



North/West Lower Michigan Synod

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"Say the Magic Words!"

The problem with a "bishop's stick," of course, is that it is too long to function as a magic wand. If I had a magic wand, I could, for example, conjure up a 35-year-old pastor, married with two kids, with 30 years' experience, who is independently wealthy, and so does not require a salary, and attracts young families without changing a thing in the church. "Parochus perfectus!" More importantly, I could make COVID-19 disappear, banish the powers of violence and racism, and heal the divisions in our country.

Obviously, the danger of my having a magic wand is that I might do something crazy with it. I might, for example, make all church services—indoor, parking lot, and online—disappear for four Sundays. "Destruunt cultum!" Church doors would spontaneously seal shut. Church parking lots would have perpetual thunderstorms. Congregations' online platforms would only display puppies and kitties playing. It would be kind of like when God told Jeremiah to stop praying for the people (7:16).

For I hear more grumbling about worship than gratitude for worship. Now the Bible attests that grumbling or murmuring is a characteristic of God's people. We miss singing, hugging, sitting together in our pews, and coffee hour. Some of us are still missing the Sacrament. Yet, Scripture also attests that eventually people like Moses, Elijah, and even God reach their limit and get fed up. I learned very young that, when something gets taken away, we miss it, cherish it, and appreciate what we have rather than complain about what we don't. "Destruunt cultum!"

I also hear that pastors, deacons, musicians, and technicians are just plain tuckered out and don't know how they can take vacation or a break. A spirit of competition and the fear that people will go elsewhere keep congregations from working together so that everyone gets a break. Shutting worship down would give everyone a chance to rest. "Destruunt cultum!"

So it's probably good that I don't have a magic wand. All I have are some magic words, words that, if we say them every day and try a little harder to live by them, are bound to produce magic. "Como os he amado, también os améis los unos á los otros." "Even as I have loved you, you also love one another," Jesus said (John 13:34). Taking these magic words to heart turns grumbling into gratitude and frees us to put others' needs ahead of our own, as Jesus did for us on the cross.

"Améis los unos á los otros." Perhaps these magic words will quiet our complaining. We might even worship as a congregation with another congregation one Sunday—something easily done virtually—and promise to come back as a way of insisting our leaders take a break.

Like Israel in the wilderness, we still have a long way—and a long while—to go before this pandemic is over. The University of Washington projects the virus will kill 410,450 Americans by January 1, 2021. We can quibble about the exact number, but the trend is alarming. We can save lives by wearing masks, social distancing, and minimizing gatherings. In my own prayers, I hear Jesus bidding us to embrace these practices as ways we love one another as Jesus loves us. We also need to begin to tell ourselves that celebrating Advent and Christmas differently is preferable to celebrating Advent and Christmas by attending funerals that could've been avoided.

Magic won't do it. Loving one another as Jesus loves us will. "Améis los unos á los otros."

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

Remodeling

The first week in August, I took some vacation time to do some remodeling on our house. The house was built in the 1970's with a solid wood construction and a brick veneer on the front for aesthetics. Over the years, some of the bricks cracked and others were worn by sidewalk salt in winter. And so, we decided to replace them. In the years since the house was built, new and better materials have been created for house aesthetics. While it would be a large task with lots of work, in the end the house would look better and function better into the future.

The house has good bones. I took off the old siding and pried off the old bricks, which came off too easily revealing their need to be replaced. I covered the solid foundation with new insulation, house wrap, which had not been invented when the house was built, and repaired the cement foundation. Then I applied a new style of manufactured stone that is attached in sections. I am now finishing up the trim and the house looks more modern and will function better into the future.

I often do critical thinking as I do manual labor. As I worked last week, I thought about how my home updating can be a metaphor for the church. Many churches were organized and built with a solid foundation of faith in Jesus many years ago. The world has changed, communities have changed, but in many places the church still has the same veneer or façade from when they began years ago. Churches, like houses, need to always be thinking about what they look like or how they appeal to their neighborhood as they age.

Now, I am thinking less about how the church building looks and more about how the church people, the body of Christ, look and interact with their community. We have a solid foundation of faith in Jesus. As the years go by, we change our outside appearance to keep up with the world in which we live and the community we are called to serve. When the old siding on our house is worn out or leaking, we are quick to replace it with something new and efficient. But often in the church, when the styles of worship and the ways we welcome, relate to the community, and do leadership become tired and worn out, we are reluctant to change, to do things differently, and to update our life together.

COVID-19 gave me the opportunity to have a staycation and take time to upgrade the outside appearance of our house. Maybe it also gives us the opportunity to upgrade the outward appearance of our church family and make it more inclusive, more Jesus driven, and more outward focused. The church has a firm foundation in Jesus and now might be the right time for some remodeling of the body of Christ as we move into the future.

The Rev. David E. Sprang
Assistant to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission

Growing Young Presentation with Jake Mulder

Saturday, September 19, 2020
11:00am ET
Zoom

There are best practices for congregations who want to be open and accepting of young adults. Members of our Synod and the wider ELCA consistency recommend the book *Growing Young* to help congregations learn and utilize these best practices in their own settings.

The Synod's REVIVE Team, our congregational vitality group, is excited to announce a presentation featuring Jake Mulder, co-author of *Growing Young*. This presentation will highlight the 6 Essential Strategies To Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church and how this can work in small and medium sized congregations. This 90 minute presentation will be held via Zoom on Saturday, September 19, at 11:00am ET. All are welcome. Registration for this event closes on September 16, 2020.

Register Now: <https://bit.ly/2DQu0MI>

North/West Lower Michigan Synod Education Partnership Grants

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs" (Matthew 19:14). As our children prepare to return to school in the midst of a pandemic, we as Christ's church have a profound opportunity to express Jesus' love for them by doing as the Church has done for generations and finding ways to partner in their education. In so doing, we proclaim to our children that they are created in God's image, claimed by Christ with a love that will never let them go, and gifted by the Holy Spirit with abilities and talents to participate in Jesus' own work of serving the world.

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod is pleased to provide Education Partnership Grants to facilitate congregations in assisting with students, families, and educators for the 2020-2021 school year.



Grants might be used for technology: for example, expanding the congregation's Wi-Fi network so the church parking lot becomes a place where students can safely get online; providing technical assistance as students and parents learn to use tablets; and providing a congregational tablet that students can borrow to take tests or write papers. Grants might be used to provide tutoring or a virtual study hall, giving working parents time when they do not have to supervise their children's learning. Grants might be used to facilitate one on one relationships in which, for example, a child and an adult read a book together or work on mathematics together.

Since back to school plans vary across our Synod, congregations will convene groups of students, parents, and educators to assess needs and make plans. Congregations who receive grants will attest they are adhering to the CDC and State of Michigan guidelines governing the pandemic. Priority will be given to well-developed plans that evidence congregational participation.

Download Grant Application: <https://bit.ly/2ZwQjPh>

Please submit completed applications to Pastor David Sprang, Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Evangelical Mission at davidsprang@mittensynod.org.

Bringing Polarities into Balance: Virtual Autumn Leadership Event

October 26-27, 2020

It is difficult to move forward faithfully when life seems to be reduced to one choice between opposing sides. One way forward is to learn to balance opposites in healthy ways for ourselves, our churches, and our society. This retreat will teach tools to manage polarities and open paths for the future that create a variety of choices. Rostered Ministers are invited to attend this two-day virtual learning event featuring presentations from Lisa Withrow.

Register Now: <https://bit.ly/32cmup9>

Equipping Leaders for Mission and Ministry Virtual Fall Events

September - October

Equipping Leaders for Mission and Ministry (ELMM) is excited to announce its fall retreats: The Writings with Professor George Heider, The Gospels of Matthew and Mark with Professor Wally Taylor, and Community Catalyst Training with Pastor David Sprang.

Retreats will be held in September and October and will take place via Zoom.

Register Now: <https://elmm.org/events>

Synod Finances as of August 31, 2020

	Current Year		Prior Year		Variance*	
	August	Year to Date	August	Year to Date	August	Year to Date
Revenue						
Mission Support	157,789	763,403	115,161	799,823	42,628	(36,420)
Other	2,814	38,502	7,718	110,514	(4,904)	(72,012)
Total	160,603	801,905	122,879	910,337	37,724	(108,432)
Expenses						
Churchwide Proportionate Share	78,894	381,701	57,581	399,912	21,313	(18,211)
Other	46,651	395,454	64,361	532,297	(17,710)	(136,843)
Total	125,545	777,155	121,942	932,209	3,603	(155,054)
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0	0	0		
Net Change to Fund Balance	35,058	24,750	937	(21,872)	34,121	46,622

*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.

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

Coronavirus Resources

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

New resources include information about conducting remote meetings and the new executive orders amending the MI Safe Start Plan and issuing revised workplace safeguards.

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

2021 Compensation Guidelines

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod's 2021 Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Ministers of Word and Service, Synodically Authorized Ministers, and Other Staff are now available on the Resources for Congregations page of the Synod website.

Learn More:
<https://bit.ly/3huY3r9>

Upcoming Events

September 18	ELMM: The Writings	Zoom	Learn More: https://elmm.org
September 18	ELCA Creation Care Training	Online	Learn More: https://bit.ly/3inMK5o
September 19	Growing Young Presentation	Zoom	Learn More: https://bit.ly/2ZLg0fd
September 20	Caring for Creation Online Worship	Online	Learn More: https://bit.ly/3inN18q
September 24	Hunger in the Time of COVID-19	Zoom	Learn More: https://bit.ly/3bPXgQv

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.

Bay Conference	Rev. Emily Olsen, Dean
Hope/Marlette (part-time)	Interviewing
St. Paul/Au Gres	Supply Pastors
Grace/East Tawas	Supply Pastors

Kalamazoo Conference	Rev. Kjersten Sullivan, Dean
St. John/Baroda	Rev. James Morgan, Stated Supply

Stony Lake Conference	Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean
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Capital Area Conference	Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean
Calvary/Lansing (part-time)	Pastoral Team: Rev. John Schleicher, Rev. Rick McKenzie, Rev. Jim Couser
St. Paul/East Lansing	CALL ACCEPTED: Rev. Carl Ballard/Installation TBD.
Grace/Lansing	CALL ACCEPTED: Rev. Christin Fawcett. Installation TBD.
Peace/Charlotte	CALL ACCEPTED: Rev. Neil Brady. Installation TBD.
All Saints/Mason	Rev. Erick Johnson, Stated Supply

Sunrise Conference	Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean
Peace/Gaylord	Contracted with Episcopal Priest in Gaylord/Congregational Vote 9/20.

Traverse Conference	Rev. Scott Torkko, Dean
Messiah/Roscommon	CALL ACCEPTED: Rev. Jeff Bonn, Installation TBD.
St. Paul/Reed City	CALL ACCEPTED: Rev. Kara Shaw (A-OK), Transitional Pastor. Congregational Vote TBD.
Augustana/Tustin	Supply Pastors/Interviewing

Greater Grand Rapids Conference	Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean
Bread of Life/Hudsonville	Rev. Katherine Van Valkenburg, Transitional Pastor/Congregational Vote 9/27.
Bethlehem/Grand Rapids	Rev. Karsten Voskuil (RCA), Service of Invitation to Extended Service TBD.