



North/West Lower  
Michigan Synod

2900 N. Waverly Rd.  
Lansing, MI 48906

517-321-5066  
[mittensynod.org](http://mittensynod.org)

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## An Unforgettable Christmas

Now that Halloween, Reformation Day, and All Saints are behind us, and Thanksgiving is only 11 days away, I find myself thinking of Christmas. When I do, I hear, "O Little Town of Bethlehem" playing in my head, because of the way Bethlehem is described: "How still we see thee lie." Bethlehem's streets are dark, its people lost in deep and dreamless sleep. There isn't much celebrating going on. Still, Christmas comes. "Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." I find comfort in the realization that, come what may, Christmas will come. Christ will be born anew to us and within us. Christ will be born anew in ways our world desperately needs.

This year, I expect our celebration to be different. I expect we will have a quiet, COVID-19 controlled, Christmas this year. While we can't determine how our celebrations will be different, we can decide now to make our celebration of this (hopefully) once-in-a-lifetime Christmas unforgettable in a positive way. The choice is ours. Will we spend Christmas lamenting the ways we cannot celebrate, or will we plan now to make Christmas unforgettable for ourselves, our families, our congregations, and those most in need?

On Christmas Eve a few years ago, the power went out at New Life Lutheran Church of Alcona County. When I saw pictures of the congregation worshipping in the dark with flashlights and lanterns, as well as candles, I was genuinely jealous because I wanted to be there. In adapting to the situation, they created an unforgettable Christmas. What if we cannot go into our church buildings? Will we gather outside with candles, listening to carols, reading the Christmas story, and foregoing the sermon?

What if we cannot even come together? Might the Christmas story be read by families around the kitchen or dining room table with grandma and grandpa joining by Zoom? I am seeing a Zoom screen with hundreds of people all holding candles and singing "Silent Night." What would it look like for the church to make our celebration of Jesus' birth last 12 days rather than just one night?

I am not trying to be the Grinch. A Christmas miracle could happen and we could celebrate just as we always have. But it seems increasingly likely that our lives, our churches, and our world will not resonate with the way Bethlehem is described in the Christmas Carol. Let's consider this possibility and spend Advent planning to make this an unforgettable Christmas.

I know some congregations in our Synod are already thinking of fun ways to celebrate virtually, such as having adults dress up and film a Christmas Pageant video for the kids to watch. I invite you to use each other as resources and share ideas in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod Facebook Group. If we're able to adapt and embrace the challenges of this year, I believe we'll have the makings of a very special and unforgettable Christmas.

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

## Mission Creep

We are deep in the midst of a pandemic and the numbers in Michigan keep rising. Pastors and church members alike are tired and frustrated. This may not seem like the best time to think about the mission of the church, but it might help take our minds off the pandemic and bring some clarity to decision making now and in the future as the pandemic diminishes.

"Mission Creep" is a term many folks are tossing around these days. It means straying from the vision and purpose or the mission plans that a congregation has set in place. There have been a lot of articles and opinions from "church consultants" on this topic, but they seem to all over the place. As we continue into the future in the midst of a pandemic, I decided to build my own top ten list of things that keep a congregation from "Mission Creep".

- 1) **Have a plan.** Congregations need a Mission Statement, but more importantly, short term mission goals and principles which keep the mission going and centered.
- 2) **Center on Jesus.** The purpose of the church is to know the Good News of Jesus, celebrate it, share it, proclaim it, and seek to live it out in the church and especially in the world. We should look for what Jesus is doing in us, in others, the community, and the world.
- 3) **Know your "why".** Have in mind why the church exists, why you are a follower of Jesus, why you are motivated to serve, and why you want others to know about Jesus. The why is not "to save the church", "to get more members", or "to fund the budget". It is to know and share Jesus.
- 4) **Communicate the mission.** The why and the purpose the congregation exists should be talked about and celebrated in all aspects of the congregation's life so that everyone knows it, supports it, and lives it.
- 5) **Keep the mission moving forward.** Mission Creep often happens when the mission is no longer communicated and there is no forward vision or movement. This results in people going off in their own ways or the church going into self-preservation mode.
- 6) **Vision is always more outward than inward.** The church is most healthy when it spends more time giving Jesus away than it does caring for itself. There is certainly a need for pastoral care of the faithful. A healthy church, one that avoids Mission Creep, keeps the balance tipped in favor of the outsider not the insider.
- 7) **Focus on encouraging and mentoring new leaders.** Jesus trained the disciples and then gave them the opportunities to grow and lead. As the early church grew, it was always training new leaders and then turning them loose. It is especially important to encourage and support leaders of the next generation and listen to their ideas.
- 8) **Be flexible.** Churches are great at stifling new ideas. In mentoring new leadership, a healthy church entertains new ideas. If the idea meets the mission, there are people to do it, and it is within the budget, then do it. Mission Creep happens most often when the church hangs on to old ideas that are not working instead of embracing new ideas that further the mission.
- 9) **Keep listening.** A healthy missional cycle for a congregation is to know the why, listen, find the need, determine that it meets the mission, do it, and then listen some more.
- 10) **Keep it nimble.** A church cannot be all things to all people. The people will be exhausted. Find needs that use the church's assets and go do them. Examine the things that are no longer useful or no longer meet the current mission priorities. Have the ability to let go of things that have outlived their usefulness.

During COVID-19 and whenever we come out of it, these things will be very useful in planning the way forward and determining what the church's "new normal" will look like post pandemic.

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

## Racial Justice

As we continue our emphasis and ministry toward racial justice and an end to racism, here are updates on our current activities:

**Justice Leaders Collaborative** has been leading a six-week affinity group via Zoom for leaders in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod. Members of the Synod Council, Conference Deans, Table/Committee Chairs, Synod Staff, and other leaders have completed five of the six sessions entitled "An Introduction to Social Justice." Due to the nature of this interactive study, this training was limited to 30 participants by invitation.

**Racial Justice Training in 2021:** Justice Leaders Collaborative will be leading a racial justice training for the North/West Lower Michigan Synod entitled "White People Working for Racial Justice". This course will be offered via Zoom and will be open to all in the Synod who are interested. Further information including the dates and registration process will be available in January. Please watch for updates!

**Racial Justice Book Discussions** are continuing via Zoom. Throughout November, the group is discussing Caste by Isabel Wilkerson. Previously the group has completed discussions on Waking Up White by Debbie Irving, White Fragility by Robin Deangelo, and How to Be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi. If you are interested in reading the books as we strive to address the issue of racism and racial justice in our world, they are available on Amazon in print, e-book, and audiobook formats.

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

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.  
Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.  
Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.  
Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.  
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

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



NORTH/WEST LOWER MICHIGAN SYNOD ELCA

## A SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS

*Premiering Sunday, December 27, 2020*  
*Facebook Live*

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod will be producing A Service of Lessons and Carols video worship service that will premiere on December 27, 2020. This service will also be available in advance for congregational use.

We are looking for congregations to submit video recordings of hymns to be used during the service. If your congregation would like to record a hymn, please review the hymn list and submission guidelines linked below.

Sign-ups will close on November 27, 2020 and hymns will be assigned on a first-come first-served basis.

Learn More: <https://bit.ly/38zWB50>

If you have additional questions, please contact [communications@mittensynod.org](mailto:communications@mittensynod.org)

### Synod Finances as of October 31, 2020

|                                      | Current Year |              | Prior Year |              | Variance* |              |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
|                                      | October      | Year to Date | October    | Year to Date | October   | Year to Date |
| Revenue                              |              |              |            |              |           |              |
| Mission Support                      | 106,104      | 961,201      | 113,039    | 1,019,287    | (6,935)   | (58,086)     |
| Other                                | 3,244        | 48,869       | 9,287      | 124,650      | (6,043)   | (75,781)     |
| Total                                | 109,348      | 1,010,070    | 122,326    | 1,143,937    | (12,978)  | (133,867)    |
| Expenses                             |              |              |            |              |           |              |
| Churchwide Proportionate Share       | 53,052       | 480,600      | 56,519     | 509,644      | (3,467)   | (29,044)     |
| Other                                | 50,314       | 500,513      | 59,963     | 666,016      | (9,649)   | (165,503)    |
| Total                                | 103,366      | 981,113      | 116,482    | 1,175,660    | (13,116)  | (194,547)    |
| Net Assets Released from Restriction | 0            | 0            | 0          | 0            |           |              |
| Net Change to Fund Balance           | 5,982        | 28,957       | 5,844      | (31,723)     | 138       | 60,680       |

\*Variance in "other" revenue reflects no 2020 Synod Assembly. Variance in "other" expenses reflects no 2020 Synod Assembly and changes in staffing.

#### Synod Staff Video Sermons for Weekly Worship

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. These sermons are then released to the general public on Sunday afternoons.

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

#### Coronavirus Resources

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

Bishop Satterlee has issued a letter in response to the recent increase of COVID-19 cases in Michigan and is recommending the suspension of indoor in-person worship starting November 15, 2020.

Read Letter: <https://bit.ly/3eMQUCQ>

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services has provided new resources on managing stress and anxiety related to COVID-19.

Learn More: [www.Michigan.gov/StayWell](http://www.Michigan.gov/StayWell)

Bishop Satterlee and the Synod Staff continue to work remotely. The ELCA Churchwide Organization will not consider returning to the office until January 2021.

Learn More: <https://bit.ly/2MPx4to>

#### Upcoming Events

|                |                                     |        |   |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|--------|---|
| November 16-18 | Mediation Skills Training Institute | Online | Learn More: <a href="https://bit.ly/2luaiZ0">https://bit.ly/2luaiZ0</a> |
| November 26    | Thanksgiving                        |        |   |

**Due to the current government restrictions and recommendations on in-person gatherings, many upcoming events have been cancelled or postponed. Please check with the event's organizer for more information.**

## 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>                                   | <b>Kalamazoo Conference</b>              | <b>Rev. Kjersten Sullivan, Dean</b>   |
| Hope/Marlette (part-time)              | Rev. John Slazak, Contract Pastor                               | <b>Stony Lake Conference</b>             | <b>Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean</b>   |
| St. Paul/Au Gres                       | CALL ACCEPTED: Rev. Max Miller (SD), First Sunday, November 29. | <b>Sunrise Conference</b>                | <b>Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean</b>   |
| Grace/East Tawas                       | CALL ACCEPTED: Rev. Max Miller (SD), First Sunday, November 29. | Trinity/Ocqueoc<br>St. James/Rogers City | Rev. Laraine Sundin retiring;<br>last Sunday November 22.                                   |
| <b>Capital Area Conference</b>         | <b>Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean</b>                                    | <b>Traverse Conference</b>               | <b>Rev. Scott Torkko, Dean</b>  |
| <b>Greater Grand Rapids Conference</b> | <b>Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean</b>                        | St. Paul/Reed City                       | CALL ACCEPTED: Rev. Kara Shaw (A-OK), Transitional Pastor. Congregational Vote November 22. |