



North/West Lower Michigan Synod

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In this Issue:

Time for a Pause

COVID-19 Response Grants

Upcoming Events

Congregations in Transition

Time for a Pause

"We do not forgive. We do not forget. We will hunt you down. We will make you pay." I had three reactions as I listened to President Biden respond to the killing of 13 of our soldiers in Afghanistan. First, this is how I expect, even desire, an American president to respond to a terrorist attack on our forces. Second, I am dismayed that President Biden's words accurately reflect the way we are responding to each other in many other areas of life, even in church. Third, I am thankful this is not how God responds to our attacks on God, one another, creation, and ourselves.

God forgives us even as God remembers what we are doing and failing to do, just like the father of a prodigal son. God hunts us down not to destroy us but to bring us back, just like a shepherd searching for a lost sheep and a woman searching for a lost coin (Luke 15). And if there is any price to be paid, Jesus pays it for us on the cross: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24). And in the resurrection, Jesus proclaims that we are reconciled with God and will share in God's own life (Romans 6:5).

Jesus joins us to his death and resurrection in baptism and commissions us to participate in his own ministry of reconciliation: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

And this is hard. For us humans, it is frequently a long journey from being hurt, wronged, or attacked to forgiveness. It is often an impossible odyssey to travel from forgiveness to reconciliation. Even knowing the forgiveness that we have received, from God and from others, often the best we can muster is the cessation of against-ness for the one who wronged us, and we move on. Or the intervening years, even decades, and other relationships render reconciliation moot. Sometimes, "all the king's horses and all the king's men [and even our faith in Jesus Christ] cannot put Humpty Dumpty back together again." At our best, we pause to examine ourselves and prayerfully commend the other to God's unending care in Jesus Christ.

Perhaps it is time for such a pause. We are living in a moment when things we say, do, email, and post on Facebook may result in ramifications we will one day regret and in relationships being sent asunder and beyond repair. So, let's pause.

"Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord, keep watch over the door of my lips! Incline not my heart to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in company with those who work iniquity; and let me not eat of their dainties!" I sang some form of these words from Psalm 141 on Sunday evenings as part of Evening Prayer in seminary. Of late, I find myself singing them again.

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

Psalm 141 is a psalm of preservation. Perhaps it is time to pause and ponder whether it is more important to make a point, rant, vent our feelings, be right, win a battle, attack another...or preserve a relationship, preserve ourselves, preserve our church, preserve the gospel, preserve our faith, or someone else's. Perhaps this is the best we can do when forgiveness is far away, and reconciliation is beyond our reach. Perhaps the best we can do is pause, examine ourselves, and prayerfully commend the other to God.

Thankfully, God can and does do more. Jesus's reconciling reach is broader, bolder, and stronger. Jesus said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." May it be so. And soon.

In the meantime, let's take a moment and pause. In addition to prayer and sitting in silence, listening to "old music," music from earlier seasons in my life, fills me with gratitude for friendships from those times and makes preserving relationships much more important. Figure out what works for you. Let's take a moment and pause.

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

Coronavirus Resources

In recent weeks, the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus has become a source of concern as cases rise across the U.S.. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Delta variant is currently the predominant strain of the virus in the U.S.. The Delta variant is more contagious and spreads faster than earlier forms of the virus. Unvaccinated people remain the greatest concern as data suggests that the Delta variant might cause more severe illness in those who are unvaccinated than previous strains. Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3IUSx79>

In response to the Delta variant, the CDC has updated their mask guidance. Given the current information about the Delta variant, vaccine effectiveness, and current vaccine coverage, the CDC now recommends masks be worn in indoor public places by everyone, regardless of vaccine status, in areas of substantial or high transmission. The CDC is also recommending universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status. Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3xyBlq8>

The CDC and public health officials continue to recommend getting a COVID-19 vaccine to best protect yourself and others from COVID-19. Vaccines in the U.S. are highly effective at preventing severe disease and death, including against the Delta variant. Currently, everyone aged 12 and older is eligible to receive a vaccine. The State of Michigan offers information about the different vaccines, vaccine incentives, and how to book a vaccine appointment on their website. Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3iDnU3V>

There have been some questions about religious exemptions to vaccine requirements. ELCA leaders have encouraged participation in vaccination as a primary means to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no ELCA policy resolution dedicated to vaccination, but a basis in Lutheran tradition and ELCA teaching for religious exemption is virtually non-existent. On the contrary both the Lutheran heritage and ELCA teaching encourage participation in public health efforts since health is a shared endeavor.

Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3kak7M9>

We continue to post updates and resources pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic on our website. View all resources: <http://bit.ly/3rL2fsF>

COVID-19 Response Grants

When COVID-19 began, the ELCA created the COVID-19 Response Fund and encouraged donations. This fund has now generated over \$1.5 million. The North/West Lower Michigan Synod applied for and received distributions from this fund to assist congregations helping those in their communities.

The COVID-19 grants distributed by the Synod have totaled \$72,200 thus far. We have had 25 congregations approved for grants and it's estimated that these congregations have been touching the lives of 2,248 people a week through the pandemic. Over the summer we will be sharing some of those stories.

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

Faith Lutheran Church, Grand Rapids

Faith Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids works ecumenically with other churches in their neighborhood as a partner in the North End Community Ministry (NECM). NECM is a lighthouse of hope providing food, resources, love, support and encouragement to those we serve. We serve clients twice a month through the food pantry, which allows us to foster relationships on an ongoing basis. Our neighbors often ask about a local church to attend and we strongly encourage this connection. One of the biggest challenges we observe in our community is enough funds to help clients in need of rent and security deposits.

Throughout the pandemic, we have mainly assisted others by providing food and baby supplies. One man who came in recently felt blessed by the amount of food he was given for his family. He exclaimed, "Wow, I can't believe how much food you are giving us! It is such a blessing to be able to provide for my family, as we are so in need!". Another man traveled to Tennessee to rescue his sister and her kids from an abusive relationship. They were all grateful to be able to receive food and other resources from NECM to provide for their household. Another one of our clients was caring for a friend's baby and was overwhelmingly appreciative that we were able to provide her with baby food, diapers and other baby supplies, and food for her household.

As the "hands and feet of Jesus", we continue to show the love of Jesus Christ by our actions.

Autumn Leadership Event

Rostered Ministers are invited to gather for the Autumn Leadership Event on October 26, 2021 from 10am-3pm ET at Immanuel, Mt. Pleasant. This one day event will include a Service of Remembrance and Loss with All Saints overtones, opportunity for conversation, a boxed lunch, and a presentation by Bishop Satterlee, "Where is Jesus when you preach?". This presentation is the basis of Bishop Satterlee's forthcoming book and has been well-received in other synods. This event is designed to be easily dismantled should COVID-19 make it inappropriate for us to come together.

Register Now: <https://tithe.ly/event-registration/#/4016533>

Registration will close October 20, 2021.

New Mission Begins

By Rev. David E. Sprang, Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Evangelical Mission

On July 1, 2021, a new mission began in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod. After much work and collaboration, the Synod submitted a grant proposal to the ELCA to start a Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community Explore at Grand Valley State University.

A Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community Explore is a tool to assess the viability of starting a worshiping community. It is the way all new worshiping communities begin. If after six months there are clear signs that a community is forming, then it can become an officially recognized Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community. It can then remain a worshiping community in the future or it can move on to a Congregation Under Development and eventually a fully recognized congregation.

Pastor Kate Van Valkenburg, part-time pastor of Bread of Life Lutheran Church in Hudsonville, has been contracted to lead the Explore and will do so while continuing her work at Bread of Life. The Synod is also partnering with United Christian Campus Ministry (UCCM), an ecumenical partnership with the United Methodist and the Presbyterian Church USA. UCCM provides campus ministries for Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids Community College, and Kendall School of Design.

On Friday August 13, 2021 Pastor David Sprang gathered with Pastor Kate Van Valkenburg, Pastor Julie Schneider-Thomas (Grand Rapids Conference Dean) and others at Grand Valley State University for a Commissioning Service. Following the commissioning, the group walked the campus and Pastor Van Valkenburg shared prayers of blessing. Then the group moved to Grand Rapids Community College where they shared prayers of blessing. During move-in day on campus, Pastor Van Valkenburg and Nancy Janisch (Director of United Christian Campus Ministry) shared greetings and popsicles with students as they arrived on campus.



Pastor Kate Van Valkenburg and others share prayers of blessing



Pastor Kate Van Valkenburg, Pastor David Sprang and others at Grand Valley State University

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod, with help from the ELCA, supports Lutheran Campus Ministries at Michigan State University, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College, and Central Michigan University. There are over 40 universities, colleges, and community colleges on the territory of the Synod.

To connect with a local campus ministry, you can refer a student through the LuMin website at:
<https://www.luminelca.org/ministries/>

LIRS Support of Afghan Refugees

For two decades, the U.S. Government has employed Afghan allies to serve alongside U.S. Troops, diplomats, and other government employees as interpreters, translators, cultural advisors, drivers, and more. More than 18,000 Afghans who served alongside them face a severe backlog in the processing of their Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs). LIRS has taken the lead in resettling our Afghan allies and their families and is currently looking for assistance in supporting these refugees in Western Michigan.

Local Needs for Western Michigan

Samaritas is organizing the resettlement of refugees in Western Michigan. They have expressed a need for housing options for refugee families to Western Michigan. Options can either be temporary/transitional or permanent. They are looking for both 1/2/3 bedroom apartments and larger single family homes.

Others supplies for families, such as house furnishings and supplies for babies and young children, are also needed. Monetary donations are also being accepted and will support rental homes or apartments.

If you are interested in supporting this ministry, have housing leads, or items to donate, please contact Chris Cavanaugh, Samaritas' Director of New American Resettlement for Western Michigan at ccava@samaritas.org.

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

Climate Change

Pastor Ellen Schoepf, Faith Lutheran Church, Okemos

As I think about climate change and climate justice, the words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. come to mind when he said, "We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late...Over the bleached bones and jumbled residue of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: "Too late."

Rev. Dr. King's words connect to the reality of climate change as climate change is already upon us and wreaking havoc in our world. However, I also know that we as Christians are people of deep-seated hope. Hope is something that is active, something that we embrace, and something that requires action from us. As Rev. Dr. Jim Antal says in his book, *Climate Church, Climate Change*, "Hope is the most important contribution people of faith can and must make as humanity confronts the climate crisis. To become people of hope we must be willing to stare reality in the face."

As we face the daunting reality of climate change, hope is the gift we bring. Hope is a new story, of redemption and reconciliation. The story of Christ's resurrection reveals a new understanding of truth as it reveals that death is not victorious. As we live into the hope that is gift, we are called to actively work for the healing of creation. I invite you to join members of the Synod Environmental Stewardship Task Force as we work to educate people in our synod regarding the climate crisis and work for climate justice and the healing of creation.

The Synod's Environmental Stewardship Task Force will be hosting a one hour Zoom event on Creating and Renewing a Green Team on September 23. Please register by September 20 to receive the event materials.

Learn More and Register: <https://bit.ly/3jKBOAG>

If you want more information about or are interested in joining the Environmental Stewardship Task Force, please contact Linn Kracht at ldkrachtr@gmail.com.

Synod Finances		
Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund	August	YTD
Mission Support Revenue	105,808	795,661
Other Revenue	462	129,885
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0
Total Revenue	106,269	925,546
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	52,904	397,830
Other Expenses	50,148	387,018
Total Expenses	103,052	784,849
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	3,218	140,687
Beginning Fund Balance	371,678	234,198
Ending Fund Balance	374,896	374,895
Other Fund Balances		
Unrestricted-Designated		695,774
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related		1,031,068
Temporarily-Restricted		342,124
Permanently-Restricted		924,639
Total - All Funds (as of 8/31/21)		3,368,500

Narrative Budgets

As congregation councils begin their budgeting process, we invite you to consider presenting a narrative budget to your congregation. This would seem especially important and helpful after 18 months of varying COVID-19 protocols and limited face-to-face gatherings.

The Narrative Budget resource from the ELCA summarizes: “A narrative budget integrates dollars, people and ministry to tell the story of a congregation’s mission and ministry” and “gives a vision of ministry rather than just a spreadsheet of line items. It reflects how the congregation spends its time, talent and treasure in a different way, rather than just how we pay the bills.”

Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3logzW7>

ELCA Youth Gathering Updates and Information

Every three years, 30,000 high school youth and their adult leaders from across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America gather for a week of faith formation known as the ELCA Youth Gathering. 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.

Safety and Security Webinar

The Gathering will host a webinar on October 7 at 8pm ET to discuss plans for next summer regarding safety in Minneapolis and COVID-19. Register Now: <https://bit.ly/3tDMB4d>

Registration Information

Early Bird Registration for the 2022 Gathering opens September 22! Learn More: <https://bit.ly/2VFb0de>

The Gathering has set aside funds for individuals with financial need, to help offset the cost of their registration for the 2022 Gathering. Primary adult leaders and congregational leadership may apply for financial assistance on behalf of a specific young person. Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3xIIJ2a>

Webinars

Join Gathering leadership for a monthly webinar to prepare you for the 2022 Gathering, the Multicultural Youth Leadership Event (MYLE) and the tAble. Topics will vary each month, but all webinars will be split between a presentation and a Q&A. Learn More: <https://elca.org>YouthGathering>About/Webinars>

Mitten Synod Information Session

In preparation for the event, our Synod Coordinator Pastor Dan Schewe and our Synod Day Director Megan Floyd held an informational meeting to help plan. It is available to watch on YouTube: <https://bit.ly/3AM5hlf>

ELMM Fall Events

Register now for Equipping Leaders for Mission and Ministry (ELMM)'s fall events! All events will be held via Zoom.

September 17-18: Hebrews, James, and 1 Peter with Prof. Wally Taylor

October 2 & 23: Pastoral Care Assistant Training with Prof. Rosanne Swanson

October 15-16: Daniel Apocalyptic, and the Early Jewish Period with Prof. Kelly Murphy

November 12-13: Revelation with Prof. Kelly Murphy

Learn More and Register: <http://elmm.org/events>

Lutheran Disaster Response

Recent natural disasters have caused devastation throughout the U.S.. Lutheran Disaster Response is accompanying on the ground ministry organizations and synods in the impacted areas and assisting with immediate needs and long-term recovery.

Learn how you can help:

Hurricane Ida: <https://bit.ly/3Eilcth>

Haiti Earthquake: <https://bit.ly/2VEhVTI>

U.S. Wildfires: <https://bit.ly/393Rgms>

Upcoming Events

September 17-18	ELMM: Hebrews, James, and 1 Peter	elmm.org/events
September 23	Creating & Renewing a Green Team	https://bit.ly/3jKBOAG
October 2	ELMM: Pastoral Care Assistant Training	elmm.org/events
October 5-7	Calm Beneath the Chaos: An Ecumenical Retreat	https://bit.ly/3EkilX8

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. Joan Oleson, Dean
St. Peter/Unionville (Part-Time)	Pastor Bill Huether retiring October 2021 / Congregational Vote 9/26	St. John/Baroda (Part-Time)	Pastor Jim Morgan, Stated Supply / Seeking additional candidates
Capital Area Conference	Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean	Immanuel/Allegan (Part-Time)	Pastor Dennis Smith, Stated Supply
Christ United/Dewitt (Part-Time)	Episcopal Diocese of Michigan taking the lead in the call process.	Hope/Plainwell (Part-Time)	Supply Pastors
All Saints/Mason (Part-Time)	Pastor Erick Johnson, Stated Supply / Preparing MSP	Stony Lake Conference	Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean
Greater Grand Rapids Conference	Rev. Julie Schneider- Thomas, Dean	Sunrise Conference	Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean
Immanuel/Big Rapids (Part-Time)	Interviewing	St. John/Haggensville; St. James/Millersburg; Trinity/ Ocqueoc	Congregational Vote 9/12
		Traverse Conference	Rev. Scott Torkko, Dean