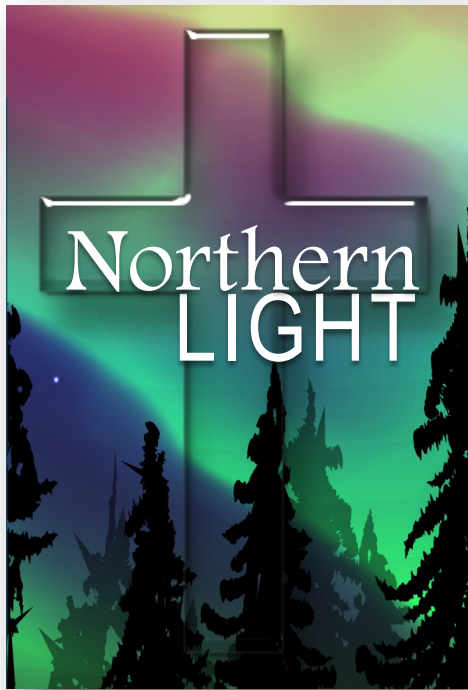


Shining with the Light of Christ in the Northern Great Lakes Synod

Volume 37, Issue 6 | November - December 2025



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Northern Great Lakes Synod
1029 N. Third St., Ste. A
Marquette, MI 49855

Office: (906) 228-2300 | Fax: (906) 228-2527
www.nglsynod.org

Bishop Katherine Finegan
kfinegan@nglsynod.org

Pastor Sharolyn Swenson
sswenson@nglsynod.org

NGLS | ngls@nglsynod.org

Dear People of the Northern Great Lakes Synod,

As I make final preparations to leave on sabbatical, I feel it keenly that even if my desk will be clear, there is much in the world that remains messy. As people of faith, we are being challenged in new ways that we may feel ill-equipped to handle.

I see, and feel with increasing pressure, the world trying to divide us and tear us apart. I encourage you to make your community of faith, that is, the body of Christ which you help to animate, your priority. Political divisions are real, but the demonization of those who disagree with you has been brought to a new level. Do not lump people together and join the bandwagon that would declare them to be “of the devil.” As we look at our world through the lens of the open tomb, we cannot look at another and not see someone for whom Jesus died. This includes MAGA, the immigrant, the liberal, the refugee, the transgender individual, those on the other side of the political aisle, your neighbor, and those who get their news from only one source. In times of disaster or civil unrest, you will need your neighbor and your community of faith to meet the challenges.

Remember the flooding in the Copper Country not so long ago? And how the larger community rallied to provide water and supplies to those impacted? Or the ice storm that knocked out power to so many for too long? With winter around the corner, you may well need the help of the neighbor you disagree with to plow your driveway. With troubles always around the corner, you may well need the pastor whose sermon and leadership you criticized to proclaim a word of hope and hold your hand in comfort. Now is not the time to be burning bridges, even as we, each of us, are called to work and advocate for justice.

Write your congressional representative *and* extend grace to your disagreeable neighbor. Carry signs in protest

and forgive those you consider misinformed. Be generous in your giving to those organizations that are on the ground, feeding the hungry, advocating for the immigrant, welcoming the stranger. Try not to be quick to criticize, to judge, to respond in anger or indignation. These are emotionally provoking times which make people vulnerable to manipulation and impulsive actions. Keeping a level head allows for creative solutions and conversations that deepen understanding, even as common ground may still be elusive.

As I write this, common ground regarding immigration policies continues to elude all of us. By the time you read this, our own Pastor Rita Chirala and her son will have left her congregation, and the country, despite our best efforts. Even as immigrants seek to follow good law and order, the system is designed to fail them. And more than a few U.S. citizens have been swept up unlawfully. Even if our own Pastor Rita were to be able to fulfill all righteousness per a system that is stacked against her, I have no confidence, given a Supreme Court's decision that allows for racial profiling, that she and her son would be safe, even if citizenship were secured.

I call out this gross injustice. It is indefensible that people of color should be afraid every day of being arrested on suspicion of being an illegal immigrant, that they should have to carry a copy of their passport to prove citizenship should the arresting agent even take the time to check. Or that immigrants who are striving to "follow the rules" and show up for their scheduled court date are summarily deported, and not necessarily to their country of origin.

I am grateful to our Canadian partners that a call has been secured for Pastor Rita so that she has a livelihood, and I continue to pray that the Canadian immigration lawyer will be able to secure the necessary visa in time. The work of providing comfort and support to Faith, Sault and to Pastor Rita's colleagues and friends continues as they have suffered this abrupt separation even as it was necessary to keep Pastor Rita and her son safe.

I do not believe extending grace to people with whom we disagree means acquiescing to systems that are unjust. I pray for affection that transcends political division, for unified mission and purpose that binds us together in the face of all that tries to divide us, and for local community interdependence that is more reliable, generous, and available than government support.

I leave you, for now, with this blessing: The God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus.

Amen

The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

The God of all grace + bless you now and forever.

Amen.

(ELW, Service of the Word, p. 221)

Yours in Christ,
Bishop Katherine Finegan



Dear Church,

Did you read Bishop Finegan's letter? Just a page back? Because everything I might write to you in this moment, makes me wonder if you might be better served with my famous Chicken Pot Pie recipe, than whatever I am about to say. (But notice, I will attempt to say something meaningful anyway.) What she said is truth, important, and is speaking the Gospel into the malaise of our present age. I offer this emphasis, not only because I agree, but also because it is a part of our shared ordination vows to "give faithful witness in the world, that God's love may be known" and our shared baptismal vows "to strive for justice and peace in all the world." So you may hear your pastors saying something like this from their own pulpit, too.

And while the time is now to notice the world spinning around us, and always and already re-commit to community, justice, and love; I wonder if it is helpful for me to turn us from outside in to inside out? What is our witness out to a hurting world, that our little corner of the ELCA, nestled between and among the lakes, may offer?

In February of this year, the ELCA received a report from Barna Group and Fuller Seminary identifying five commitments to consider, so that we may live more faithfully into our Vision. God's Love Made Real is the short-hand version of "A world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation." How does the love we feel for God and neighbor make a difference? How does it bubble up and out of us in such a way that it is not weird, or seems fake, or just like words on a page and not the living Word we know, trust and love?

God's Love Made Real Strategic Recommendations, are for all bodies in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and we are invited to five commitments:

- Cultivate congregations that are warmer, more inviting, and more invitational in nature.
- Enhance ELCA-wide efforts to nurture and strengthen faith and spiritual formation.
- Tangibly and significantly incorporate and empower young people in all levels of the Church's life.
- Provide greater empowerment, equipping and tools for lay leaders to carry out the work of ministry and be the Church in the world today.
- Rethink, refocus and reorganize the ELCA's educational systems and structures to serve the current (and rapidly changing) needs of the ELCA.

Which one are you really good at already? Which one offers growth or challenge? Who do you need to partner with to be able to do any or all of these well? Who is missing from around your table that you need help from? How does this spring forth from who you are already? What do you need to stop doing, to be able to pivot to these commitments?

Our response to the chaos of the world, is peace, but not placidness. Love is an active verb.

Shalom+
Pastor Sharolyn Swenson
Director of Evangelical
Mission and Assistant to the
Bishop of Northern Great
Lakes Synod



Be An Advocate for God's Creation

By: Chuck Thomas, NGLS Vice President

Wasn't this year a great year for fall colors? As I traveled around the Northern Great Lakes Synod in early October, I couldn't help but marvel at the splendor of God's creation! Yet, my sense of wonder has been tempered by deep concern. It troubles me to see good stewardship of God's creation being pushed to the back seat by societal and corporate desires. I worry about the environmental legacy we will leave for our grandchildren and their children due to the current federal policies of rolling back the EPA Endangerment Rule, cutting the science and research divisions of the EPA, and reducing permitting requirements for development, logging, mining, and oil and gas exploration on public lands.

Regardless of your political leanings, in accordance with our Church's social teaching, "Caring for Creation" approved in 1993, we as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) share a deep love for all of God's creation and a profound responsibility for it. Made in the image of God, we are called to continue what God is already doing for the earth (Psalm 104), enabling it to flourish. God assigns humans to care for the earth as God does, in loving servanthood (Philippians 2:7, Genesis 2:15).

Locally, we can establish Caring for Creation teams in our congregations to shepherd environmental stewardship projects. Some relatively easy tasks include adopting a section of highway to keep it clear of litter, starting pollinator gardens, increasing recycling efforts at your congregation, composting kitchen waste, and advocating for more green space and less paved or built-up areas in your local

communities.

At the State and Federal levels, we can advocate for elected leaders who endorse environmental protection policies that allow for wise use of our natural resources while simultaneously protecting God's creation. And through advocacy efforts, we can make sure our current elected leaders know our desires on specific issues. The ELCA offers an established Environmental Advocacy program webpage (www.elca.org/our-work/publicly-engaged-church/advocacy/environment). The Caring for Creation Today information found at the link will provide ready-to-send advocacy letters under the "Take Action Now" button, making it easy to reach out to elected leaders as new issues arise. Together, our voices can make a meaningful difference in shaping policies that reflect stewardship of the earth.



Announcements

- ◆ We give thanks and welcome to the world three babies:
- ◇ Marigold Rae Hunter, daughter to Pastor Molly Hunter and husband Ethan. Born on June 18 at 6lbs 12oz.

Transitions

- ◇ Esther Penelope Ford, daughter to Pastor Catie Ford and husband Dillon. Born August 25 at 17.5" and 5lbs 14oz.
- ◇ Evelyn "Evie" Elizabeth Brondyke, daughter to Pastor Lily Brondyke and husband Alex. Born on September 10.
- ◆ On November 2, 2025, Zion Lutheran Church in St. Ignace will hold their final worship service. We give thanks for the 118 years of ministry of this community of faith.
- ◆ We rejoice with Pastor-elect **Wade Crevier** as he has been called to serve Prairie Lutheran Church in Poplar Grove, IL. Along with his brother, Pastor Lance Crevier, both were blessed to have Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Peshtigo, WI. as their church home. As Grace, the spouse of soon to be Pastor Wade, is the program director of Lutherdale, they are required to make their residence on that campus. God bless their new beginnings!
- ◆ We hold in prayer Pastor **Rita Chirala** and her son, Derek, as they must leave their congregation, and the country. May God grant them safety and warm welcome. And may God provide comfort and care to Faith, Sault as they offer farewell and Godspeed to the Chiralas' under distressing circumstances.
- ◆ We rejoice with Pastor-elect **Morgan Simmons** as she has been called to serve Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church in Rhinelander, WI. She will be ordained by Bishop Jen Nagle on October 25, 2025 at University Lutheran Church of Hope in Minneapolis, MN. Her first day at Immanuel is October 27, 2025.
- ◆ We pray God's blessings upon **Pastor Jack Busche** and his family as Pastor Jack has accepted a new call in the East Central Synod of Wisconsin. His last Sunday at Grace, Gwinn was August 24. Pastor Dave Van Kley and Pastor Alex LaChapelle will provide support to the leadership and ministries of Grace during this time of transition.
- ◆ We pray God's blessings upon **Pastor Tommy Wimsae (Richter)** and his family as they moved to Pennsylvania where Pastor Tommy has accepted a new call. His last Sunday at Zion, Manistique and Calvary, Rapid River was August 17. Pastor Jim Duehring will serve as Administrative Interim for Zion and Synod Council Vice President Chuck Thomas will serve the Administrative portion at Calvary while Pastor Mike Markwell assists with pastoral care and ministry leadership.
- ◆ We hold in prayer **Licensed Lay Minister Larry Molloy** who is recovering from significant health challenges downstate. Bethany, Mohawk and Shepherd of the Sea, Copper Harbor are receiving the pastoral leadership of retired pastor, Rev. Peter Vorhes.
- ◆ We hold in prayer **Navy Chaplain Rev. David Murphy**, and his family, as he is deployed to San Diego, CA for one year. Good Shepherd, Peshtigo and Our Savior's, Marinette are provided the pastoral leadership of Rev. Lee Goodwin and Rev. Nick Johannes while Pastor Murphy is away. May God provide safety, comfort, and direction for ongoing ministry.

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.

Lutheran World Relief

Prince of Peace, Marquette
Zion, Manistique

Lutheran Campus Ministry

Prince of Peace, Marquette
Good Shepherd, Peshtigo

Disaster Relief

Bethany, Perkins
Ascension, Minoqua
Mission United, Pelkie
Faith, Ishpeming

Mission Outreach

Bethany, Republic
Trinity, Rhinlander
Rev. Elisabeth & Wes Daniels

Missionary Support

Mission United, Pelkie

Sangwe Well Project

Rev. Jim Duehring
St. Paul, Mass City

Lutheran Social Service

Our Saviour, Paynesville

Equipping the Saints

Salem, Ironwood
St. Paul, Ironwood
Zion, Ironwood
Rev. Elisabeth & Wess Daniels

Seminarian Support

All Saints, Wakefield-
WELCA

ELCA Good Gifts

Emmanuel, Menominee

Habitat for Humanity

Community, Palmer

Companion Synod

St. Paul, Mass City
St. Paul, Ironwood
First, Gladstone

REMINDER



As 2025 comes to a close, please note these important dates and documents that need to be sent to the Syond Office:

- Congregation Statements of Intents for 2026 (coming your way soon!)
- Congregation treasurers: please be sure to note the month on your remittance form so that mission support giving can be properly credited.
- Congregation Annual Reports
- Calendar Year Closing Date - January 13 2026- Last day for checks to arrive in the Synod Office so that 2025 mission support (benevolence) gifts can be credited to 2025 giving.

• Synod Calendar •

November 2025

6 - Boundaries Education
9-12 - Wonderment & Wellness
Women's Retreat
13 - E-Notes due
13 - NGLS Staff Meeting
16-18 - First Call Theological Conference
25 - E-Notes due
27-28 - NGLS Office closed for Thanksgiving

December 2025

3 - NGLS Staff Meeting
8 - January/February Northern Light articles due
11 - E-Notes Due
24-25 - NGLS Office closed for Christmas
29 - E-Notes due

Pastoral Vacancies and Interims

Ready to Receive Potential Candidates

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. Kari Vadis
Emmanuel, Menominee – Rev. Christine Olson
Emanuel, Skandia & Bethany, Negaunee – Rev. Lloyd Luedeman
Grace, Pembine – Rev. Gene Wickman
Zion, Manistique - Rev. Jim Duehring
Calvary, Rapid River - Mr. Chuck Thomas

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
Bethany, Mohawk & Shepherd of the Sea - Rev. Peter Vorhes
Faith, Sault Ste. Marie - Rev. Elise Hynek

*“Then let us adore and give him his right, all glory and pow’r and wisdom and might,
All honor and blessing, with angels above, and thanks never ceasing, and infinite love!”*

-ELW #825

In this season of thanksgiving, we give thanks and praise to God for the infinite love shown us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, remembering that all our blessings are from God’s gracious hand. We are thankful, too, for the generous financial support provided by our congregations for God’s mission in this Synod. As we end the year, may we share with joy the gifts that God has blessed us with.

-Betsy Koski, Bookkeeper

As of 9/30/25	2024	2025	\$ Change	% Change
Annual Pledged Amount	729,507	695,080	-34,427	-4.7%
Amount Received Year to Date	512,348	510,034	-2,314	-0.4%



Northern Great Lakes Synod

1029 N. Third Street, Suite A
Marquette, MI 49855

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Synod Website:
www.nglsynod.org

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Prayfaithfully

NGLS Daily Devotions Schedule November & December 2025

November 3-9	Melzee Jacobson
November 10-16	Pastor Brittany Barkus
November 17-23	Doreen O'Donnell
November 24-30	Pastor Alex LaChapelle
December 1-7	Pastor Brenda Greenwald
December 8-14	Pastor Kelly Ylitalo
December 15-21	Pastor J Mills
December 22-28	Walter Scanlon
December 29 - January 4	Pastor Lee Goodwin