Francis Retreat Center in Dewitt. The cost of the retreat center prohibits giving a discount to people who choose to commute to the retreat. Learn more and register: <https://bit.ly/3IxBuBz>

My Burden is Light Preaching Retreat: On October 16-18, 2023, we will hold a three day retreat to discuss *My Burden is Light: Making Room for Jesus in Preaching*. The retreat will be held at the St. Francis Retreat Center in Dewitt. It is designed for preachers; however, anyone who cares about preaching is welcome to attend. The cost of the retreat center prohibits giving a discount to people who choose to commute to the retreat. Learn more and register: <https://bit.ly/3K5z0gc>.

Adult Theological Education: The Rev. Dr. Kit Kleinhans, Dean of Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University, will teach Luther's Small Catechism for Adults for six weeks beginning October 24, 2023. The class be held via Zoom. It's been fun to see how people across our synod gathered for our first class in January and February. Many met at their church to watch the lecture together and then gathered for coffee a day after the class for discussion. These classes are designed for both lay people and rostered ministers. Registration information will be available soon!

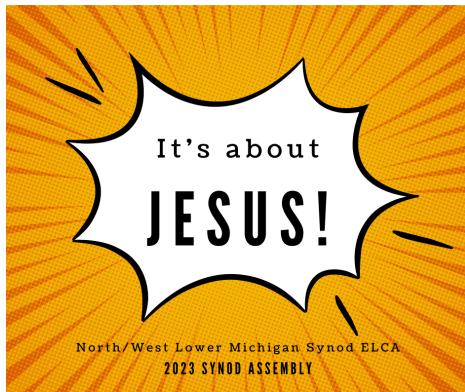
Empowering Our Buildings to Share the Story of Jesus: On November 4, 2023, Pastor Sprang will hold an event at Trinity in Battle Creek to help us to empower our buildings to share the story of Jesus. This event is an opportunity to explicitly name ministries that bring people into our congregations as extensions of Jesus's own ministry and is designed for rostered ministers, congregation leaders, and anyone else who would like to attend. Registration information will be available soon!

We have a full schedule of synod events planned and details will be coming quickly. I encourage you to pay attention to the Weekly Update emails, the Synod's website and social media, and my Take One videos. This summer, I pray we all are granted time to spend in the beauty of God's creation in our own State of Michigan.

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



North/West Lower Michigan Synod 2023 Synod Assembly



Our first post-Covid, in-person assembly since 2019 took place from May 7-9, 2023 in Mt. Pleasant, MI with the theme "It's about Jesus!". 196 voting members from 77 out of our 100 congregations registered for the event (along with an additional ~25 visitors). The agenda included required business such as Elections and Officer Reports, along with approval of Budget and Compensation Guidelines. In addition, there were a variety of ministry presentations and greetings, table discussions, scholarship presentations, and display tables. There was also worship opportunities such as Morning Prayer, Eucharist services, and a Service of Prayers at the Close of the Day. Many also took advantage of three workshops: Honduras: Health for Life, The Real World: Church Buildings, and You are Witnesses of These Things. Further information about the assembly can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3E6VYzP>

Throughout the assembly, there were many smiles and positive comments as we came back together in person to do the Synod's business. While there were many highlights, most attendees noted the inspiration and relationship-building gained during three table discussions: Sharing a favorite Gospel story about Jesus, sharing a time when you experienced Jesus, and sharing a statement of Good News about Jesus. At the close of the assembly, formal feedback was requested via a survey. The complete survey summary and results are available here: <https://bit.ly/43FzYXE>

In a newsletter update to his congregation following the assembly, one voting member stated: "There was good interaction among participants with the ability to freely express differences of opinion, and in general, come to mutual acceptance of the various positions and opinions without acrimony." This is an important observation as we tend to be a synod that is not "of one mind" on most issues or topics. This ability to share opinions and debate in a healthy, respectful way is a key component to having a productive and meaningful synod assembly.

There was one area of discussion and action during the recent assembly where Synod Council follow-up took place. This area is regarding the format of the next Synod Assembly, planned as a **business-only assembly via Zoom on Saturday, May 11, 2024**. This will be followed by a **3-day in-person assembly in Mt. Pleasant from May 18-20, 2025**, which will include a bishop election. During the recent assembly, a motion was made to amend the 2024 budget to enable a change to the 2024 assembly from a virtual, single-day format to an in-person multi-day format. While 86 voting members (56%) voted in support of this amendment, a required 2/3 majority was not attained. Wide-ranging opinions exist across our synod (from those at the 2023 assembly as well as those not in attendance) regarding how to best organize and conduct the synod assembly, including:

- Frequency (every year vs. every other year)
- Duration (single day vs. multi-day)
- Format (in-person vs. virtual)
- Scope and Content (business-only vs. business plus social/worship/education/service/etc.)

Each of these aspects are taken into consideration by Synod Council as decisions are finalized well in advance of each assembly (with planning, scheduling, and contractual negotiations starting up to 24 months in advance). Specific to the decision to have a virtual assembly in 2024, considerations included the expectation of a relatively "light" business agenda, financial requirements covered by congregational and/or synod budgets (estimated at \$6,000 for virtual vs. ~\$50,000 for in-person assemblies), impacts on the environment (travel, waste, etc.), other planned in-person synod events available through 2023, and resource availability (including synod staff, vendors, and venues) along with the understanding that another in-person assembly would take place in 2025.

At the end of May, following the 2023 assembly, Synod Council met to debrief the assembly, including personal observations and take-aways, input via voting member discussions, what they heard in the debates, along with input received from the survey. After this discussion, which included an updated financial review along with the other inputs outlined previously, the decision was made to carry forward with the current plans for a virtual assembly via Zoom on Saturday, May 11, 2024. Synod Council understands that this decision is supported by some and disappointing to others – but believes it is the right decision to make at this time.

Sandy Schlesinger, Synod Vice President

Congregational Vitality - REVIVE

In 2015, the ELCA initiated a new program for congregational renewal called Congregational Vitality. Before this new program, a few congregations were selected to be in redevelopment, which helped these congregations restart with many of the efforts and priorities of a new congregation. Congregational Vitality is an effort to offer all congregations the tools and priorities needed for evangelism, engaging the community, providing radical welcome, and sharing Jesus. Each synod was encouraged to develop a team of people who would steward these efforts of teaching and sharing congregational vitality across the synod. Our synod received a grant from the ELCA to facilitate this program. Our team was trained by the ELCA and our programs were formulated. In 2018, we enrolled our first eight congregations and initiated a series of three learning days per year. In late 2019, we signed up the second cohort of eight congregations.

Then in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit and all in-person training stopped. Congregations scrambled to do online worship as in-person worship was not possible in the same ways as before. REVIVE had to change too. We began to gather all of the handouts and resources that were being used at in-person trainings and started posting them on the synod's website as a virtual resource library. We then began to create or repost videos of popular topics around Congregational Vitality, especially digital media, Growing Young, and social media. All of these resources are available here: <https://www.mittensynod.org/mission/revive/>

During this time, the ELCA also made changes, which helped in furthering congregational vitality. First, the ELCA COVID Relief Fund was created and funds donated to the ELCA were channeled through synod congregations that requested money for extra community outreach during the pandemic. We received and distributed over \$60,000 through 24 congregations in our synod. Second, the ELCA began doing free, online Congregational Vitality trainings, which were available to anyone who wished to attend. There is now a regular cycle of trainings being offered two times per year to congregation members who want to attend. My article in the April newsletter outlines how to sign up for these trainings: <https://bit.ly/42SBuVb>

Now as we learn to live with COVID and experience the new reality of church life, the remaining REVIVE funds are being used to support a variety of resources for congregations to use as tools for Congregational Vitality including:

- MissionInsite: A resource that provides demographic profiles of a congregation's neighborhood
- A library of stewardship resources: <https://www.mittensynod.org/mission/stewardship/>
- Evangelism training, including funding copies of *You Are Witnesses of These Things** for synod assembly participants and congregational groups that are consulting with me on Congregational Vitality
- Supporting in-person events such as:
 - Autumn Leadership Event on September 12, 2023
 - *You Are Witnesses of These Things* Retreat on September 17-18, 2023
 - Empowering Our Buildings to Share the Story of Jesus event on November 4, 2023
 - Zoom workshop on Congregational Financial Wellness on January 18, 2024
 - Workshop on Technology for Churches in the Spring 2024

The ELCA has also called a new staff person who has Evangelism as a part of their job description, so additional resources and ideas will be forthcoming. Congregational Vitality/REVIVE is an ongoing process with new ideas of learning how to share and talk about Jesus in our everyday life.

Pastor David Sprang
Assistant to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission

*Bishop Craig Satterlee and Chelsey Satterlee wrote *You Are Witnesses of These Things* as a resource to help congregational members learn to talk about and share Jesus. Craig and Cathy Satterlee funded the cost of publication. The cost of the book is only slightly above wholesale and proceeds go directly toward the publishing expense. It is a labor of love to help the church share Jesus more abundantly and speak of Jesus more fluently.

Going Foam Free

Environmental Stewardship Task Force

Has your church ever considered going foam free? You'll note that the word "Styrofoam" is not being used in this article. That's because it is a registered brand name that, like Kleenex, is fast becoming a regular word, and the manufacturer is fighting that use. Officially, the material is known as expanded polystyrene foam, or EPF.

EPF is a polymer that has many valuable uses: in general and electronics packaging, insulation, food packages, and even protecting your head in your bike helmet. It is lightweight, durable, gives off no odor or bad chemicals and is structurally strong.

However, EPF also does not biodegrade, and can last thousands of years in landfills. Since it is 98% air, it takes up a lot of space. All containers previously thrown out are in a landfill somewhere and will be there essentially forever. However, there are alternatives made from bamboo, cornstarch, corn syrup and other plant materials, which biodegrade.

Many churches are taking the step of not using EPF products such as cups, plates and take-home containers. Alternatives are available from a company called Green Paper Products. A Thrivent grant can help make this changeover possible. In addition, if your church has a spot for a compost pile, or a nearby cooperative farmer, the products are all compostable and need not ever see a landfill.

EPF can be recycled – it has its own number #6S. However, none of the local companies will accept it for recycling because it takes up so much room. There is a company in Mason, MI that will recycle EPF.

11 churches in Kalamazoo have banded together to arrange EPF recycling for that area. It occurs once every three months at the Mayor's Riverfront Park in Kalamazoo. The next event is in July. Some townships and cities have occasional gatherings of EPF materials. Check with your local municipalities. To be recycled, EPF materials must be clean, empty, free of tape and labels and plastic film or other contamination.

If you'd like more information about environmental stewardship reach out to the North/West Lower Michigan Synod's Environmental Stewardship Task Force's chair Linn Kracht at ldkracht@gmail.com.



"God's work. Our hands." Sunday



View all resources at <https://elca.org/dayofservice>

Synod Finances

	May	Year to Date
Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund		
Mission Support Revenue	96,306	413,765
Other Revenue	42,715	67,601
Total Revenue	139,021	481,365
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	48,153	206,882
Other Expenses	106,317	270,346
Total Expenses	154,470	477,228
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	(15,450)	4,137
Beginning Fund Balance	528,913	509,326
Ending Fund Balance	513,463	513,463
Other Fund Balances		
Unrestricted-Designated		615,203
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related*		751,460
Temporarily-Restricted		317,355
Permanently-Restricted		1,002,547
Total - All Funds (as of 5/31/23)		3,200,028

*May 31 Endowment Fund Account Statements were not available at the time of publishing this summary. The amount shown here reflects balances as of 4/30/23.

Congregation 501(c)(3) Status and Employer Identification Number

Occasionally we hear from congregations with questions about their 501(c)(3) status or Employer Identification Number (EIN). These questions often arise when congregations are establishing bank accounts, investments, etc.

As noted in the [Churchwide Office of the Treasurer Financial Resources for Congregations](#), each congregation should have their own EIN. To secure an EIN, the congregation must complete Form SS-4, Application for Employer Identification Number, available from the Internal Revenue Service. Learn more: <https://bit.ly/46dW6Km>.

Congregations may direct questions regarding these matters to 501c3@elca.org.

You Are Witnesses Retreat

“Then Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46–48).

Pastor David E. Sprang and Bishop Craig Alan Satterlee invite you to join them for a retreat centered on the book *You Are Witnesses of These Things: Sharing the Story of Jesus*. This retreat is an opportunity to experience the joy and fun in sharing the story of Jesus for no reason other than Jesus is such life-giving good news. The retreat’s primary audience is lay people, but pastors and deacons are also welcome to attend.

This retreat will be held in-person at the St. Francis Retreat Center in Dewitt, MI from September 17–18, 2023.

Learn More and Register: <http://bit.ly/3IxBuBz>.



My Burden is Light Preaching Retreat

“Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30.

Bishop Craig Alan Satterlee invites you to join him for a preaching retreat centered on his new book, *My Burden is Light: Making Room for Jesus in Preaching*. This retreat is an opportunity to discuss the book and to intentionally reflect on both our preaching and our relationship with Jesus. Like the book, the retreat’s primary audience is pastors and deacons, but lay preachers and listeners who care about preaching are also welcome to attend.

This retreat will be held in-person at the St. Francis Retreat Center in Dewitt, MI from October 16-18, 2023.

Learn More and Register: <http://bit.ly/3K5z0gc>

Upcoming Events

June 17	Silence the Violence Events	Learn more: https://bit.ly/3X3uAuS
June 19	Juneteenth	Learn more: https://bit.ly/3Nv5T7k
July 17-20	ELCA Rostered Ministers Gathering	Learn more: https://www.elca.org/rmg
September 10	“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday	Learn more: https://elca.org/dayofservice
September 12	Autumn Leadership Event for Rostered Ministers	Learn more: https://bit.ly/3PWdCKA
September 17-18	<i>You Are Witnesses of These Things</i> Retreat	Learn more: https://bit.ly/3IxBuBz

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
Messiah/Bay City	Pastor Dan Stonebeck, Interim / Seeking Candidates
St. Matthew/Bridgeport (Part-Time)	Pastor Andreas Teich, Stated Supply / Preparing MSP
Zion/Freeland	CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Kevin O'Bryan (PA); Installation June 25
Trinity/Midland	CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Jeff Gramza (NWOH); Installation TBD
Faith/Saginaw	CALL ACCEPTED: Ms. Christina Beauvais (Seminary Graduate); Ordination and Installation June 17
Our Savior/Saginaw (Part-Time)	CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Kevin O'Bryan (PA); Installation June 25
Resurrection/Saginaw (Part-Time)	Pastor Andreas Teich, Stated Supply / Seeking a partnership or quarter to third time pastor
Grace/Vassar	Seeking a stated supply pastor for two Sundays a month

Capital Area Conference	Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean
University/East Lansing	Pastor Gary Bunge retiring September 30. Pastor Haley Vay Beaman last Sunday July 9
Trinity/Hillsdale	CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Kara Shaw; Installation July 9
Faith/Okemos	CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Bruce Thorsen, Transitional Pastor; Installation TBD

Greater Grand Rapids Conference	Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean
St. Luke/Grand Rapids	Pastor Galen Knutson, Intentional Interim / Preparing MSP
Trinity/Grand Rapids	Pastor Bob Linstrom retiring November 2023
Zion/Woodland (Part-Time)	Pastor Rebecca Ebb- Speese retiring. Last Sunday June 18 / Preparing MSP

Kalamazoo Conference	Rev. Joan Oleson, Dean
Messiah/Constantine (Part-Time)	CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Tom Pederson
Prince of Peace/Portage	Seeking to call a deacon / Seeking Candidates

Stony Lake Conference	Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean
Edgewood/Fruitport (Part-Time)	CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Ellen Schoepf; Installation June 4
Harbor of Grace/Muskegon	Pastor Jack Ferra, Interim / Preparing MSP

Sunrise Conference	Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean
New Life/Alcona County	Pastor Chrisy Bright last Sunday June 11 / Supply Pastors
St. Paul/Alpena	Seeking a part-time assistant pastor

Traverse Conference	Rev. Jonathan Reid, Dean
Feast of Victory/Acme (Part-Time)	Pastor Ruth Overdier, Stated Supply / CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Haley Vay Beaman; Installation TBD
St. Paul/Reed City	Pastor Marcy Miller, Stated Supply / Preparing MSP