



North/West Lower Michigan Synod

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Congregational Sustainability

Congregational sustainability— accompanying and assisting congregations to realistically assess whether they are maintainable and discern their future— is a less glamorous part of our work. However, it is so important that it is a Living Stones initiative. In assessing sustainability, we look at whether an average of 50 people worship in a congregation each Sunday, since research indicates this is the minimum number necessary to independently carry out the functions of the congregation. We look at the age of worshipers, income, the budget, what the congregation prioritizes with its money, the last time the congregation held a stewardship campaign, and, if they haven't, the potential if the congregation holds one. We look at whether and how the congregation is connected to its neighborhood.

We understand that decisions about a congregation's future belong to the congregation, as long as the congregation can make them. We also understand that the Synod does not have the resources to maintain congregations indefinitely. We neither provide financial resources nor make extraordinary exceptions to ELCA policy for congregations whose mission is nothing more than the people they have worship in the building they love at the time they want, as understandable as this mission is. Where desirable, we help congregations to partner with neighboring congregations, both ELCA and full communion partners. We have learned that these partnerships succeed best when they start as grassroots efforts.

In November, three congregations are making important decisions about their future. I invite you to join me in praying for them and supporting their decisions.

After working with a listening team as outlined in S.14.18 and for financial reasons, Resurrection Lutheran Church in Saginaw and Pastor Marilyn Robinson ended their pastor relationship on November 7. Resurrection has no plans to call a pastor and is moving forward with supply pastors. Pastor Marilyn Robinson is available for call.

On November 3, St. John Lutheran Church in Saginaw voted to enter a period of discernment, beginning December 1 and expected to last six months, during which the congregation will worship with Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Saginaw. During this time of discernment, St. John will decide whether to close and join Our Savior's or find a smaller building to hold worship. St. John is not closing at this time. Pastor Carl Ballard is available for call.

On November 24, four congregations in Muskegon—Immanuel, Our Savior, Samuel, and St. Luke—are expected to vote to close, to come together as a new congregation, Harbor of Grace Lutheran Church, and to call Pastor Jane Mountain as their transitional pastor.

Congregational sustainability is nothing less than the journey of discerning and discovering what it means for the church and each of us to be joined to Christ's death and resurrection. The call in this work used to trust Jesus' promise, "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor" (John 12:24-26). Pastor David, Pastor Rosanne and I consider it a Holy privilege to accompany congregations on this pilgrimage.

Peace,

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

Synod Christmas Worship & Lunch

Pastor Sprang tells us it is time for congregations to plan how they will advertise their Christmas services, and that they need to consider how different generations will find out about them; don't spend too much time and energy advertising in the newspaper!

As has become our practice, we will hold a Christmas Eucharist followed by lunch on December 11 beginning at 11:30am at St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in Lansing. As part of the service, we will install Pastor Rosanne Anderson as assistant to the bishop. While this service and luncheon have traditionally been for pastors and deacons, this year we welcome anyone who would like to come in celebration of Pastor Anderson.

Please RSVP at <https://bit.ly/2q1swbD>

We hope that you can join us!

Nine Updated Trends About Christmas Eve Services

By Thom Rainer

Christmas Eve is less than a month away. Most churches have some type of Christmas Eve services, but we are seeing clear trends in how churches approach them. Every time we write or podcast something about these services, we get a lot of comments and questions. In that context, here is an update on nine clear trends we are seeing:

1. **It is growing in importance.** Non-Christians are more likely to come to worship services on Christmas Eve than any other day of the year, including Easter. Church leaders get it. They are putting more prayer, preparation, and strategic thinking into the services.
2. **There are three popular times for the service.** Whether a church has one or multiple Christmas Eve services, three times are more popular than others: later afternoon (typically for families with young children or for older adults); early evening (the more traditional time); and late evening (for empty nesters and families with teenage or grown children).
3. **The services are traditional.** They include traditional hymns and carols. They may include some time for the lighting of the final advent candle.
4. **The services are brief.** The typical length is 30 to 45 minutes.
5. **The pastor's message is brief.** The typical length is 10 to 15 minutes.
6. **Most churches include candlelight services.** They are now expected by Christians and non-Christians alike.
7. **More unchurched are attending these services.** As I noted in the first item, one of the reasons for the growing importance of Christmas Eve services is the increasing number of non-Christians who attend. Anecdotally, they seem to be more receptive each year.
8. **Churches are building in processes for follow-up.** That means they have processes in place to get contact information, and processes to provide some type of non-aggressive follow-up such as a text message, an email, or most effectively, a handwritten letter.
9. **All ministry staff are expected to be there.** Because this day is the single most important day to reach unbelievers, more churches require an "all-hands-on-deck" presence

Some of these trends have been around a while. Some are only recently growing in importance. Please share with us what your church plans to do for Christmas Eve.

Originally published on Thom Rainer's website. View original: <https://bit.ly/36VK1KY>

A Message from the Nebraska Synod ELCA

Dear Friends in Christ,

On behalf of the all the members of the Nebraska Synod ELCA, and of the thousands of others whose lives you have all touched, I am writing to express to you a deep and abiding word of gratitude for your generous and timely gift from your synod assembly worship offering to Nebraska Synod Disaster Response for flood relief.

You were no doubt aware when you sent your gift that disaster response, especially after flooding, is a long-term matter. What you could not have known was that shortly after you sent your gift in response to the March bomb cyclone flooding and blizzards, another round of storms blew through central Nebraska, bringing as much as nine inches of rain in a matter of hours. Already-flooded communities suffered again, and still more communities endured flood damage. Your gifts help us respond directly and effectively in the aftermath of these disasters.

We are deeply grateful for your partnership in the gospel, and especially for the gifts whereby we get to share with you the work of recovery, walking with those who suffer until not only buildings, but lives and communities are made whole again.

With the Apostle Paul, we who are blessed to be fellow members of the Body of Christ with you can say with sincerity,

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. —Philippians 1:4-6

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Brian D. Maas
Bishop

Creation Caring for Creation

The Environmental Stewardship Task Force

“The trees in the woods will shout for joy when the LORD comes to rule the earth” (1 Chronicles 16:33 GNT)

As the Creator gave our bodies incredible resources for maintaining and restoring health, so too, natural ecosystems are adept at self-healing, especially if given a helpful nudge. So, whether you are a climate skeptic, somewhat concerned about climate change or believe that we are in a climate emergency, you may wish to both plant a tree and advocate for sustainable forests across the globe.

Trees are a blessing for their beauty, for providing animals and humans with both food and shelter, for providing cooling shade, for cleansing both air and water of toxins, for reducing flooding and stabilizing hillsides. In recent years the blessing of trees has been acclaimed for their capacity for taking CO2 out of the air.

So, as stewards of creation we can be a “helpful nudge” by raising and shepherding trees and plant life in our own neighborhoods. We can also support public policies and international efforts aimed at protecting and expanding forests.

How might you and your congregation join the trees in praising our Creator and doing God’s work of restoring creation?

“Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree” - Martin Luther

Synod Finances as of October 31, 2019

	Current Year		Prior Year	
	October	Year to Date	October	Year to Date
Revenue				
Mission Support	113,039	1,019,287	131,064	1,006,717
Other	9,287	124,650	10,399	106,701
Total	122,326	1,143,937	141,463	1,113,418
Expenses				
Churchwide Proportionate Share	56,519	509,644	65,532	503,359
Other	59,963	666,016	95,357	712,615
Total	116,482	1,175,660	160,889	1,215,974
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0	0	1,156
Net Change to Fund Balance	5,844	(31,723)	(19,426)	(101,400)

ELCA Rostered Ministers Gathering

July 20-23, 2020, Phoenix, AZ

All rostered ministers are invited to gather with colleagues from across the church for fellowship, renewal continuing education, worship, bible study, and refreshment for your spirit.

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

WELCA Gathering

July 16-19, 2020 Phoenix, AZ

Following Jesus is messy. Loving one another is justice. We are not perfect. We are one body in Christ. We invite you experience a life-changing event with other bold women of faith!

Learn More: <https://bit.ly/36UHdOl>

Christmas Care Packages for Navy Sailors

Pastor Chris Laughlin of Messiah Lutheran Church in Constantine has received a message from a Navy chaplain friend that her sailors would greatly appreciate care packages around Christmas. Unfortunately, for security reasons, we can't give out their contact information. If you or your congregation would like to send a care package, please send items from the list to:

Messiah Lutheran Church
% Pastor Chris Laughlin
3224 Woodhams Ave
Portage, MI 49002

If you would prefer to provide funds to cover the cost of shipping or the Navy Calling Cards, please give to the Synod Office.

Items to Send:

- Candy (chocolate melts), hard candy, sour gummy worms, mints, etc.
- Jerky (any kind, even homemade. Package in Ziploc baggies)
- Phone cards (The AT&T Ship-to-Shore Prepaid Calling Card is the only card that can be used on board Navy ships and Coast Guard cutters. See: <https://bit.ly/2OfptED>)
- Amazon gift cards
- Goldfish
- Crackers
- Fruit snacks
- Letters/Cards/Pictures kids draw from your congregation

Items Not to Send:

- Liquids
- Baby wipes
- Toiletries
- Overly religious materials

Upcoming Events

December 11	Synod Christmas Worship & Lunch	Lansing, MI	Learn More: https://bit.ly/2p46ioO
January 31- February 3	Extravaganza 2020	Anaheim, CA	Learn More: https://bit.ly/2ruaiQk
February 11-13	Ignite the Church Conference	Orlando, FL	Learn More: https://bit.ly/2NDce1C

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. Kjersten Priddy, Dean
St. John/Saginaw	Carl Ballard's last Sunday Nov. 24/Discerning Future	St. John/Baroda (part-time)	Dennis Smith, Interim/ Discerning Future
Faith/Saginaw	Supply Pastors/Awaiting Additional Candidate	Stony Lake Conference	Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean
Resurrection/Saginaw	Supply Pastors/No plans to call a pastor	Sunrise Conference	Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean
Capital Area Conference	Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean	Peace/Gaylord	Supply Pastors/Interviewing
Calvary/Lansing (part-time)	Supply Pastors/Interviewing	Traverse Conference	Rev. Scott Torkko, Dean
St. Paul/East Lansing	Supply Pastors/Preparing MSP		
Grace/Lansing	John Schleicher, Contract Pastor/Preparing MSP/ Exploring Mission Partnership		
Peace/Charlotte	Supply Pastors/Preparing MSP		
Greater Grand Rapids Conference	Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean		
Peace/Holland (part-time)	Clay Bates, Contracted through December/ Interviewing		
Bread of Life/Hudsonville	Paul Krupinski retiring Dec. 29		