Bishop's Newsletter

October 2023



"See the Whole Board"

In a certain episode of *The West Wing*, President Bartlett said at different points to Charlie and Sam, "See the whole board." In the first instance, he was talking about a real chessboard. In the second, he was discussing deployment of naval resources around the globe. In both cases, he was admonishing his staff to back up and look at the big picture.

Jesus puts it another way. Jesus says, "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates" (Matthew 24: 29–33).

When I allow myself to step back and perceive all that is happening, I see beyond the things that want to get in my face and command my attention: congregation conflicts, call processes, and closings. I discover ways congregations could work together and remain vital. If only they could give up a certain sense of entitlement. I perceive that we can stop saving for a rainy day because we are in the midst of a torrential downpour. But even more important, I see beyond the survival of the church as it is currently configured.

The war in Ukraine continues. Israel and Gaza are exploding. The images from our southern border are heartbreaking. Despite positive economic news, the need in our congregations' feeding ministries is up. Our government is deadlocked. Our children need support. Gun violence is real. The planet is dying. Cancer is relentless. Forgiveness is hard to find.

And, when I am focused on the things that want to get in my face and demand my attention, Jesus feels far away. But when I step back and see the whole board, when I attend to signs of Jesus's coming, I perceive that Jesus is near, at the very gate. No, things may not turn out the way I or others want or think are best. But one way or another, Jesus will bring life.

I am not saying that congregation conflicts, call processes, and closings are unimportant. I spend most of my days dealing with these three things. However, resolving conflicts, calling pastors, and fighting to keep congregations from closing (or helping congregations to understand the time has come to close) are not important because they allow our church to go on as it always has. These issues are important because people need the gospel and Jesus has work to do in the world.

Seeing the whole board and attending to the signs of Christ coming, we know that Jesus not only has work to do in the world, but that Jesus is doing it. I needed this reminder. Perhaps you do too.

Peace,

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

You Are Witnesses of These Things

Since the post WWII era, the primary evangelism program of most churches has been "If we build it, they will come." Now we find ourselves in a dilemma. We are totally out of practice when it comes to sharing Jesus with others. It is not that some people have that talent and others don't, it is more like a muscle that we have failed to use and it has grown weak. It is our baptismal covenant to share the Good News. So, like a losing sports team, we are called to get back to the basics and practice the fundamentals. And the most fundamental aspect of being a follower of Jesus is to share Jesus with others.

Bishop Craig Satterlee and Chelsey Satterlee have written a "how to" book, *You Are Witnesses of These Things: Sharing the Story of Jesus,* to help the church exercise the muscle of sharing Jesus. We used the book at our 2023 Synod Assembly, we have made copies widely available across our synod, other synods have used the book, and a we recently held a retreat on the book to help our synod, and the church, get comfortable with sharing Jesus.

We gathered with church leaders from around our synod on September 17-18 at the St. Francis Retreat Center in DeWitt to learn and explore "sharing Jesus." 24 folks, the majority of whom were lay people, gathered to learn how to witness to the story of Jesus using the process outlined in Bishop Satterlee and Chelsey Satterlee's book. They shared their favorite Jesus stories, learned how to construct statements of Good News, followed an outline of how sharing Jesus could go, and practiced sharing Jesus through testimonies. Testimonies are not an "in your face" judgement or shaming. A testimony is telling the truth about what a person has seen and heard.



By far the most profound part of the retreat was when participants shared their testimonies. They were very personal stories about how Jesus has walked with folks in their lives and statements of Good News to share with others. It was more powerful than ad campaigns, or social media posts, or knocking on doors. It was a friend sharing with another friend or family member an intimate account of Jesus in their life and offering good news to others in a way that was non-threatening and compassionate.

In the last hour of the retreat, I shared ideas on how, after reading and practicing the steps in the book for sharing Jesus, a congregation can make sharing Jesus the top priority of the church. We talked about hospitality and looking for ways to share Jesus in everything we do in the church. We talked about getting out of the church building and going to places to meet new people and cultivating opportunities to share Jesus.



This is the heart of where the church, local churches and national church denominations, need to focus their attention right now. Sharing Jesus is the heart of what we are called to do. It is the "bearing fruit" that the parables of Jesus talk about. Sharing Jesus with a world that needs to hear the Good News of God is where the church needs refocus its energy and it is happening right now in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod.

Pastor David Sprang

Assistant to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission

An Opportunity for Self-Examination

Over the past few months, our congregations have increasingly relied on retired pastors as we work to cover both congregations without called pastors and congregations whose called pastor is facing serious health concerns. We thank retired pastors who continue to preach the Word, administer the Sacraments, support colleagues in active ministry by listening to them and praying for them, and genuinely entrust their former ministry to the Lord of the church and their current leader.

As we've shared before, our church is facing some new realities in regards to the number of pastors available to serve congregations. The ELCA recently shared a report with the Conference of Bishops that showed the trends of candidates approved for entrance into Word and Sacrament ministry. As we've seen for the past two years, the number of candidates is declining. There were 183 candidates across the entire ELCA in 2022 and the same number is estimated for 2023.

Facing this new reality, many retired pastors are increasingly being asked or are asking to support congregations and synods. While in some cases this support is appropriate, many synods and congregations are experiencing situations in which it is not, consistently having to do with retired pastors not maintaining appropriate boundaries. Therefore, across the ELCA, there has been an increase in discussion about how best to support retired pastors in maintaining healthy and appropriate boundaries. Our synod is no exception as we have experienced a number of situations involving retired pastors not maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Maintaining healthy and appropriate boundaries is an expectation for all pastors, both in active ministry and retired. We experience former and retired pastors crossing boundaries by seeking roles in the very ministries they relinquished, providing unsolicited critique and direction to the called pastor, and sharing outdated information to advance their own status at the expense of the called leader. While those former or retired pastors may feel that their intentions are good, they are actually harming the ministry they loved and served.

Like everyone else, as pastors age, filters may lessen and pastors may come to value their own judgment over the policies and best practices of this church. We experience this when former and retired pastors speak inappropriately during meetings in the congregation, violate personal boundaries (uninvited touching, unwanted hugs and kisses during the passing of the peace, stalking), and request meetings with young (usually female) pastors to provide "mentoring." While those former or retired pastors may feel that their heart is pure, they are actually harming the ministry they loved and served.

As most have experienced, it can be hard to let go of something we love and have someone else take our place. This is especially true when a former or retired pastor has served a congregation for a long time and remains in the community. However, maintaining appropriate boundaries and respecting the current leader is an important part of helping the congregation move forward and grow in their ministry. When former and retired pastors question a new leader's judgment, they undermine the current pastor's ministry. This may result in the current pastor experiencing physical manifestations of stress and has even pushed some to the brink of resignation. While those former or retired pastors may feel that their actions are justified by prayer, their behavior actually harms the ministry they loved and served.

In response to policies regarding maintaining appropriate boundaries, some former, retired, and ready-to-retire pastors have said that current leaders should develop thicker skins, become less anxious, and learn to appreciate their elders. Even if that was ELCA policy, which it is not, respecting your elders becomes difficult when your elders undermine your ministry, violate your boundaries, and treat you with disrespect.

Concern over the behavior of some retired pastors led the ELCA to adopt a policy directing Synod Councils to conduct a triannual review of retired pastors:

1.f.: The Synod Council shall engage in a regular, periodic examination of all ministers of Word and Sacrament on the retired roster such that each and every retired minister's status is reviewed at least once during a three-year cycle. *Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, 36.

We also invite you to consult the Call Process Manual where you will find (1) Addendum G: Pastoral Ethics: Pastors and Rostered Ministers Relating to Previously Served Parishes, Adopted by the Synod Council of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod September 2012 and (2) Addendum H: Covenant for Departing Pastors. Both of these documents were established prior to 2013 and will continue to be used in the future. The ELCA Church Council adopted similar guidelines for the whole church in 1998.

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Our synod has been slow in implementing the review policy; however, the increase in expressions of concern about the behavior of some of our former and retired pastors pushes us to fully implement it. The implementation of this policy provides us all an opportunity to engage in self-examination as we all play a part in supporting healthy and appropriate boundaries. Congregation leaders and rostered minister colleagues have a responsibility to assist and support former and retired pastors as they maintain appropriate boundaries and to hold them accountable when they do not. However, the most effective accountability comes from other retired and former pastors. As a synod, we offer boundary trainings to help rostered ministers refresh their understanding of healthy and appropriate boundaries. Whether active, retired, or on leave from call, rostered ministers are expected to participate in boundary training every three years. Our next boundary training will be offered via Zoom in January 2024.

Most recently, the expressions of concern about the behavior of former and retired pastors have come from rostered ministers and congregation leaders both inside and outside of our synod. First, we have received reports that some of our retired pastors are sharing outdated information with congregations in the call process, including information about "the annual draft of first call candidates," and the availability of mission developers or redevelopers. Sharing outdated information only hinders a congregation's call process as it sets unrealistic expectations. As we've shared before, the annual assignment of seminary graduates to synods was eliminated several years ago due to the low number of graduates. Seminary Graduates are assigned to their home synod and the bishops work together to assist them in securing a call in a preferred synod. And, as we've shared before, the ELCA ended its mission developer/redeveloper program, as investing a lot of money in a few congregations was not a fruitful strategy.

Second, experienced pastors that we recruit for open congregations increasingly ask if the congregation comes with a retired pastor or if the former pastor lives in the community. They state that former and retired pastors are trouble they don't need and decline to be available for interview. The increase in being asked this question indicates the pervasiveness of this issue across the ELCA. As we recruit pastors, we want to be able to demonstrate that our synod is attempting to address their concerns.

Finally, there is a sudden confusion over who can ordain and install pastors within our synod, with some of our retired pastors suggesting that they can be authorized to perform ordinations and installations. Our current Synod Constitution says the bishop shall "exercise solely this church's power to ordain (or provide for the ordination by another synod bishop of) approved candidates who have received and accepted a properly issued, duly attested letter of call" (S.8.12.c.). The bishop is also to "Install (or provide for the installation of) rostered ministers whose calls the bishop has attested" (S.8.12.c.). For this reason, we encourage newly called pastors and congregations to be in conversation with Bishop Satterlee very soon after the call has been accepted to arrange the ordination and/or installation.

Pastors offering themselves to perform ordinations or installations in place of the bishop is akin to former pastors offering themselves to baptize in place of the called pastor. The guidelines adopted by Synod Council in 2012 state: "It is the responsibility of the former pastor to decline invitations to conduct pastoral acts in any former parish. It is important that the burden of such decisions does not fall back to the pastor who currently holds that call." We note that Bishop Satterlee will occasionally invite retired pastors to represent the synod at funerals of rostered ministers and congregation celebrations.

In addition to addressing concerns within our synod, planning is underway for our 2025 Synod Assembly, which includes a bishop election. As with any bishop election, it is the responsibility of the current bishop to ensure the synod is in good order. Whether it's to enable starting a new term focused on new priorities or ensure the next bishop doesn't unknowingly step on a landmine, it is the current bishop's responsibility not to leave difficult things undone. Again, from the Synod Council guidelines: "It is the responsibility of the former pastor to be supportive of the successor, even when that is difficult to do. The responsibility for the success of the current pastor is also part of the former pastor's responsibility."

Releasing ministries we love and entrusting them to someone new is daily dying and rising, our baptismal vocation, sharing Jesus's abundant life. As we look to the future, we thank retired pastors for continuing to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments while maintaining healthy and appropriate boundaries, respecting the polices and best practices of this church, and trusting new and current leaders' judgment. Thank you!

Salt, Light, and Leaven: 2024 Synod Assembly

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod is excited to announce "Salt, Light, and Leaven" as the theme for the 2024 Synod Assembly!



Jesus names us "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world," and compares the kingdom of heaven or reign of God to "leaven" (Matthew 5:13–16; 13:33). At the 2024 Synod Assembly, we will celebrate ways our congregations are "salt of the earth," "light of the world," and "leaven" of the kingdom in ways large and small as we prayerfully participate in Jesus's own work of reconciling the world to God's very self.

In order to celebrate and share the ways our congregations are "salt of the earth," "light of the world," and "leaven" of the kingdom, congregations or groups of congregations will have the opportunity to produce and submit a video showcasing one way they are salt, light, and leaven. We will select four videos to be shown during the 2024 Synod Assembly. Congregations who submit a video will receive a \$100 donation to their ministry and congregations whose videos are selected to be shown at the 2024 Synod Assembly will receive a \$500 donation to their ministry

All congregations in our synod are invited to submit a video for consideration. There is a limit of one video per congregation. The goal of the video is to provide an experience of the congregation's ministry rather than a report about it. Think of the video as a "virtual tour" of an aspect of the congregation and ministry. This might be an annual event, such as providing backpacks to school kids, or an on-going ministry such as a food pantry. Preference will be given to ministries that in some way include sharing the story of Jesus. Videos must be 8-10 minutes in length.

Congregations interested in submitting a video must complete the interest form by January 15, 2024. This form confirms a congregation's intent to submit a video. All videos must be submitted by April 3, 2024 for review.

Selected congregations will be notified on April 17, 2024. Videos from congregations who are not selected will be shared on the Synod's social media after the conclusion of the 2024 Synod Assembly. As this opportunity is for congregations, Synod task forces, tables, and ministries are not eligible. Congregations should review the submission guidelines carefully and contact <u>assembly@mittensynod.org</u> with any questions.

Video Submission Guidelines

- Congregations must be located in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod. Synod task forces/tables/ ministries are not eligible for this opportunity.
- There is a limit of one video per congregation.
- Videos must focus on one area or ministry that shows how the congregation or group of congregations is salt, light, and leaven. Preference will be given to ministries that include sharing the story of Jesus.
- Congregations must produce and submit their own videos. The Synod Staff is not available to assist with video production.
- Videos must be 8-10 minutes in length.
- Congregations interested in submitting a video must complete the interest form by January 15, 2024. Interest Form: <u>https://forms.gle/xVqyZF1GXYtR9occ8</u>
- All videos must be submitted by April 3, 2024. Video Submission: https://bit.ly/3tdgLPG

Israel-Hamas War

In response to the Hamas attacks in southern Israel on October 7 and Israel's declaration of war against Hamas, including the ongoing siege of Gaza, the ELCA offers the following statements from some of our Lutheran and global partners in the region. We invite you to read these statements and join us in prayer.

Letter from Bishop Dr. Sani-Ibrahim Azar: <u>https://bit.ly/3POV53Y</u>

Letter to Bishop Dr. Sani-Ibrahim Azar from Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton: https://bit.ly/ELCA_ELCJHL

Statement from the Lutheran World Federation: <u>https://bit.ly/3rMhRS4</u>

Statement from Presiding Bishop Eaton on Israel-Hamas War: <u>https://bit.ly/3PT8RCM</u>

ELCA Resources on Israel-Hamas War: <u>https://elca.org/Israel-Hamas-War</u>

God, our refuge and strength, you have bound us together in a common life. In all our conflicts, help us to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, to listen for your voice amid competing claims, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship, page 76*).

Lutheran Disaster Response has a history of providing support for our partners and anticipates answering calls for assistance when the time comes. The ELCA has long-standing relationships with many partners in the region, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and Augusta Victoria Hospital, which is operated by the Lutheran World Federation.

The most pressing needs that Lutheran Disaster Response and their partners can address are food, water and medical supplies. Support for hospitals will be another priority as the need for medical assistance continues to grow. Additionally, Lutheran Disaster Response is coordinating with the Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries desk to provide interfaith emotional and spiritual care support for communities in the United States. Gifts to "Middle East Crisis" will be used to address humanitarian needs in the region. Give now: <u>https://bit.ly/3ZSTAq6</u>

Adult Theological Education - Luther's Small Catechism

NORTH/WEST LOWER MICHIGAN SYNOD ELCA

ADULT THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM

JOIN THE REV. DR. KIT KLEINHANS, DEAN OF TRINITY LUTHERAN SEMINARY AT CAPITAL UNIVERSITY, FOR A SIX-WEEK STUDY OF LUTHER'S CATECHISMS!

TUESDAYS STARTING OCTOBER 24 ZOOM When Luther wrote that familiar question, "What does this mean?" he meant it! He wanted Christians to understand their faith and to see how God was at work in their lives, in the church, and in the world.

Join the Rev. Dr. Kit Kleinhans, Dean of Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University, for a six-week study of Luther's catechisms. Let's dig deep into what God means *for us*!

The class will meet on six consecutive Tuesday evenings: October 24, 31, November 7, 14, 21, 28 from 7:00 - 8:15pm ET. This course is open to all adults, both laypeople and rostered ministers, and is free of charge. Sessions will be recorded and available to registered participants. Registration is required and will close on October 19, 2023.

Register now: https://forms.gle/DQu3F2QicSDrPjWp8

Synod Finances				
	September	Year to Date		
Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund				
Mission Support Revenue	94,069	789,806		
Other Revenue	14,984	96,307		
Total Revenue	109,053	886,113		
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	47,034	394,903		
Other Expenses	63,407	487,536		
Total Expenses	110,441	882,439		
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	(1,388)	3,674		
Beginning Fund Balance	514,388	509,326		
Ending Fund Balance	513,000	513,000		
Other Fund Balances				
Unrestricted-Designated		615,059		
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related*		769,123		
Temporarily-Restricted		322,404		
Permanently-Restricted		1,002,547		
Total - All Funds (as of 8/31/23)		3,222,134		

*September 30 ELCA Ministry Growth Fund Account Statements were not available at the time of publishing this summary. The amounts shown here reflect balances as of 8/31/23,

Congregational Budget Presentations

As you prepare your congregation's budget for presentation, consider including a Narrative and/or Program Budget.

ELCA Churchwide provides resources for both options at <u>elca.org</u> under Resources/Financial/ Congregations. Direct links to these resources are included below:

Program Budgets: <u>https://bit.ly/3FbaGWx</u>

Narrative Budgets: https://bit.ly/45oKItl

Stories of Faith in Action

The September 2023 Mission Support Memo is now available!

In this edition, learn about ecumenical partnerships in a story from the Delaware-Maryland Synod and the ELCA's new Congregation and Synod Support Team that encompasses Congregational Stewardship, Mission Support, and Storytelling Engagement.

The September 2023 Mission Support Memo and previous Mission Support Memos are located on the ELCA website: <u>https://bit.ly/3Qf7waL</u>

Solar Faithful Webinar

Join the Synod's Environmental Stewardship Task Force on Thursday, October 26 at 7:00pm ET to learn about Solar Faithful and how your congregation can install clean, renewable solar power.

Register now: <u>https://bit.ly/468ZUeT</u>



In October, we celebrate Pastor Appreciation Month and recognize all rostered ministers—pastors and deacons!

Read Bishop Satterlee's message: <u>https://bit.ly/3tkYGiw</u>

Boundary Training for Rostered Ministers

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod will be offering Boundary Training as a four part series via Zoom. These 1-hour sessions will be held on Thursdays at 11am ET on January 11, 18, 25, and February 1, 2024. Participants are expected to attend all four sessions.

We are privileged that Barbara Keller, Misconduct Prevention Director for the ELCA, will be the presenter for the initial session on January 11. Pastor David Sprang and Pastor Rosanne Anderson will lead the other three sessions. Register Now: <u>https://bit.ly/3ZU0HyE</u>



2024 ELCA Youth Gathering

The 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering will be held July 16-20, 2024 in New Orleans under the theme, "Created to Be." It will also include MYLE, tABLE, and Young Adult gatherings.

Registration for the ELCA Youth Gathering is now open! Registration prices, deadlines, and information about the process is available on the Gathering's website. Priority registration will close on November 1. Learn more: <u>https://elca.org/gathering</u>

The application for Gathering Volunteer Corps applications has been extended to November 1! Serve as a volunteer next summer and inspire the young people of this church. Food and lodging is covered for volunteers. Learn more: https://www.elca.church/gathering/attend/volunteers

As you plan for the 2024 Gathering, Pastor Dan Schewe, our synod's ELCA Youth Gathering Champion, is available to answer questions. Email Pastor Schewe at <u>mittensynodgathering2024@gmail.com</u>.

October 16	World Food Day	Learn more: <u>https://bit.ly/44PfA63</u>
October 16-18	My Burden is Light Preaching Retreat	Learn more: <u>http://bit.ly/3K5z0gc</u>
October 23 - 26	Ecumenical Community of Michigan Retreat	Learn more: <u>https://bit.ly/3XTMGjs</u>
October 24	Adult Theological Education: Small Catechism	Learn more: <u>https://bit.ly/3rnwR81</u>
October 26	Solar Faithful Webinar	Learn more: <u>https://bit.ly/468ZUeT</u>
October 26	Tending the Treasure Webinar with Lori Fedyk	Learn more: <u>https://bit.ly/45xuY7f</u>
October 31	Reformation Day	

Upcoming Events

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	Pastor Emily Olsen, Dean	Kalamazoo Conference	Pastor Joan Oleson, Dean	
Messiah/Bay City	Pastor Dan Stoneback, Interim / Interviewing	Lord of Life/Portage	Congregational vote October 22	
St. Matthew/Bridgeport (Part-Time)	Pastor Andreas Teich, Stated Supply / Congregational vote October 15	Prince of Peace/Portage	Seeking to call a deacon / Seeking candidates	
Trinity/Midland	Pastor Jeff Gramza; Installation October 21	Stony Lake Conference	Pastor Sarah Samuelson, Dean	
Resurrection/Saginaw (Part-Time)	Pastor Andreas Teich, Stated Supply / Seeking a partnership or quarter to third	Harbor of Grace/Muskegon	Pastor Jack Ferra, Interim / Discerning future	
	time pastor	Sunrise Conference	Pastor Megan Crouch, Dean	
Capital Area Conference	Pastor Neil Brady, Dean	Norra Life (Algorie Country		
University/East Lansing	Pastor Bryan Schneider- Thomas, Interim / Interviewing	New Life/Alcona County	Supply Pastors / Preparing MSP	
		St. Paul/Alpena	Seeking a part-time assistant pastor	
Faith/Okemos	Pastor Bruce Thorsen, Transitional Pastor; Installation October 22			
		Traverse Conference	Pastor Jonathan Reid, Dean	
		Feast of Victory/Acme	Pastor Ruth Overdier, Stated	
Greater Grand Rapids Conference	Pastor Julie Schneider- Thomas, Pastor Kate Van Valkenburg, Co-Deans	(Part-Time)	Supply / CALL ACCEPTED: Pastor Haley Vay Beaman; Installation November 19	
St. Luke/Grand Rapids	Pastor Galen Knutson, Intentional Interim / Congregational vote October 15	St. Paul/Reed City	Pastor Marcy Miller, Stated Supply / Seeking candidates	
Trinity/Grand Rapids	Pastor Bob Linstrom retiring November 2023			
Bread of Life/Hudsonville	Supply Pastors			
Peace/Sparta	Pastor Bryan Schneider- Thomas last Sunday October 15.			
Zion/Woodland (Part-Time)	Supply Pastors / Seeking candidates			