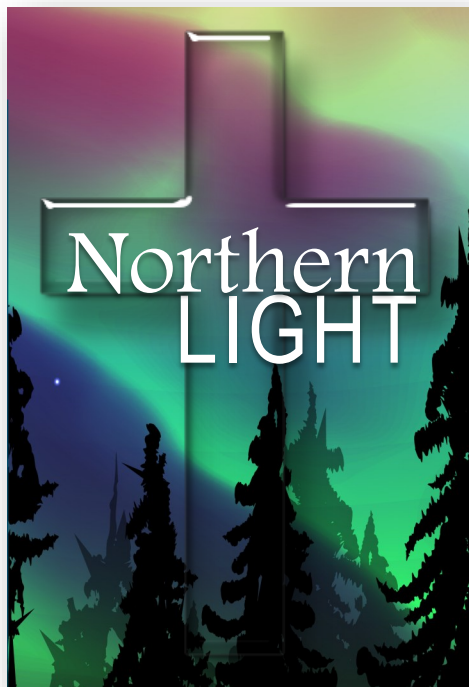


Shining with the Light of Christ in the Northern Great Lakes Synod

Volume 37, Issue 4 | July-August 2025



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Dear People of the Northern Great Lakes Synod,

Did you know that your Synod Council met in retreat at Fortune Lake Camp on June 6-7? I share with you my gratitude for these leaders whom you have raised up from your conferences. They commit to meeting at least quarterly to focus on the work that we do together as a synod.

At this retreat, we reviewed the structure, finances, purpose, and mission of the Northern Great Lakes Synod. Our time together included information about our Endowment Ministry, the evolution of ELCA Social Statements and Social Messages, the work of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, a tutorial on how to read the NGLS financial statements, review of a “Leaving a Legacy” resource and consideration of how each committee, task force, and team furthers the purpose of our NGLS mission – to equip the Saints for ministry. Included in this Northern Light are some papers for your own information:

- A Synod Map
- A chart of how each group relates to each other. Note that the “Synod Assembly” is the highest governing authority.
- A list and description of each committee currently active in our synod.

I invite you to consult the map and see what conference you are in and review the committee list and see if serving on any committee interests you. We owe a debt of gratitude to all those who invest themselves in synod-wide efforts as this is a different kind of work than congregational ministry. Serving on a synod committee, team, or task force requires a shift in perspective from a congregational view to a synod-wide lens, which also includes who we are in partnership with the greater ELCA church body. For this work, members of synod committees, at the very least, consider the following:

- Travel distance and cost. There is an effort to offer synod-wide events as centrally as possible, with the exception of Fortune

Lake which is more than a four-hour drive for those at the eastern edge of our synod.

Interestingly, it was noted on our Synod assembly evaluations that having the opening worship at Bethel in Ishpeming increased the driving distance by 30 minutes. However, it was not noted that this also *decreased* the driving distance for half of our synod assembly attendees coming from the south.

- We are a synod in two time zones. As we consider events and meetings, they cannot start too early for our CT attendees, nor end too late for our ET attendees. The synod office has two clocks in the conference room, so we are always mindful of our whole synod.
- We are a synod in two states. This was never more painfully obvious than during Covid, when governors were issuing executive orders that did not often agree with each other and pastors were grateful for the interpretive lens of the synod office. This also has a bearing on the efforts of LSS, who are more familiar with Wisconsin granting streams than the funding structures of Michigan. We are working on that.

While our distances feel like a barrier, know that our challenges are nothing like the Central States Synod or the Southwestern Synod that cover three or four states and the bishop has to regularly get on a plane to provide pulpit supply. So the good news is, it could be worse. 😊

At the Synod Council retreat, we identified a current challenge that we will intentionally strive to meet, and that is the challenge of Communications.

How does one communicate with 18,000 Northern Great Lakes Synod Lutherans over so many square miles? Even this newsletter will only

reach those who receive it or find it on our website. Our goals to meet the challenges of communication across the synod include:

- Stressing the responsibility of pastors and the role of congregational newsletter editors to lift up the work of the NGLS and the ELCA. Know that any article posted on our synod website can be reprinted in your paper or electronic newsletter.
- Encouraging more people to sign up for the E-Notes Newsletter, open it up when it comes, and read it.
- Create and distribute short videos that can be shared before worship, at council meetings, at annual congregational meetings, and at fall conference gatherings.
- Encouraging participation of congregations to invite and welcome a Mission Interpreter this Fall whose main job is to say, “Thank you.” And along with this, to recruit Mission Interpreters who are provided a list of talking points celebrating each congregation’s efforts and partnership.

As we strive to educate the whole synod community as to our work together and how it functions, I encourage you to do your part. Know that Synod leadership and all the members of every committee, team and task force is working to equip the Saints and Sinners of the NGLS for ministry. We seek to provide resources, connectedness, clarity, education, hope and inspiration as together we proclaim the love of God in Christ Jesus and are sent into the world to make a difference in His name.

Yours in Christ,
Bishop Katherine Finegan



"For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another."

Romans 12:4-5

Yesterday, I worshipped with the people gathered for the crowning worship of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Baraga. I recognized the same feelings I have when I attend a funeral of a person I didn't know well. Through the beauty of the liturgy, words spoken, stories and food shared, I came to know them better, even at the ending. Locked in my mind is a grandpa holding a little child, carefully helping her receive the bread and grape juice, body and blood of Christ...the last time in that place, but perhaps the first time around God's expansive table of welcome. I shed tears, for my own loss of not knowing Holy Cross better; for them, recognizing they hold the deep pain and deep gratitude together; and for the sheer beauty and wonder for how God is still working among us, in the midst of it all.

There is a children's story in Godly Play, that describes time. It invites children to see how stories have beginnings, middles and endings. The children's story goes on to imagine perhaps the timeline is not that finite, and maybe God's time is an infinite circle of beginnings and endings. Yes, in God's eternity there are still endings, but they become beginnings. And even the beginning of something is often so distant from our memory or awareness it seems old. The church year moves in a circle. The sabbath week moves in a circle. The timeline of our own lives and that of our congregations move in a circle, not a finite line.

Paul writes to the earliest Christian communities in the fullest, kinetic time of their life cycle. They were growing, squabbling, singing, worshipping, dining, and learning the way of Jesus together. We don't have the full story of their

closing worship, but we do still feel the impact of those early congregations in our own time. Not being a modern scientist or physician, Paul had the brilliant insight to describe the church as a body, a gathering of individual parts, unique and interdependent, for health and vitality.

Congregational Vitality is the beginning, middle, ending and new beginnings of communities. It is a whole cycle that can't really be separated. Someone might be imagining a new beginning of ministry that seeks to faithfully respond to loving God and neighbor in their community. There may be a congregation in a stage of vibrant life recognizing this too will end, and this ministry will give way to a new expression that is still a faithful following of Jesus. Congregations slowing down from a vibrant, kinetic ministry may feel they are nearing the natural completion of this expression of their congregation. We might wonder: How will our neighbors miss this congregation when it ends? What parts of the body are being stretched to stress for the sake of the whole? What DNA in the congregational body is informing ministry, that isn't obvious on the surface? Are the individual parts healthy and growing in a life of faith? How can we move through times of vibrant life, while holding with grace the reality that a Good-Friday-ending and Easter-Sunday-beginning is always before us? These are faithful wonders! These are activating, curious, and faithful questions that draw us closer to one another and God, while also sending us out to encounter our neighbor.

In the grace and peace of Christ,
Rev. Sharolyn Swenson,
Director of Evangelical Mission
and Assistant to the Bishop
with the Northern Great Lakes
Synod of the ELCA



GOD'S GIFT: TREES

**By: Chuck Thomas, NGLS
Vice President**

In the last Northern Light newsletter, we unpacked Genesis 2:15, which calls us to care for God's creation. In this issue, we will explore the marvel of trees and why we need to nurture this gift and thank God for trees. From **Genesis 2:9**:

"Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (NRSV)

The tree of life was not just another part of the garden; it symbolized the everlasting life that God intended for all of humanity; a relationship of life and abundance.

Abundance, yes! God's awe-inspiring wonderful gifts of trees are all around us. Answering God's call to be good stewards of this gift is imperative for this gift to still be present for future generations. A fruit or nut-bearing tree gives us food, and if we care for it, the tree will continue to provide food year after year. Maple trees have long been a source of sweet syrup and if tapped with care, will do so for many years. Trees have always been and, if proper sustainable harvesting practices are used, will continue to be a renewable source of raw material for building materials, paper products, and firewood. Trees also provide a great habitat for God's creatures of the forest.

In **Revelations 22:2** we hear more about the tree of life.

"through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of nations." (NRSV)



In scripture, the tree of life is not only a source of sustenance but also a powerful symbol of healing and restoration.

Wait though! Trees are not just a symbol of healing; trees really do provide environmental healing. Through the miracle process of photosynthesis, trees are instrumental in restoring the atmospheric quality in their immediate vicinity. During the photosynthesis process trees absorb climate-changing carbon dioxide, sequester the carbon, and give off life-sustaining oxygen. When the roots of a tree take up water from the ground, impurities in the water are filtered out. So, when a tree transpires water vapor into the air around it, that water vapor is free of impurities.

The last line in the well-known poem, "Trees" by Joyce Kilmer, "But only God can make a tree", says it all. Who but the Creator could have designed such a marvel as a tree!



**2025
Northern Great Lakes Synod
Synod Assembly**

The 2025 Northern Great Lakes Synod Assembly was held on May 15-17, 2025. Opening worship and dinner (benefitting Marquette County youth) was at Bethel Lutheran Church in Ishpeming. Pastor Sharolyn Swenson was installed as Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Evangelical Mission and the worshipping assembly was reminded of their baptism as each Conference brought water from a local source to the font. Friday and Saturday were at Northern Michigan University's Northern Center. There were 182 lay and clergy voting members gathered for the work of the synod. There were over fifteen display tables from ELCA and supporting organizations. There were eight workshops presented. The plenary session keynote speaker was the Rev. Jon

Anderson, who offered perspective on rural ministry, especially contextualizing the UP of Michigan and Northern Wisconsin.

There was a banquet on Friday evening, where retiring pastors were honored. Additionally, the World Hunger Big Bear awards were presented to Bethel Lutheran Church in Ishpeming for going out into their community delivering meals to the hungry, and Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Eagle River, Wisconsin for their steady community feeding of children through their backpack lunch ministry. The Bread Basket award was presented to Mary Lou Blomquist (Messiah, Marquette) for her steadfast support of efforts across the whole church for the work of ELCA World Hunger. On Saturday, our Synod passed a Truth and Healing resolution supporting a National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools. Also, the Assembly commissioned the Churchwide Assembly (August 2025 in Phoenix) voting members: Bishop Katherine Finegan, Charlotte Strom, Pastor Alex LaChapelle, Hayley Smith, Chuck Thomas, Pastor Scott Ehle, and Adam Matyska. Throughout the Assembly, attendees were invited to contribute their artistic skills to a butterfly mural to be shared by Christ's Kaleidoscope at Marquette Pride in June. The Synod Assembly closed with the election of new Synod Council members: Gabe Lannet (Conf 1), Pastor Jared Howard (Conf 2), Pastor Scott Ehle (Conf 5), Cindy Sjoquist (Conf 6), and Robert Lake (Conf 8), and the installation of the whole Synod Council. All were sent in blessing, with trees to plant and reminded of the waters of our baptism.

The Synod will re-assemble on May 16, 2026 in our hybrid settings across the synod. The 2025 voting members will continue serving until the 2026 Assembly convenes. All congregations are invited to add to the agenda of their Annual Congregation Meetings the election of their 2026 Assembly voting members.

Transitions

◇ On June 8, 2025, the final worship service of Holy Cross, Baraga was held. We give thanks for the almost 133 years of ministry of this community of faith. As they end, they give life to the following ministries and water seeds of faith through the distribution of their assets:

◇ Baraga Women's Shelter

◇ ELCA World Hunger

◇ Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp

◇ Let's Eat Community Meals

◇ Mission United, Pelkie

◇ United, L'Anse

◇ Northern Great Lakes Synod

Announcements

- ◇ We celebrate the ordination of Lance Crevier who was ordained and installed at First, Iron River on June 1, 2025. Pastor Lance served First as a Collaborative Learner until his graduation from Wartburg Seminary this past May when he was called to serve as pastor. We hold Pastor Lance, his wife, Rylee, and their daughter Juniper in prayer, along with the partnership continued and begun again with First, Iron River. God bless you!
- ◇ We thank God and celebrate the life and ministry of Pastor Mike Laakko, who passed to life eternal April 11, 2025, following a courageous battle with lung cancer. A celebration of his life took place at St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Rockland, MI on May 10. Peace to his memory.
- ◇ We thank God for Reverend Earl Bergh, who passed to life eternal on March 2, 2025. A celebration of his life was held on April 26, at Pilgrim Place in Claremont, CA. Peace to his memory.

Thank You

FOR YOUR SUPPORT

**Thank you to the
following donors for their generous
support of the work of Christ in and through our Synod.**

Disaster Relief

Salem, Ironwood
Faith, Calumet

Lutheran World Relief

Messiah, Marquette
Calvary, Rapid River
Emmanuel, Menominee
Zion, Marinette
Prince of Peace, Marquette
St. Paul, Ironwood

Lutheran Campus Ministry

Calvary, Rapid River
Prince of Peace, Marquette
Good Shepherd, Houghton
Good Shepherd, Peshtigo

Synod Ministry Fund

Synod Assembly Offering

Mission Outreach

Wes & Rev. Elisabeth Daniels

Seminarian Support

Thrivent Choice-
Rev. Norman C Peterson
Estate of Jennifer Johnson Wrege

Skrenes Fund for Ministry

Thrivent Choice-
Luanne & Rev. Thomas Skrenes

Youth Ministries

Beaver American, Pound
Trinity, Ishpeming

Equipping the Saints

Wes & Rev. Elisabeth Daniels
Synod Assembly Offering

Missionary Support

Mission United, Pelkie
Messiah, Marquette

Companion Synod

Salem, Ironwood
St. Paul's, Mass City
Messiah, Marquette
First, Gladestone

Clergy Debt Relief Fund

St. Paul's, Mass City- in memory
of Rev. Mike Laakko

Skogman Scholarship Fund

Jo Skogman
Thrivent Choice-
Joseph Durbin

Lutheran Social Services

Emanuel, Skandia
Synod Assembly Offering

• Synod Calendar •

July 2025

- 2 - NGLS staff meeting
- 14 - E-Notes deadline
- 16 - Lay Minister workshop
- 16 - NGLS Staff meeting
- 29 - E-Notes deadline
- 28 - Aug 2- Church Wide Assembly

August 2025

- 6 - NGLS staff meeting
- 11 - September-October Northern
Light deadline
- 13 - Lay Ministry committee meeting
- 14 - E-Notes deadline
- 18-20 - Region 5 Mission Table
Conference
- 21 - NGLS staff meeting
- 24 - Zion Marinette 150th anniversary
- 28 - E-Notes deadline
- 27-29 - Region 5 Bishops gathering

*Thank you
for your
generosity!*

**2025 Synod Assembly
Offering totals -**

Equipping the Saints Endowment: \$2,308.25
Synod Ministry Fund: \$2,057.15
Lutheran Social Services: \$1,867.00
World Hunger: \$26,612.67



Pastoral Vacancies and Interims

Ready to Receive Potential Candidates

Immanuel, Rhinelander – Rev. John Kuziej
 United, L'Anse – Rev. Julie Belew
 Northern Lights Parish – Rev. Bill Jacobson

In Discernment Regarding Next Steps

Zion, St. Ignace & Trinity, Brevort – Rev. Melinda VanderSys

Engaged in Transitional Process

Bethlehem, Florence - Rev. David Johnson
 Pioneer Lake, Conover – Rev. Peggy Rose
 Emmanuel, Menominee – Rev. Christine Olson
 Emanuel, Skandia & Bethany, Negaunee – Rev. Lloyd Luedeman
 Grace, Pembine – Rev. Gene Wickman

Not Actively in Call Process

Christ the King, Escanaba and Faith, Rock – Student Vicar Sarah Sleeter
 Porterfield, Porterfield & Beaver American, Pound – Student Vicar Dan Moschea
 Eden, Munising – Student Vicar Elaine Robbins
 Bethany, Ishpeming - Rev. J. Mills
 Faith & Trinity, Ishpeming – Student Vicar Robert Lake

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
 and do not rely on your own insight.
 In all your ways acknowledge him,
 and he will make straight your paths.”* (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Through May 31, congregational giving to mission support is down by almost \$50,000. As a Synod, we place our trust in God to provide all that is needed to accomplish the ministry God has set before us. As partners in this mission, we strongly encourage our congregations to make every effort to meet their pledge in a timely manner. Together, trusting in the LORD, God's work will be done.

-Betsy Koski, Bookkeeper

As of 5/31/25	2024	2025	\$ Change	% Change
Annual Pledged Amount	729,507	695,080	-34,427	-4.7%
Amount Received Year to Date	306,694	257,235	-49,459	-16.1%



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Prayfaithfully

NGLS Daily Devotions Schedule July & August 2025

June 30 - July 6	Pastor John Kuziej
July 7 - 13	Pastor Nichole Hanson-Lynn
July 14 - 20	Sister Noreen Stevens
July 21 - 27	SWO Board
July 28 - August 3	Pam Durbin
August 4 - 10	Chris Ebert
August 11 - 17	Zion, Ironwood Bible Study Group
August 18 - 24	Nancy Heykes
August 25 - 31	Pastor Kelly Ylitalo