



**North/West Lower
Michigan Synod**

**2900 N. Waverly Rd.
Lansing, MI 48906**

**517-321-5066
mittensynod.org**

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Who Counts?

On the ELCA webpage under “Mission & Vision,” our church’s goal is presented as “Share the story of Jesus and the ELCA by engaging with 1 million new people as we grow the church together.” To accomplish this goal, we will “Activate each of us so more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love.” Our priority is to be a “Welcoming Church: Engaging new, young and diverse people.”

I am increasingly convinced that the world today needs the story of Jesus and the ELCA has a particularly powerful way of telling it. “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself” (John 12:32). Jesus’ words are a pronouncement of pure grace. I would prefer that we “activate each of us so more people know” *Jesus* rather than “the way of Jesus.” Unless, of course, we truly mean that Jesus is “the way” (John 14:6).

Engaging 1 million people is a lot. To accomplish this goal, each of our 65 synods will engage, on average, 15,385 people. In our synod, each congregation will engage, on average, 134 people. This is quite an undertaking for a denomination that takes Jesus’ words in John 13:35—“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”—so seriously that we are reticent to mention Jesus by name. We will need to help pastors and deacons preach about Jesus and all of us to talk about Jesus. I am committed to doing both.

As our Director of Evangelical Mission, Pastor Sprang is charged with taking a key leadership role in helping us figure out how we are going to engage our share of 1 million people and share the story of Jesus with them. I am excited that the churchwide organization clarifies we are engaging *new* people, which I understand to mean people new to the story of Jesus and the way of Christ.

I am also excited that “New people will include those who are younger and more diverse than our current membership.” However, I was disappointed but unsurprised to read, “Diversity means ethnic, economic and among LGBTQIA+ communities.” I am disappointed and unsurprised because this church does not explicitly name people who live with disabilities among the 1 million people this church intends to invite to know the way of Jesus. Perhaps this is simply beyond the ELCA’s capacity. If so, we should own that.

I am advised that there is no ELCA definition of diversity, that this description is not meant to be exhaustive, and that the ELCA is “working to address the intersectionality between disability, race, gender, and sexuality.” Yet, a sentence that begins “Diversity means...” strongly suggests that what follows is a definition. Moreover, when a group is rarely, if ever, explicitly included among the descriptors, the subtle message is that they do not “count.”

In response to this, I suggested changing “Diversity means” to “Diversity includes.” I also said that I would rather celebrate the ELCA for explicitly including persons who live with disabilities in the list of those who “count” than grieve that this church did not include us. Then again, we should not name persons who live with disabilities if including these brothers and sisters is beyond this church’s capacity. I have long advised congregations not to say persons who live with disabilities “count” if we don’t.

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While the ELCA does not yet explicitly name people who live with disabilities among those it will engage to know the way of Jesus, I am grateful that Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Jesus (not to mention our synod staff, synod council, and leaders and members throughout our synod and across our church) do. Jesus says, "But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:13-14). Throughout the gospels, Jesus consistently engages people who live with disabilities.

Following the way of Jesus, I will advocate for the inclusion of persons who live with disabilities in our understanding of diversity in any expression of the church where I serve in a leadership role, as we proclaim the good news of Christ crucified and the nearness of God's reign. I regard doing so as faithfully keeping the promise I made at ordination as a pastor and installation as a bishop "to preach and teach in accordance with the Holy Scriptures." In this Synod, persons who live with disabilities "count."

I am presently wearied by the reality of this church's regard for and response to persons who live with disabilities. I therefore ask for your prayers and invite you to join in standing with and advocating for people who live with disabilities within this church and among the 1 million new people we will engage to "know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love."

Peace,

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

Disability Ministries Resources

As our synod works to engage and support people who live with disabilities, our synod's Disability Ministries Task Force will be hosting a book study on *Copious Hosting: A Theology of Access for People with Disabilities* by Jennie Weiss Block (Amazon Link: <https://amzn.to/3ExDu9t>).

This five-week book study will be led by Pastors Clay Bates and Kate Van Valkenburg, members of the Synod's Disability Ministries Task Force, and will held on Wednesdays from 12:30 - 1:30pm ET starting January 12, 2022. Join us as we discuss the philosophical concepts of the disability movement, examine the Christian tradition from a disability perspective, and consider a theology of access for people who live with disabilities. Register Now: <https://forms.gle/BYowu2ZrnLpNnCcu8>

We also invite you review our Synod's collection of Disability Ministries resources including books, articles, videos, and websites. Below is a selection of recommend resources:

Copious Hosting: A Theology of Access for People with Disabilities by Jennie Weiss Block
Amazon Link: <https://amzn.to/3ExDu9t>

"Learning to Picture God from Those Who Cannot See" by The Rev. Dr. Craig A. Satterlee
Read Now: <https://bit.ly/3kgNI6z>

Together Bible Study Curriculum
<https://togethersmallgroups.org/>

All Belong Center for Inclusive Education
www.allbelong.org

More resources are available on the Disability Ministries Resources page of the Synod website:
<https://www.mittensynod.org/disability-ministries-resources/>

Disability Ministries Task Force

By Pastor Clay Bates

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod is excited to introduce our new Disability Ministries Task Force. The members of this task force are Pastor Travis Wilson, Pastor Rachel Laughlin, Pastor Megan Crouch, Pastor Kate Van Valkenburg, Pastor Kate Schroeder, Bishop Craig Satterlee, Pastor Rosanne Anderson, and myself, Pastor Clay Bates, Chair of the Disability Ministries Task Force.

The mission, or purpose, of the Disability Ministries Task Force is to serve as a reservoir of knowledge and resources for congregations who desire to begin or enhance their ministry with people who live with disabilities. This could include doing ministry with those who are already participating in the life of the congregation or welcoming those who live outside of the context of the worshipping community.

The term “disability” refers to a condition of body or mind that requires accommodation. It covers a wide range of intellectual, physical, sensory, and mental health conditions. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 1 in 4 adults in the U.S. live with some type of disability, and this number is growing.

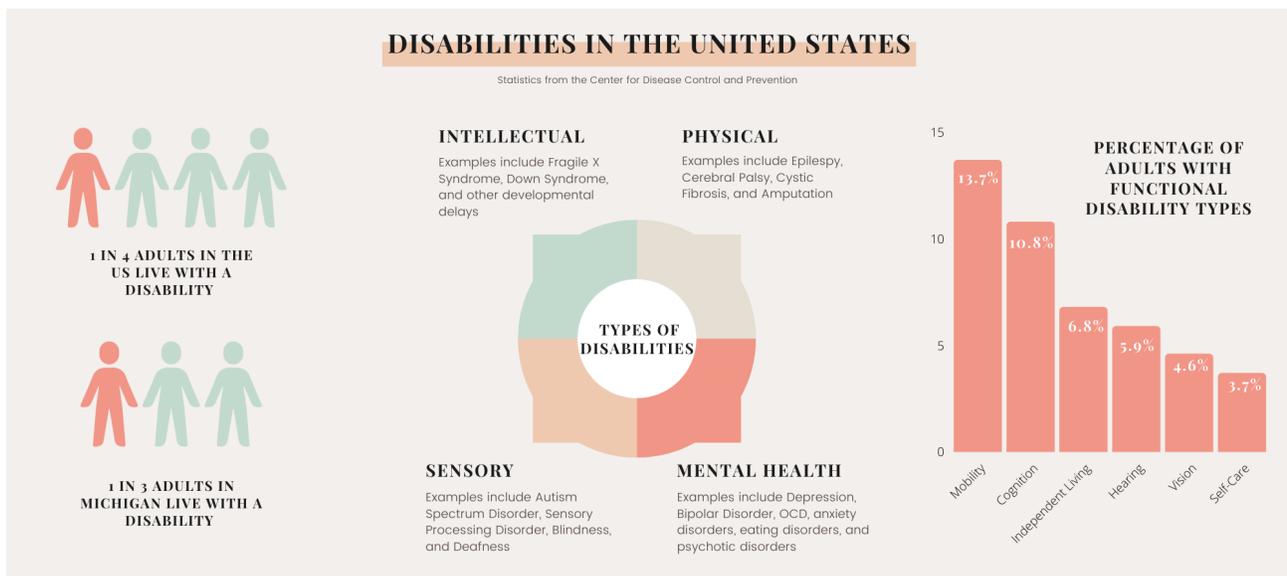
What causes me concern is that this number isn't reflected in our congregations or we are unaware of the accurate number due to disabilities that are considered “hidden,” such as mental health conditions. Oftentimes, when we do have a visitor or member who lives with a disability, we find ourselves at a loss as to how to effectively include them in worship and do ministry together. And so, the Disability Ministries Task Force exists to help leaders in our congregations who desire to be more effective in welcoming and doing ministry with people who live with disabilities.

So, what happens when you reach out to a member of the Disability Ministries Task Force? First, we listen to you so that we can determine what your issue and/or needs are. Then, we'll bring back recommendations and information that best addresses your needs. Our response can take a variety of forms, custom designed for you and your situation. It could include providing information on a certain topic that helps you understand a disability or gives you ideas for action or it could be a visit from someone on the task force or assistance in setting up a meeting with congregational leaders to establish a plan of action.

The Disability Ministries Task Force is also happy to provide a brief presentation to your congregation or council or take part in a pulpit exchange for the purpose of providing a biblical foundation for ministry with people who live with disabilities.

For more information about how the Disability Ministries Task Force may be of service to you, please reach out to me at clayhbates@gmail.com or to any of the other Disability Ministries Task Force members.

Please pray with me that the Holy Spirit may bless this task force and its ministry with guidance and wisdom as we seek to assist you in including people who live with disabilities in the life and ministry of our congregations.



Racial Justice

"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." (Galatians 3:28)

Ignatius of Loyola was a Spanish Catholic priest and theologian who founded the religious order of the Society of Jesus (The Jesuits) in 1541. As the spiritual director of the Jesuits, Ignatius wrote his guide to living a life centered in Jesus in *The Spiritual Exercises* published in 1548. *The Spiritual Exercises* use meditations, contemplations, and prayers over a 30-day period to facilitate a deepening awareness of God's presence.

Fast forward almost 500 years to our present day. We find ourselves living in a world and country continuing to struggle with social injustice and racism. As a child of the '60s, I thought we had moved ahead in racial equality. However, recent events in our country have made me realize that racism is still deeply engrained in us and in our society. After some 400 years of racial struggles in our country, we are beginning to realize that the journey toward racial justice is a life-long journey. It can be a wearying journey and we might wonder how we can be sustained throughout it.

Thinking back to Ignatius' writing, I recently discovered the book *The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice: A Month of Meditations with Ignatius of Loyola* (2021, Anamchara Books). Based on *The Spiritual Exercises* written by Ignatius, this book is written by Patrick Saint-Jean, an American Jesuit who was born and raised in Haiti and currently teaches at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. Saint-Jean wrote this book at a time when he was experiencing a deep emotional and spiritual fatigue as he experienced the pain of the struggle to "live while Black in America."

Saint-Jean writes: "In this book we will use the Spiritual Exercises as our framework for exploring the ways Christ calls us to the work of antiracism. This book's premise is that antiracism is not an optional aspect of the spiritual life, but rather that it is essential to becoming all that God calls us to be...Engaging in antiracist work is a constant quest for grace to see each other as Christ sees us."

I am inviting other travelers on this journey toward racial justice to join me for the season of Advent as we explore the ways in which God invites us to a more racially just world. We will use the book by Patrick Saint-Jean as our launching pad. Please watch the Synod's Weekly Update for a link to a Facebook page where we will be able to share our insights together. My hope and prayer is that our reflecting on this book together will be one more way in which God sustains us in our journey toward racial equality.

The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice: A Month of Meditations with Ignatius of Loyola by Patrick Saint-Jean is available on Amazon: <https://amzn.to/3GGfGSC>

*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.*

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

Synod Finances

Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund	September	YTD
Mission Support Revenue	103,951	899,612
Other Revenue	4,525	134,410
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0
Total Revenue	108,476	1,034,022
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	51,976	449,806
Other Expenses	64,664	451,682
Total Expenses	116,639	901,488
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	(8,164)	132,534
Beginning Fund Balance	374,896	234,198
Ending Fund Balance	366,732	366,732
Other Fund Balances		
Unrestricted-Designated		700,623
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related		1,045,516
Temporarily-Restricted		318,778
Permanently-Restricted		924,639
Total - All Funds (as of 9/30/21)		3,356,288

Due to scheduling for this month's newsletter, Synod Financials for the month of October are not available.
Updated Synod Financials will be available in the December edition of the Bishop's Newsletter.

2021 Annual Report Covers & 2022 Mission Support Statement of Intent Forms

The ELCA has released 2021 Annual Report Covers. This resource is designed for congregations to use during their annual meetings and includes a letter from Presiding Bishop Eaton, a few references to stories that can be found in Stories of Faith in Action and a litany and a hymn for worship.

Download Now: <https://bit.ly/2ZNtZUQ>

As partners in ministry, the ELCA invites you to make a Statement of Intent to Synod and Churchwide ministries for 2022. Through the spiritual practices of invitation, reflection, and response, we faithfully consider how to share God's abundant grace. As your congregation prepares a spending plan for 2022, please review and submit the 2022 Mission Support Statement of Intent Form. Once completed, forms should be emailed to finance@mittensynod.org and revdsprang@gmail.com.

Download Now: <https://bit.ly/3EBVShn>

Coronavirus Resources

Given the recent rise in COVID-19 cases in the state of Michigan, it is important to review the current guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to best protect yourself and others from the COVID-19 virus.

The CDC continues to recommend masks be worn in indoor public places by everyone, regardless of vaccine status, in areas of substantial or high transmission. While the state of Michigan does not have a statewide requirement to wear a mask, local health departments, establishments, and school districts may have additional rules that must be followed. It is safer to wear a mask in high-risk settings to best protect yourself and others. Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3GKQU3J>

Vaccination continues to be the most important public health action to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone aged 12 and older is eligible to receive a vaccine and booster shots are available for individuals 65 and older and individuals with an increase risk due to underlying health conditions. Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3iDnU3V>

View all COVID-19 resources: <http://bit.ly/3rL2fsF>

ELCA Youth Gathering

Every three years, 30,000 high school youth and their adult leaders from across the ELCA gather for a week of faith formation. 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.

Early Bird Registration will close on November 21, 2021! Learn More: <https://bit.ly/2VFb0de>

ELCA World Hunger Advent Resources

Celebrate the excitement, anticipation, and wonder of Christ's birth with new ELCA World Hunger Advent resources!

These resources are designed to equip congregations in their work to end hunger and poverty and include an Advent calendar, weekly study guide, and a Congregation Action Kit for use at home or church.

View Resources: <https://bit.ly/3CItp9g>



NORTH/WEST LOWER MICHIGAN SYNOD ELCA

A SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS

Sunday, December 26, 2021

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod will be re-releasing A Service of Lessons and Carols worship video for congregational use on Sunday, December 26, 2021.

This worship service was created last year and consists of recordings from congregations throughout the Synod. A bulletin is also available and will be included with the video file.

If you would like to use this worship video on December 26, 2021, please complete the sign-up form: <https://bit.ly/3mDehnN>

If you have additional questions, please contact communications@mittensynod.org

Upcoming Events

November 15-19	Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders	https://bit.ly/3lzG3RB
November 25	Thanksgiving	
December 24	Christmas Eve	
December 25	Christmas 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	
St. Peter/Unionville (Part-Time)	CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Jeff Bonn, Installation November 21		
Capital Area Conference		Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean	
Christ United/Dewitt (Part-Time)	Episcopal Diocese of Michigan taking the lead in the call process / Submitted MSP		
All Saints/Mason (Part-Time)	Pastor Erick Johnson, Stated Supply / Seeking a candidate		
Greater Grand Rapids Conference		Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean	
Immanuel/Big Rapids (Part-Time)	Supply Pastors		
Christ/Wyoming	Pastor Jack Ferra, Interim / Pastor Justin Walker On Leave: Disability		
St. Luke/Grand Rapids	Pastor David Blank last Sunday October 17 / Supply Pastors		
Kalamazoo Conference		Rev. Joan Oleson, Dean	
St. John/Baroda (Part-Time)	Pastor Vicky Blough, Stated Supply through mid-January / Seeking additional candidates		
Immanuel/Allegan (Part-Time)	Pastor Dennis Smith, Stated Supply / CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Christopher Laughlin		
Hope/Plainwell (Part-Time)	Supply Pastors / Preparing MSP		
St. Peter/Battle Creek	Pastor Cheryl Johnson and Pastor Michael Anton, Stated Supply		
Messiah/Constantine (Part-Time)	Pastor Christopher Laughlin last Sunday November 28		
Stony Lake Conference		Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean	
Sunrise Conference		Rev. Chrysy Bright, Dean	
Traverse Conference		Rev. Scott Torkko, Dean	
Evangelical/East Jordan	Pastor Matt Deames, Stated Supply		
Trinity/Manton	Pastor Ruth Overdier retired November 7 / Pastor Bill Heuther, Stated Supply		