

PART II: Pastoral Transitions, Committees and Conferences

Ministers of Word and Sacrament Celebrating Anniversaries of Ordination in 2026..... 44

Ministers of Word and Sacrament Retiring Since Last Synod Assembly..... 51

Deceased Ministers 52

Synod Staff..... 53

Executive Committee 54

Synod Council 55

Synod Assembly Planning Committee 2026..... 57

Candidacy Committee 58

Constitution Committee 60

ELCA Fund for Leaders 61

Endowment Fund Committee..... 63

Endowment Distributions 2025..... 64

Synod Ministry Fund Application 66

Walking with Our Indigenous Neighbors Task Force 67

Christ’s Kaleidoscope 68

Lay Advisory Committee 70

Lifelong Faith Formation 71

Leadership Support Committee..... 72

Prayfaithfully..... 73

Stewardship Committee 74

World Hunger Committee..... 75

Worship Committee 76

Youth Ministries Support Team..... 77

Conference 1 – Iron Gogebic Ontonagon 78

Conference 2 – Copper Country..... 79

Conference 3 – Headwaters..... 80

Conference 5 - Menominee Valley 81

Conference 6 – Tri-County 82

Conference 7 – Three Lakes..... 83

Conference 8 – Superior Central 84

Synod Map 85

Ministers of Word and Sacrament

Celebrating Anniversaries of Ordination in 2025

Rev. Bill Jacobson - 25 Years

Pastor Bill Jacobson was born the oldest of 5 children on June 25, 1953 in Canby Minnesota to Vernon and Ilene (Thomsen) Jacobson. Pastor Bill was baptized, nurtured in the faith and confirmed at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Canby. The church and church community was a significant part of the family's life throughout the years.

Graduating from Canby High School in 1971, Pastor Bill attended college in Moorhead and Marshall Minnesota. Over the years, Pastor Bill worked in residential construction as a carpenter, building materials retail, and facilities maintenance and construction at the Rock Island Arsenal in Rock Island Illinois. On June 12, 1976, Pastor Bill and Melzee Matney Healey were married in Brooklyn, Iowa. Living together in central and western Iowa and Northern Illinois, Bill and Melzee have been blessed with 3 children, 6 grandchildren, and 14 great-grandchildren.

After having been encouraged by his confirmation pastor, numerous Sunday school teachers and fellow congregants through the years, Bill felt the call to ordained ministry and entered Wartburg Theological Seminary in the fall of 1997. Pastor Bill has earned a Bachelor of Arts from Western Illinois University and a Master of Divinity from Wartburg Theological Seminary. Pastor Bill was ordained by Bishop Thomas Skrenes in Davenport, Iowa on August 19, 2001.

Assigned to the Northern Great Lakes Synod, Pastor Bill has served The Rock-Perkins Lutheran Parish (Faith, Rock and Bethany, Perkins) from 2001-2003, Zion Lutheran Church of Metropolitan, Felch, MI from 2003 to 2010, All Saints Lutheran Church, Wakefield from 2010 to 2014 and PSALM Shared Ministry (a shared ministry of All Saints, Wakefield and Sharon, Bessemer) from 2014 until retirement in June 2020. Since 2021 Pastor Bill continues to serve St John's Lutheran Church in north Ironwood on a part-time, contract basis. Since the fall of 2023 Pastor Bill has also served the Northern Lights Lutheran Parish (Siloa Lutheran Church in Ontonagon, St Paul's Lutheran Church in Mass City, and First Lutheran Church in Winona) as the Administrative Interim Pastor.

Pastor Bill and Melzee continue to live in their home in Ironwood catching up on many deferred home improvement projects and traveling as time allows.

Rev. Christine Lynne Olson - 25 Years

Born: Columbus, Ohio in Franklin County

Names of parents: Judd and Lynne Olson

Baptized: Emanuel Lutheran Church in Marion, OH - this was my father's parents' church and the church in which my father was raised. My mother was raised in the Episcopal Church (in Connecticut), as a compromise between her parents because her father was originally United Methodist and her mother was Catholic. My mom says that when I was born (I am the eldest of three) she said to dad, "I'll become Lutheran if you go to church." The rest is history.

Confirmed: All Saints Lutheran in Lilburn, GA. Though I was born and baptized in Ohio, we moved to Georgia when I was five years old. Took my First Communion at this church as well.

Undergraduate school: Lenoir-Rhyne University in Hickory, North Carolina. I was a Christian Education major, with the intention of heading to seminary after collage. I took four semesters of Biblical Greek there.

Seminary: Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. My mom commented that I was making a "full circle" when I decided to go there for seminary, as they lived just a few blocks from there when I was born. (Mom and Dad had an apartment near the seminary when they were first married, before they got their first house, which was also in that general area.) But, that's not why I went there. I visited Southern, Gettysburg, and Trinity and simply felt most at home at Trinity.

No other post-graduate work, except yearly continuing education, which should not be underestimated.
Ordination: Trinity Lutheran Church in Lilburn, GA. My parents moved to this church after I went to college. This became the family church until my mom left Georgia and moved to NC. My sister was married there, I was ordained here, my father's funeral was there. The pastors allowed me to preach and assist with worship when I was home from seminary during the summers.

Terminally single (at least so far)

The congregations served and where they are located:

Internship-Christ the King Lutheran in Great Falls, VA; 1998-99

Faith Lutheran Church in Hutchinson, MN; 2001-2004

Trinity Lutheran Church in Martinsburg, WV; Feb 2004-Feb 2021

Good Shepherd and Mt Nebo Lutheran Parish in Orange, VA; Feb 2021-Feb 2023

Emmanuel Lutheran in Menominee, MI; Feb 20 2023 until present (February seems to be my "church changing month".)

I am one of those who felt/sensed the call to become a pastor at a very young age. My mom told me recently (about 8-12 years ago) that I first mentioned that I felt the call at around 4 years old. She said that I came up to her one day and declared that a voice inside me was telling me that I should be a pastor. She said she was shocked because we weren't going to church when I was young (and life was so hectic at that time), so she didn't think I even knew what a pastor was. She said, after that, she decided that we should be going to church. I don't remember that exchange. In my memory, we were always very active at church. My parents were very involved, as were we kids. I don't remember how or when the idea of being a pastor came to me-it was just a part of my consciousness as I grew up.

Rev. David Christenson - 50 Years

Born in Madison Dr. Charles and Shirley Christenson and baptized there. Grew up in Holy Communion Church, Racine Wisconsin as well as being confirmed, married, ordained, and sons baptized there. Attended U. of Wisconsin/Whitewater and Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary graduating in 1976. Ordained at Holy Communion, Racine. Married Jane Champley Christenson June 5, 1971. She was an RN for 42 years. I served Rows Lutheran Parish near Ashland, Ohio, Bethel Lutheran Church in Cicero, Indiana, Salem Lutheran in Bark River, Michigan, and retired after 14 years serving St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in Stephenson and the last four years there also served Gethsemane Lutheran church in Wallace after the parishes were linked. We have two outstanding sons! Peter (Heather, Hailey, Hayden, and Hudson) lives in Appleton and Dr. Joel (Emily, Teddy, and Silvia) lives in Staunton, Virginia. We recently sold our country home we designed and enjoyed for 30 years to relocate in a senior citizen community in Marinette, Wisconsin. I was a volunteer fire fighter/EMS in Indiana and Michigan totaling about 30 years when I physically could not be an EMT any longer. What a life change! I enjoy ham radio and had to set aside my woodworking and gardening hobbies with the move. We attend St. Stephens church where we were welcomed back by Pastor Brenda Greenwald and congregants.

Rev. Norman C. Peterson - 50 Years

Born on Sunday July 9, 1950 to Ruth and Roger Peterson, in Chicago IL.

Baptized at Saron Lutheran Church, Chicago.

Confirmed at St. James Lutheran Church (7400 W. Foster Ave) in Chicago.

Graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Augustana College in Rock Island, IL - May 28 1972.

Received a Master Divinity Degree from Northwestern Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Paul, MN - May 21, 1976.

Ordained into the Lutheran Church in America at the Fourteenth Annual Convention, Illinois Synod held at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL - May 23, 1976.

Congregations served:

Bone Lake Lutheran Church, Luck WI - 6/1/1976 - 5/31/1980

Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rhinelander, WI - 6/1/1980-9/1/2013

Married Mary Joy Anderson 6/14/1974. Blessed with three children, Sarah, Aaron and Paul. Blessed with four grandchildren. Linnea and Emma Osterman and Heath and Tor Petersons.

The Lutheran Church has always been a part of my life including Sunday School, youth group, and weeks at Camp Augustana on Lake Geneva. When my parents and I moved to Woodruff, WI, I became involved in campground worship services through Calvary Lutheran Church.

While enrolled at seminary I met my future bride Mary. We were planning to get married just before internship when I interviewed for a summer ministry on the Floating Chapel sponsored by Pioneer Lake Lutheran Church. Allowed us to get married in June instead of August of 1974. During that summer Mary and I were involved in two youth bicycle trips of 250 miles each led by the pastor who supervised the Floating Chapel Ministry. This experience evolved into taking the 38 more youth group bike trips totaling over 10,000 miles and raising thousands of dollars for World Hunger.

I had the joy of being involved in the Wisconsin Upper Michigan Synod Youth Leadership School both as a group facilitator and for many years as one of the Co-Leaders of this program. I was also blessed to serve on the Synod Council of the Northern Great Lakes Synod and on various committees. I give thanks to God for all the blessings I have experienced in both congregations I have been called to serve.

I am most appreciative of God's gift of my wife Mary who supported me though all these years and for the blessing of our family. I indeed, have been and continue to be blessed. Thanks be to God!

Rev. Peter Vorhes - 50 Years

Pastor Peter Arthur Vorhes was born in La Crosse, WI, on September 28, 1950, the son of Pastor Arthur and Barbara (Quandahl) Vorhes. He was baptized on Reformation Sunday, October 29, 1950, at North Kickapoo Lutheran Church, rural Soldiers Grove, WI (ELC), and confirmed at Calvary Lutheran Church, Perham, MN, on May 23, 1965 (ALC).

Pastor Vorhes graduated from Hayward High School, Hayward, WI, in 1968. He went on to St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN, where he sang in the St. Olaf Choir and from which he graduated with a BA in Music in 1972. He then attended Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, from which he received an MDiv in 1976. He also did graduate work at Luther Seminary from 2002-2009. He was ordained at Peace Lutheran Church, Menomonie, WI, on June 6, 1976, with his father authorized by the District President of the North Pacific District, ALC, to ordain him.

Pastor Vorhes served the following congregations: Cameron Emmanuel and Zion Lutheran (now closed) Churches, Kendrick and Juliaetta, Idaho (1976-1980); St. Stephen Lutheran Church (now closed and reformed as Spirit of Life Lutheran Church), Gladstone, Oregon (Associate Pastor, 1980-1983); Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Marinette, Wisconsin (1983-1989); Messiah Lutheran Church, Marquette, Michigan (Senior Pastor, 1989-1998); and Faith Lutheran Church, Calumet, Michigan (1998-2017).

He married Liz Siivola on December 30, 1999. He has two children from his previous marriage to Vivian Moe: Erik (spouse Rev. Erica Schemper), St. Paul, Minnesota, and Kirstin Sellers, Maple Valley, Washington; and four grandchildren: Zora, Abram, and Hazel Vorhes; and Grace Sellers. He and Liz are also the happy owners of two Golden Retrievers, Lily and Copper.

In retirement, Pastor Vorhes has served as a volunteer Michigan State Police Chaplain, Calumet Post, since 2018, and serves on the Copper Country Critical Incident Stress Management Team. He is an avid bicyclist and cross-country skier and has completed 30 American Birkebeiner cross-country ski marathons. He sings in the Michigan Tech Concert Choir. He also provides pulpit supply, serves as an occasional organist, is currently serving as the administrative interim pastor at Bethany Lutheran Church of Keweenaw, Mohawk, and Shepherd of the Sea Lutheran Chapel, Copper Harbor, and serves on the NGLS Lay Ministry Support Committee.

Rev. Allan E. Johnson - 55 years

I was born in northern Wisconsin, and spent most of my childhood there. My parents were John and Pearl Johnson. My dad worked as a mechanic, and for most of my grade school and high school years we also lived on a small dairy farm with 40 acres of hay field and 40 acres of woodlot pasture. I was baptized and confirmed in First Lutheran Church, Ogema, Wisconsin, but spent much of my Sunday School years at Ogema Baptist Church.

I received a B.A. in mathematics from the University of Chicago where I was also introduced to Jewish life and worship. I met my wife Sara at college. I then attended Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. While in my first call I attended Concordia Seminary in St. Louis Missouri, and received my S.T.M. in Church History from Seminex. Later I studied New Testament and Early Christian Literature at the University of Chicago and received my Ph.D., and have published a number of articles in *Studia Patristica*.

Right after college I married Sara Schilling, in 1967. We have no children.

My first call was a two-point parish, Zion Lutheran Church in Shipman Illinois and St. John's Lutheran Church in Dorchester. I later served in St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Indianapolis Indiana, Calvary Lutheran Church in Chicago Illinois, Zion and Kenneth Lutheran Churches in Adrian Minnesota, Augustana Lutheran Church in Gibbon Minnesota, Healing Waters Parish in Yellow Medicine County, Minnesota, and Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Canby Minnesota. After retirement I served as an interim pastor at Faith Lutheran Church in Rock, Michigan, and Trenary Lutheran Church in Trenary, Michigan, then briefly as an interim assistant at Messiah Lutheran Church, Marquette. I also taught exegesis and New Testament classes through the Synod's Lay School for Mission program.

Ecumenism is important to me, and during my last years in Minnesota I served as chair of the ecumenism committee of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod. During that time I also had the opportunity to serve by invitation on the ecumenism committee of the New Ulm Roman Catholic Diocese.

Rev. Thomas Wickstrom - 55 years

When I was asked to respond to a reminder about my upcoming 55th Anniversary of Ordination, I knew I was getting "really old". I was born at St. Luke's Hospital in Marquette in late November of 1946. Both of my parents were veterans of WWII and recently discharged. I was baptized at Calvary Lutheran Church in Rapid River early in 1947, my father's family Church. My earliest memories of growing up were at the Janzen Hotel in Marquette where my mother was the Manager, my father worked at J&L Steel. We moved to 55 Midway Drive in Negaunee Twp.. on US 41 in May of 1951. I had started Sunday School at St Mark's in Marquette in 1950. We joined my mother's home congregation Immanuel in Negaunee. From kindergarten thru graduation in 1964 I attended the Negaunee Public Schools. I was confirmed at Immanuel and after Confirmation taught Sunday School (3rd. grade) and as a High School Senior Jr. Confirmation I sang in the church choir, and was active in Luther League. I was active in the Boy Scouts of America from Cubs until I earned my Eagle Scout and Pro Deo Et Patria Awards. I have 3 younger brothers Jim, Mike, and Kevin. I was awarded a Scholarship to Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter MN. Graduating with a BA in Psychology in 1968. I moved to Chicago and graduated from the Lutheran School of Theology with a BD in 1972. After completing 4 months of Internship at Tabor Lutheran Church in Rockford IL I married Susan Weber RN from Albert Lea MN at Pine Lake Bible Camp in Waupaca WI. We moved into Seminary Housing 2 days after our wedding. I was ordained into the Lutheran ministry at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Negaunee On October 5, 1971. My first Parish was at South Range/Atlantic Mine MI. In 1976 I was called to the Palmer Lutheran Parish of Concordia Palmer, Our Saviors Suomi Location, and Faith National Mine. In 1984 I was called to Pilgrim Lutheran Church of Fredric WI. During this pastorate I was appointed to a term on the Synod Council of the Wisconsin and Upper Michigan Synod served through the transition to the ELCA. I was on the Board of the Luther Point Bible Camp. We moved back to the U. P. on the call of First Lutheran Church of Iron River, MI in November of 1999. I retired on my birthday in 2001 after 30 years of ministry. Since retirement I have served as part time Visitation Pastor at Bethel Ishpeming also doing interim supply at Bethany Republic and the Pelkie Parish. We have spent our winters in FL at our condo in Green Acres since 2002. I have been pulpit supply in both FL and

MI. We decided because of aging to make our full time residence in FL in 2020. We are members of St Michael's Lutheran Church in Wellington FL where we are both active in the congregations ministries. Pastor Tom does supply when the Pastor must be away and also takes a monthly turn as assisting minister at Sunday Worship. Our family was diminished by the death of our daughter Michelle Brendalen in 2019. She is survived by her son Paul J. Brendalen and his daughters Makenzie and Zoe. Most everyone in the U.P knows our son Lucas who is active in the arts and music in Marquette Co. NMU, and the Synod. Our youngest son Thomas John (T.J.) is a pharmacist with Walgreens in Belmont MI. With his wife Nichole they are raising our grand sons Joshua attending college, Evan who will graduate from high school in the spring of 2026. Our youngest Grand child is Anna who is in 9th grade. Our life is full of friends, church, Our Condo Association where Tom chairs the Landscape Committee. We both swim almost daily in the pool here, and Sue sews baby quilts for church and hospitals.

Rev. Kenneth Henry Michaelis – 60 years

I was born on July 9, 1940, in Madison, WI to Alfred and Myrtle Michaelis. I graduated from Middleton High School in 1958.

I was baptized, confirmed, and ordained at St. Lukes Lutheran Church in Middleton.

College years were spent at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, graduating in 1962 with honors in the major of psychology. My senior thesis/study was published in the Journal of Experimental Psychology.

I married Joanne Kay Tewalt on June 16, 1962. In the fall of 1962 we were off to Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque. Internship was spent at Elgin State Hospital for five quarters of clinical pastoral education. Our son Caig was born in 1966, shortly before graduation from Wartburg with a M. Div.

The next step in our lives was the move of 1000 miles to western North Dakota where I served Bethlehem Lutheran in Ross, First English Lutheran in Lost Wood, American Lutheran in Stanley, First Presbyterian Church in Stanley, and as Administrator/Chaplain of Bethel Lutheran Home for the Aged. Three services were held every Sunday, and upon occasion, four services took place, driving 65 miles to make the rounds. With no P.A. systems, I was too tired to talk once I got back to the parsonage about 2:00pm. During our time in North Dakota our daughter, Krista, was born.

In 1973 we accepted a call to serve Peace Lutheran and Nelsonville Lutheran in the Amherst, WI area. During our time I earned a master's degree in counseling from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. We enjoyed this parish just as we had enjoyed the congregations in North Dakota.

In 1976, I accepted a call to serve as Chaplain-Personnel Director for Northland Retirement Community in Marinette, WI. I served Northland for the next 38 years as Chaplain, health Care Administrator, and finally for the last 16 years, as the CEO/President. I retired finally in 2014.

During my time at Northland, since I usually did not have Sunday morning responsibilities, I served as a supply pastor for about 25 churches of various denominations and as interim pastor for 12 parishes. There was something positive about every congregation I assisted.

I served my community duties as Mayor of Ross, ND, and as chairman of the Marinette City Committee on Aging and as Chairman of the Marinette City Board of Cemetery Trustees.

Joanne has been a wonderful partner in all this. She, in addition to raising our children, taught elementary school in Benton, WI, Elgin, IL, Stanley, ND, Amherst, WI and Marinette, WI. She received the honor of Teacher of the Year at Marinette during her tenure. I could not have done what I did without her kind, supportive assistance. We have been married for 64 years and have three fine grandchildren. What a good partner I have.

I worked for a total 58 years out of the 60 since ordination. As Bugs Bunny used to say in the cartoon: "That's all folks".

Thanks to the Church for allowing me to serve.

Minister of Word and Sacrament Retiring Since Last Synod Assembly

Rev. Tammy Barthels:

I was born in Wausau Wisconsin to Alan and Jackie Denfeld (both deceased).

I was baptized and confirmed at Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church in Wausau. I also attended parochial school at Holy Name of Jesus.

After graduating high school I attended North Central Technical College and graduated with a two-year graphic arts - printing degree. I worked in that field for about 14 years. When my brother-in-law was diagnosed with brain cancer, I started volunteering for hospice. His diagnosis turned my heart toward working with hospice patients. I received a certified nursing assistant certificate and worked at the hospice house in Wausau for 5 years. During this time I really felt called to do more ministry and did my first unit of clinical pastoral education in 1997. There were no seminaries close to home and raising children it was difficult to see how God was calling me. I wanted to care for people. I attended Upper Iowa University and received a degree in Human Services with a certificate in social work and worked in that field for another 11 years. I received a Spiritual Direction 3-year certificate in 2005 and continue to offer spiritual direction to others still today. God continued to call and in 2011 I enrolled at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque Iowa. Upon graduating with an M. Div I was called to Immanuel Lutheran Church in Rhineland Wisconsin where I spent seven years shepherding the people before retiring. One of the most significant things in my life was donating a kidney to a friend in 2003. It was the year my daughter was activated to duty in Iraq, our son was in a severe accident, and my father died. Instead of dwelling on what I couldn't do, I dwelt on giving life to another. The Gospel of John chapter 15:12-13 reads "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this to lay down one's life for one's friends." It is a verse close to my heart.

In retirement I enjoy spending time with my spouse Randy, our three adult children, our four grandchildren, traveling, offering spiritual direction, facilitating retreats, creating journals and cards, reading, and spending time kayaking on the lake.

Rev. Peggy Rose

Peggy Rose was born and grew up in Marquette, Michigan. Her parents, Joseph, and Lila Rose raised her with a deep love and respect for God's creation as lived on the south shore of Lake Superior: swimming, skiing, skating, riding horses (7 of them!). She has three siblings. She delights in her extended family: sister-in-law, brother-in-law, nephews, nieces, and a plethora of cousins. She has parented two foster children and a foreign exchange student from Sweden. She is a graduate of Northern Michigan University (1976) and Luther Northwestern Seminary (1985).

Even though she was born and raised in Marquette, Michigan, she "grew up" as a pastor in rural Iowa: seminary internship in eastern Iowa in a rural two-point parish north of the Quad Cities. After graduating from Luther Northwestern Seminary in St. Paul, MN in 1985, she returned to Iowa serving for seven years at Augustana Lutheran Church in Manson. She has also served parishes in the SE-MI Synod and NWL-MI Synod where she also served as an assistant to the bishop.

Reflecting on 40 years of ordained ministry: I have been privileged to get to know and explore and enhance and keep the ministry growing with eleven congregations in the role of intentional interim/transition pastor. This is my passion and true calling. I have been amazed each time that I move to step outside and look up into new and amazing starlit skies, and exclaim O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! I wrote some of these ramblings in an essay that was included in the publication celebrating the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women in the ELCA. 40 years of being ordained into the ministry of word and sacrament has been amazingly different than I had imagined and more than I could ever have dreamed! WOW! Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Holy Spirit! Thank you, God!

Living in God's Amazing Grace,
Pastor Peggy Rose

Deceased Ministers of Word and Sacrament

Since Last Synod Assembly

Rev. Douglas H. Buck

March 24, 1935 + June 3, 2025

Douglas H. Buck was born in Menomonee Falls, WI on March 24, 1935, to Harvey and Grace (Duehring) Buck. He was baptized at St. Paul Evangelical and Reformed Church in Menomonee Falls, WI and confirmed at St. Luke Lutheran Church in Waukesha, WI

He graduated from Carroll College (now University) at Waukesha, WI and then from Northwestern Lutheran Theological Seminary in Minneapolis, MN. Pastor Buck was ordained at St. Mark Lutheran Church in Grand Forks, ND on May 18, 1960. He served two congregations: Holy Trinity in Marshall, WI for 14 years and at Zion Lutheran Church in Metropolitan, MI for 24 years.

He was married to Janet Lange and they had two children and four grandchildren. They have resided in Tennessee for the past 25 years. A Celebration of Life was held for Pastor Doug on June 15, 2025 at Jefferson Park in Chattanooga, TN.

Rev. George A. Olson

September 12, 1925 + February 3, 2026

The Rev. George A. Olson, 100, passed to life eternal February 3, 2026. Pastor George was born on September 12, 1925, to Adolph and Emma Olson on a farm in Star Prairie, WI, the fifth of seven children. He graduated from Osceola High School and then tended the family farm while his brothers served in World War II. Baptized and confirmed at First Lutheran Church in New Richmond, Wisconsin, he went on to graduate from Gustavus Adolphus College in 1951 and Augustana Seminary in 1955. One week later, he married Ruth Holmstrom and began a call to Sunne Lutheran in Wilton, ND. He and Ruth had three children (Clark, Kathryn, and James) and three grandchildren (Rachel, Connor, and Kaila).

Pastor George was active in the Red River Valley Synod of the Augustana Lutheran Church and a founder of Camp of the Cross at Garrison Dam, ND, which began his active service to outdoor ministries, a connection to his rural roots. In 1962, Pastor George was called to serve the parishes of Calvary Lutheran Church, Rapid River, MI and Trinity Lutheran Church, Stonington, MI, where he remained until 1972, when he was called as the first pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Peshtigo, WI, a merger of the Swedish and Norwegian Lutheran Churches that had existed for 100 years one block apart. Here he launched a building program to create a new church building, which was dedicated in 1980. He retired in 1986.

Throughout his years of active ministry, he continued his devotion to outdoor ministry, serving for several years at Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp as both dean and pastor. Following retirement, he trained as a floral designer and worked at a local florist until 2004, while also preaching frequently throughout the Northern Great Lakes Synod and serving on various synod committees. Since retiring, he and Ruth were members of Zion Lutheran Church in Marinette, WI. Pastor George's funeral was held at Zion Lutheran Church, Marinette, WI, on Monday, February 9, 2026.

Northern Great Lakes Synod

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Northern Great Lakes Synod Executive Committee

Rev. Katherine Finegan Bishop
Chuck Thomas Vice President
Nancy Heykes Secretary
Rev. Terry Frankenstein Treasurer
Catherine Tibbett Member, Synod Council
Rev. Diane Srutowski Member, Synod Council

The functions of the Synod Council shall be to:

(S10.03.)

- Exercise trusteeship responsibilities on behalf of the Synod.
- Recommend program goals and budgets to the regular meetings of the Synod Assembly.
- Carry out the resolutions of the Synod Assembly.
- Provide for an annual review of the roster of ordained ministers and the roster of associates in ministry and make appropriate recommendations to the Synod regarding those persons whose status is subject to reconsideration and action under the constitution and bylaws of the ELCA.
- Issue letters of call to ordained ministers and letters of appointment to associates in ministry, consecrated deacons and deaconesses, commissioned teachers, and certified or commissioned lay professionals as authorized by Chapter 10 of the constitution and bylaws of the ELCA.
- Fill vacancies until the next regular meeting of the Synod Assembly except as may otherwise be provided in the constitution or bylaws of the Synod, and determine the fact of the incapacity of an officer of the Synod.
- Reports its actions to the regular meeting of the Synod Assembly.
- Perform such other functions as are set forth in the bylaws of the Synod, or as may be delegated to it by the Synod Assembly.

Northern Great Lakes Synod Synod Council

Year = Year Term Ends (3 year terms)

Rev. Katherine Finegan 2029

Conference 8

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Northern Great Lakes Synod Synod Council

Year = Year Term Ends (3 year terms)

Synod Council continued

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Melzee Jacobson, SWO President 2026

Synod Council Advisor

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**Northern Great Lakes Synod
Assembly Planning Committee
2026**

Year = Year Term Ends (1 year terms)

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Rev. Lily Brondyke
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Report of the Candidacy Committee

This committee accompanies seminarians through traditional and nontraditional pathways toward serving God in ministries of Word and Sacrament (Pastoral) and Word and Service (Diaconal and Chaplaincy).

Current members of the Northern Great Lakes Synod Candidacy Committee include:

Marcie Kaven, Chair	Pastor Grant Van Lishout
Andy Hill, Recording Secretary until 9/30/25*	Andrea Young / Rev. Jen Christenson, Region 5 CaLMs**
Linda Levine, Recording Secretary since: 9/30/25	Assistant to Bishop Sharolyn Swanson
Roland Jacobson	Bishop Katherine Finegan

*We compassionately received Licensed Lay Minister Andy Hill’s regret for withdrawal from our committee in September 2025, as his personal obligations were calling him in different directions. We celebrate the many years of service Andy has offered the NGLS in Candidacy efforts! Our committee has a growth mindset and hopes to add a member or two, in our common desire to accompany those discerning a call to ministry in the ELCA.

**We also received the resignation of our briefly assigned CaLM, Andrea Young, Fall 2025. We have since welcomed our most recent CaLM assignment, Rev. Jen Christenson beginning January 2026.

The NGLS Candidacy Committee met on April 29th at Bethany Lutheran Church in Norway, MI and the progress and needs of six candidates were individually considered. We were updated on the interim Region 5 CaLM, Krista Anderson (of Region 3) and received panel interview training by Bp. Finegan and Pr. Swanson.

A second NGLS Candidacy Committee meeting was held on September 30th at Bethany Lutheran Church in Norway, MI. While we had no candidates due for threshold panels at this meeting, we discussed each one and their next steps. We also received Wartburg seminary updates, NGLS administrative updates, Candidacy training, and CaLM updates from Andrea Young (the newly assigned Region 5 CaLM).

Additionally, many of our NGLS Candidacy Committee members represent our efforts to various NGLS congregations. For example, Marcie Kaven provided an “Adult Forum” presentation to members of the congregation of Bethany Lutheran Church, Escanaba, after worship on February 16th. Also, in Spring of 2025, we welcomed a new Region 5 Candidacy and Leadership Manager, Andrea Young, and a new seminary faculty representative from Wartburg, Rev. Dr. Yackel-Juleen. While we will most certainly miss our previous partners, especially Rev. Ramie Bakkan as she was our Region 5 CaLM for many years, the new faces are breathing fresh perspectives and ideas into our mission. This is welcome and helpful.

Our current ministry roster of candidates includes the following...

- Robert Lake, member of Faith Lutheran in Ishpeming, MI.
 Student Vicar serving Calvary, Rapid River, MI
 Word and Sacrament Candidate, Wartburg
 Entered in August 2023 as a Distance Learner & switched to Collaborative (Feb ‘26)
 Estimated Approval in 2028

- Sarah Sleeter, member of Bethany Lutheran, Norway, MI
Student Vicar serving Christ the King in Escanaba, MI and Faith Lutheran in Rock, MI
Word and Sacrament Candidate, Wartburg
Entered in August 2017 as MDiv Distance Learner
Endorsed in October 2020
Re-engaged as TEEM Candidate in October 2024, estimated Approval in 2026
- Elaine Robbins, member of Eden Lutheran in Munising, MI.
Student Vicar serving Eden Lutheran, Munising
Word and Sacrament Candidate, Wartburg
Entered in October 2024 as a TEEM Journey Together Learner
Estimated Approval in 2028
- Daniel Moschea, member of Porterfield Lutheran in Porterfield, WI
Student Vicar serving Porterfield Lutheran and Beaver American Lutheran
Word and Sacrament Candidate, Wartburg
Entered in August 2023 as a Distance Learner
Estimated Approval in 2027

Our NGLS Candidacy Committee celebrates the ministerial paths of these four candidates. We also recognize that each candidate is unique, and we are committed to doing our best to meet each one where they are, in the hopes of benefiting the kingdom in mutual ministry.

Our NGLS Candidacy Committee requests the Northern Great Lakes Synod to partner with us: Join our efforts to promote a mindfulness of recognizing ministry potential in our congregations. Pray for the wellness of the NGLS Candidacy Committee. We are committed to our work in equipping and accompanying candidates for ministry and we appreciate being lifted in prayer for our resilience and enthusiasm.

Thank you for continuing to call us toward this important work of Candidacy and for your prayerful consideration as we move forward into new spaces for growth and bolstering of our dedication to mutual ministry and accompaniment with NGLS seminarians.

Blessings in Candidacy,

Marcie Kaven,

NGLS Candidacy Committee Chair, 2025

Report of the Synod Constitutions Committee

The Synod Constitutions Committee is appointed by the Bishop to carry out the Synod's responsibility to approve or disapprove any changes to congregation constitutional provisions:

*C16.03. *Any amendments to this constitution that result from the processes provided in*

**C16.01. and *C16.02. shall be sent by the secretary of this congregation to the synod. The synod shall notify this congregation of its decision to approve or disapprove the proposed changes; the changes shall go into effect upon notification that the synod has approved them.*

2025 Model Constitution for Congregations

It has been tradition in our Synod for the Synod Secretary to chair the Constitutions Committee with assistance from Synod staff and committee work by Synod Council members and other volunteers with congregation governance experience. I give thanks for the work of our current Constitutions Committee members: Synod Vice President Chuck Thomas, Synod Council members Gabriel Lannet and Bill Fleming, Richard Reitz, Trinity, Rhinelander and Pastor Paul Heykes, Calvary, Minocqua.

The committee continued to use a regular work cycle (December-March, April-July, and August-November) to review constitutions that are submitted for the required Synod approval. In addition to the formal review, committee members will also include recommendations for non-required changes to improve governance or prevent potential problems. In most cases we try to review drafts ahead of a congregational vote so that needed corrections can be made before a congregational vote.

We encourage all congregations to know their constitutions and bylaws and regularly review and update them. In addition to the required and suggested updates in the 2025 Model Constitution for Congregations, you may also find that some of your existing provisions for council or committee structure don't meet your current situation and needs. The Constitutions Committee is ready to assist your congregation in this review and amendment process. To get started, see the Synod website "Congregation Council Resources" page which includes the 2025 Model Constitution, downloadable in both Word and PDF formats, a memo of alternative governance provisions for small congregations developed by our Committee members and our review schedule for your work planning.

Our committee looks forward to being your congregation's partner in governance work.



Nancy Heykes, Committee Chair

ELCA Fund for Leaders 2026 Annual Report

Thank you to the people of the Northern Great Lakes Synod for investing in the future of the church through the ELCA Fund for Leaders. Your partnership helps free these leaders from the burden of student debt, empowering them to serve where the church needs them and where the Holy Spirit leads. In the 2025-2026 academic year, more than \$3 million in scholarship assistance supported up to 450 future pastors and deacons across the church. *We are grateful for your partnership!*

Students supported in 2025-2026:

Robert Lake	\$25,000	Wartburg Theological Seminary
Daniel Moschea	\$13,300	Wartburg Theological Seminary
Elaine Robbins	\$25,000	Wartburg Theological Seminary
Sarah Sleeter	\$6,500	Wartburg Theological Seminary
Total \$69,800		
Total awarded since inception: \$276,622		

Synod fund(s): Values as of 2/1/2026, after close of ELCA fiscal year

Northern Great Lakes Synd Fund For Leaders Marquette,MI, E271344 Market value as of 2/1/2026: \$495,220.29 New gifts given to your fund in fiscal year 2025: \$798.23

Ngls-First Ev Lutheran Church, Iron Mountain-Flim Marquette,MI, E270902 Market value as of 2/1/2026: \$39,017.27 New gifts given to your fund in fiscal year 2025: \$0.

Northern Great Lakes Synod Skogman Family - Flim Marquette,MI, E270903 Market value as of 2/1/2026: \$257,021.39 New gifts given to your fund in fiscal year 2025: \$2,743

Northern Great Lakes Synod Kemppainen Family-Flim Marquette,MI, E270904 Market value as of 2/1/2026: \$102,616.94 New gifts given to your fund in fiscal year 2025: \$0.

Northern Great Lakes Synod United Lc/Crystal Falls Marquette,MI, E271444 Market value as of 2/1/2026: \$7,794.72 New gifts given to your fund in fiscal year 2025: \$0.

Ngls-Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Menominee, Mi-Flim Marquette,MI, E271473 Market value as of 2/1/2026: \$77,923.89 New gifts given to your fund in fiscal year 2025: \$0.

Northern Great Lakes Synod- Bethel Lc Flim Marquette,MI, E271528 Market value as of 2/1/2026: \$107,591.48 New gifts given to your fund in fiscal year 2025: \$0.

Ngls-David V. & Patricia A. Holli Flim Endowment Marquette,MI, E271758 Market value as of 2/1/2026: \$116,504.74 New gifts given to your fund in fiscal year 2025: \$0.

The Klasner Family Seminary Scholarship Fund, E273313** Market value as of 2/1/2026: \$20,311.45 New gifts given to your fund in fiscal year 2025: \$0.

Total market value as of 2/1/2026: \$1,224,002.17

Synod scholarship available for 2026-2027: \$89,400*

*calculated with a 10% holdback to ensure scholarships can be paid, even if the market fluctuates. Please issue awards in whole dollars.

**funds below \$25,000 do not distribute.

Documents

Process and Timeline

Guidelines for Synods

This document contains eligibility criteria and notes on the selection process and timeline.

FFL Synod nominations

By May 1 Synods submit nominee information to FFL using this Excel template.

Instructions for Synod or
Congregation nominees

By May 15 Synods send to each nominee. This document assists students registering & applying in ELCA GrantMaker.

May 15 - June 5 Students register and apply.

June 25 - July 2 Students accept the grant agreement online.

Website: <https://www.elca.org/our-work/leadership/elca-fund-for-leaders/our-scholarships>

Email FundforLeaders@elca.org

Phone: 800-638-3522, ext. 2936



Report of the Endowment Ministry Committee



Endowment Ministry Funds are a stable and lasting way to fund and grow ministry, both now and well into the future. Thanks to our faithful donors, the Northern Great Lakes Synod (NGLS) is very fortunate to have robust Endowment Ministry Funds. We thank all donors for their faithful stewardship and sharing their treasures to do God's work.

The Endowment Ministry Committee is happy to report that in 2025 all Endowment Ministry Funds of the NGLS showed a healthy investment growth of more than 14%, which mirrored the growth of most general market indexes. The value of the unrestricted Equipping the Saints fund on December 31, 2025, was \$827,333 and the value of the combined restricted funds was \$2,669,868. To support a variety of ministries, \$34,000 was distributed from the Equipping the Saints fund and \$127,920 was distributed from six restricted funds in 2025. The following pages show how much was given to each ministry endeavor.

In 2025 the Endowment Ministry Committee again made updates to the Endowment Ministry Fund governance policy with language reflecting current standards, practices, and needs, which Synod Council subsequently approved at its March 2026 meeting. Included in the update was additional guidance language covering administration fees and language edits to reflect current nomenclature for the Funds.

The Endowment Ministry Committee sponsored a second "Seed Sowers" luncheon during the 2025 Synod Assembly. This luncheon to celebrate past planned givers, donors who have established a planned estate gift, and donors who are considering setting up a planned gift was a success and enjoyed by all who attended. We have been blessed over the years by the seeds sown through our endowment ministries and we look forward to abundant blessings in the future. With the hybrid nature of the 2026 Synod Assembly the committee has opted to forego having a luncheon this year associated with the assembly. We have begun the planning process for a celebration of donors and prospective donors at a yet to be determined future date.

Thank you for sharing your treasures and the love it represents, and thanks be to God.

Respectively submitted,

Chuck Thomas, Committee Chair and NGLS Vice President



Northern Great Lakes Synod Equipping the Saints Fund Distribution 2025

**Unrestricted Assets to determine distribution:
Average Market Value 2021-2025 is \$486,325.36**

\$2,000 Website Development and Maintenance

This distribution will help support the additional financial burden on Mission Support dollars.

\$2,000 Lifelong Faith Formation

We look forward to another year of engagement unhampered by geography or weather. Funds support teachers, the administrator, and underwrites any required expenses.

\$3,000 Bay College Campus Ministry

All our Tri-County Conference congregations support this ecumenical ministry. A part-time campus pastor serves and receives very modest funding. This disbursement helps make a Christian presence on campus possible.

\$3,000 Synod Council Retreat

As the Synod Council seeks to lead our Synod into the future, a time of reflection, discernment, visioning, and prayer is appropriate. This disbursement makes this important work possible.

\$14,000 Leadership Support

This disbursement makes the following opportunities more affordable for congregations and leaders alike: Fall Theological Conference, Clergy Women's Retreat, Boundaries Education, and dedicated support for our Licensed Lay Ministers and Supervisors.

\$2,000 Synod Youth Coordinator

To support our synod's efforts toward collaborative youth ministry.

\$2,500 U.P. Wild Church – Mission Development

Begun in 2019, this ministry effort is in collaboration with the Episcopal Diocese and supported in part by a grant from the ELCA. Begun as a holy experiment in the Marquette County area, additional ministries now include five more communities.

\$2,000 Justice Advocacy

This disbursement will provide financial support for our synod's efforts around Racial Equity, Cultural Competency, Welcome and Inclusion, Darkness to Light training, and building relationships with our Tribal neighbors.

\$2,000 Endowment Ministry Project Expenses

This year will see a continuation of the Seed Sowers luncheon which celebrates people who have or who are interested in including an ELCA ministry in their estate plan or will.

\$1,500 Future Tanzania Visits by the Bishop's Assistant.

It is anticipated that the Assistant to the Bishop will visit our Companion Synod in Tanzania in the next few years. Putting a portion of Endowment distributions aside for this purpose reduces the impact of future expense.

Total 2025 Distribution: \$34,000 (7% distribution of assets)

Thank you for your gifts to the Equipping the Saints Endowment Ministry of the NGLS!

Northern Great Lakes Synod

Endowment Ministry Distribution – Restricted 2025

Restricted Assets: \$2,669,868 (December 31, 2025, balance)
ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust & Thrivent Charitable

\$69,800 Seminarian Scholarships

Preparing the next generation of pastoral leaders is an important part of the Synod's work. Students from synod congregations benefit from our various endowments. Our Synod stands as one of the most generous Synod in the ELCA in the support of seminarians.

\$7,775 Tanzania Scholarships

Restricted giving by donors has made it possible to support members of the Church in Tanzania pursue their learning at the Kisarawe Lutheran Junior Seminary and higher education at Tumaini University in Tanzania.

\$16,250 Rural Ministry

Restricted giving by donors makes it possible to support our Synod work. Programs throughout our Synod benefit from this gift including seminary candidacy, outreach and leadership support.

\$12,464 St. Mark's, Marquette Legacy Endowment Fund

Distributions from this fund, which was created following the closure of the congregation, supports the ministries of Fortune Lake Camp, ELCA Seminaries/Seminarians, Synod Restricted Mission Support, and Room at the Inn/Warming Center.

\$14,868 Clergy Debt Relief Fund

This newest Endowment Fund was begun through the generous bequest of Norman Lamberg. Annual grants are made to rostered persons who have incurred debt while in seminary seeking their first theological degree.

\$6,763 Bishop Thomas and Luanne Skrenes Fund for Ministry

Annual distributions from this Endowment Fund support the clergy of our Synod through debt retirement, as well as ministries with our Companion Synod, the Eastern & Coastal Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

2025 Total Distribution from Restricted Funds - \$127,920

2025 Total Distribution: \$161,920



SYNOD MINISTRY FUND

Grant Application



The Synod Ministry Fund was created to provide financial support for innovative and creative ministry efforts. This year, 2026, the scope of the focus is wider in an effort to include ongoing and established ministry efforts. And there are funds specifically available for backpack programs, healthy snacks for food pantries, and health related ministries for Seniors. Please describe your proposal and submit your application for grant funds using the guide below.

1. Briefly describe your ministry effort in 3-4 sentences. Provide contact information.

2. Describe how your effort will align with the following goals of the Synod Ministry Fund:

- Collaborative: involve more than one congregation in planning and participation.
- Evangelism focused: build relationships with the unchurched in your community.
- New: different, experimental or how does this build on and support what is ongoing.

3. Proposed Timeline

4. Projected Budget

- Provide an itemized, projected budget.
- Include amount requested, other funding streams, and contact info for your fiscal agent.

5. Objectives

- What are your goals and how will you know if you have achieved them?

6. Operational Details

- Describe how you will carry out and execute your project.

7. Evaluation Upon the completion of your project, you agree to provide:

- a report which includes a summary of impact, degree of participation, etc.
- an itemized accounting, with receipts, and return of any unused funds.

-
- The generosity of givers results in a balance of \$13,000 for disbursement in 2026.
 - Grant applications for funds received in 2025 may be submitted until January 31, 2027, or until all available funds are disbursed.
 - The maximum amount per application this year is \$1500.
 - Be advised that grant requests may be denied.
 - Please send all questions and completed grant applications to npls@nplsynod.org.



nplsynod.org



1029 North Third Street, Suite A Marquette MI 49855



906/228-2300

Report of the Justice Advocacy Committee: **Walking with Our Indigenous Neighbors Task Force**

The Walking With Our Indigenous Neighbors (WWOIN) Team seeks to foster relationships between synod congregations and indigenous people/ communities, by increasing the awareness of and appreciation for indigenous culture and history, as well as encouraging support for their rights and healing from the ongoing trauma of colonization.



Current members of the WWOIN team are Pastor Sharolyn Swenson, Pastor Bucky Beach, Pastor Julie Belew, Andrew Crow-Roberts, Pastor Scott Ehle, Nancy Heykes, Pastor Amanda Kossow, Rich Reitz, Pastor Melinda VanderSys, Pastor Dave Van Kley, and Carol Watts. Other members of synod congregations are welcome to join this team.

During 2025, members of the WWOIN Team sponsored a memorial to the Synod Assembly, publicizing the work of and providing funding for the ELCA's Truth Seeking and Truth Telling Task Force (TSTT). Part of the ELCA's Truth and Healing movement, this task force is dedicated to making transparent the Church's complicit role during the Indian Boarding School Era, and providing to the indigenous communities the details of its operation of the Bethany Indian Mission in Wittenberg, Wisconsin. The memorial passed unanimously at assembly.

At the Synod Assembly, the WWOIN team provided a display highlighting our efforts, and Rich Reitz led a workshop on Indian Boarding Schools, highlighting the story of Bethany at Wittenberg.

Members of the committee taught one of the Lifelong Faith Formation classes on the Seven Grandfather Teachings by James Vukelich and offered several workshops and forums at congregations around the synod during the year.

Several members continue to serve on the TSTT task force, providing leadership in researching Indian Boarding Schools and coaching students at Wartburg Seminary engaged in this research as part of Dr. Craig Nesson's American Genocide class.

We provide resources for worship to help congregations observe the National Day of Awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (May 5) and Boarding School Remembrance Day on the Sunday nearest September 30.

We seek to provide information regarding events in the indigenous community to which all people are invited. Last year, members participated in the Children's Remembrance Walk, Water Walks, Ceremonies, Tribal gatherings, along with serving the veterans in the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, attended several powwow events across the synod, supported Ishpeming area congregations and pastors in their study of Robin Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* and offered a Zoom study on the movie, *Sugarcane*.

Presently, the team is reviewing its vision, setting goals and a timeline for events in 2026 and beyond.

Respectfully submitted,
Pastors Bucky Beach and Dave Van Kley, co-chairs

Report of CHRIST'S KALEIDOSCOPE TEAM

The Northern Great Lakes Synod Christ's Kaleidoscope Team was formed in 2023 as a Task Force to offer learning and conversation across the synod around issues of justice, particularly around racial equity. The early tasks were offering the Synod Lenten Challenge in 2023 and 2024, an online learning cohort during Lent. Following the movement of many of our committees and task force, it has been recognized that seeing others through the eyes of Jesus is work we do all the time. This year, the task force has identified the lasting quality of their work, and have met several times to shape their team mission, in light of the Vision and Purpose of the ELCA and mission of the Synod.

TEAM ACTION STATEMENT: (always evolving) *Engage and activate with one another to see through the eyes of Jesus racial equity, LGBTQIA2S+ personhood, disability awareness, and ecology.*

Team members recognized that while there may be value in separating our focus into four groups, like the image of kaleidoscope (and God's creation), the work of justice is interconnected and yields mutual flourishing. In clarifying the use of the term "justice"...as theological or biblical justice is "living in right relationship with God, self, one another, and creation" instead of a more common or legalistic view of justice. This reframing, or turn of the kaleidoscope lens, means that the gift of discipleship in the promises of baptism "to strive for justice and peace in all the earth" cannot separate our work, but only refocus as it moves through seasons of attention.

FOUR POINTS OF FOCUS for RIGHT RELATIONSHIP:

- **Racial Equity and Justice:** We recognize the right relationship seeing all ethnicities as ones created in the image of God. And we are compelled to name hard truths that the sin of racism exists, and even still impacts church and culture. Making space to listen to the voices of black, indigenous, and persons of color (BIPOC), helps us see more clearly how we might expose and turn away from ways we are a part of that brokenness. Rev. Melissa Salminen is leading a Lifelong Faith Formation class. In the Fall, rostered ministers will participate in Racial Equity Boundaries Education, next Epiphany will have a synod focus on African worship music, and we anticipate a Civil Rights Bus Tour in 2027. We will partner and support our fellow team, WWOIN, in listening to indigenous voices.
- **Identity and Expression Justice:** We recognize the right relationship of being freed and safe to express one's own gender and be in loving, consensual, just relationships with whom we choose, is also an expression of the image of God and a manifestation of God's love itself. This work advocates for the LGBTQIA2S+ folks among us and seeks to learn and share inclusive grace, knowing some are on a path of de-construction of cultural and historic bias that distorts God's grace. The team is active at PRIDE Marquette, and other PRIDE events across the synod during the month of June.
- **Ability and Agency Justice:** We recognize that bodies work uniquely, age differently, are many sizes, or might be healing or dying and that all persons have the agency and dignity in their unique bodies. We are only disabled when culture places barriers of participation or excludes, intentionally or unintentionally. Christ's Kaleidoscope seeks to educate and resource congregations with ways to include all bodies and abilities in their gatherings and spaces.
- **Creation Care and Justice:** We recognize that we are a part of God's creation, interconnected and interdependent on every other living thing. Our actions as humankind has the ability to cause great harm, and nurture harmonious flourishing. We lift up the deep theological tradition and biblical witness of Eco-justice, especially as ones in such a pristine, beautiful, and precarious corner of God's creation. The season this team is most active in this area is the first Sunday in September through October 4 (St. Francis Day) for the Season of Creation.

The work of Christ’s Kaleidoscope is still growing, shaping and responding. The Team has a goal of meeting quarterly on Zoom, and is always open to new folks. If you are interested in the work of the Christ’s Kaleidoscope Team, contact Rev. Jared Howard or one of the team members in your Conference:

Conference	Team Role	Team-Member
2	Chair	Rev. Jared Howard
1		Rev. Brittany Barkus
4		Amanda Rasner
6		Vicar Robert Lake
6		Rev. Melissa Salminen
6		Chuck Thomas
8		Rev. J. Michael Mills
8	Synod Staff Contact	Rev. Sharolyn Swenson



Report of the Lay Advisory Committee

The Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) is charged with oversight and support of laypersons engaged in preaching and ministry across the synod, including those on the pulpit supply list, those serving as Licensed Lay Ministers, and seminarians serving congregations of the Northern Great Lakes Synod, while working towards a degree. Present members of the committee are Bishop Katherine Finegan, Sister Noreen Stevens, and Pastors Terry Cathcart, David Van Kley and Peter Vorhes.

The LAC interviews and approves candidates to serve as LLM's in synod congregations and, under Sister Noreen's leadership, arranges for support and evaluation through an assigned clergy supervisor and the congregation served. LLM's are appointed by the Bishop to serve in a particular congregation or congregations for a designated period of time, subject to regular review. LLM's are authorized to preach, lead worship, and may be authorized to preside at Holy Communion in the congregation to which they are assigned.

Currently, the following LLM's are serving across our synod: Jon and Sharon Babbitt, First, Grand Marais, MI (Pastor Jim Duehring, supervisor); Elaine Hendrickson, Our Saviour's, Atlantic Mine, MI (Pastor Julie Belew, supervisor); Karen Hanson at Northland Retirement Community, Marinette, WI (Pastor Keith Kolstad, supervisor); Virginia Paulson, Community Lutheran Church, Suomi/Palmer, MI (Pastor Terry Cathcart, supervisor); Linda Stoetzer, Trinity Lutheran Church, Brevort, MI (Pastor Melinda VanderSys, supervisor); and Donna Ahlberg, Trinity, Iron River (Pastor Lance Crevier, supervisor).

During the last year, the following LLM's completed their ministries: Larry Molloy at Bethany Lutheran Church of the Keweenaw, Mohawk, MI; and Andrew Hill at Trinity Lutheran Church in Stambaugh, MI. We give thanks for their faithful ministries!

The LAC facilitates communication with seminary students assigned by the Bishop to ministry settings across our synod. Currently, the following seminarians are serving: Robert Lake, Calvary, Rapid River, MI (Pastor Mike Markwell, supervisor); Daniel Moschea, Porterfield, Porterfield, WI (Pastor Lee Goodwin, supervisor); Elaine Robbins, Eden, Munising, MI (Pastor Ellie Russey, supervisor); Sarah Sleeter, Christ the King, Escanaba and Faith, Rock, both in MI (Pastor Dave Johnson, supervisor).

During the last year, the LAC initiated:

- Quarterly support meetings via Zoom for LLM's and their supervisors, for the purpose of building community and discussing shared ministry concerns. These will continue in the new year.
- Quarterly education opportunities for all laypersons engaged in worship leadership and preaching. Topics have included: Spiritual Formation, Expansive Worship, Law and Gospel in the year of Luke, Dwelling in the Word, and Witnessing to a Lutheran Identity in Ecumenical Settings. New opportunities are planned throughout the rest of 2026.
- Together with the Lutheran School of Theology of Chicago and under the leadership of Sister Noreen, reviewed the applications of and enrolled ten persons in Project Starling, a two-year study program for laypersons engaged in a variety of congregational ministries. Sister Noreen continues to meet with the students to provide support and counsel.

In addition, the LAC is working to develop a clear set of standards for laypersons listed on the NGLS' pulpit supply call list. Expectations include:

- The recommendation of their parish pastor;
- Have attended and/or are participating in the NGLS Lay School, one of the lay education opportunities offered by our neighboring synods, or by an ELCA seminary;
- Have participated in Boundary Training offered through the NGLS.
- Invitations to the quarterly Zoom education events offered by the LAC.

Finally, the LAC approved changing the title "Licensed Lay Minister" to "Synodically Authorized Minister," in order to bring our terminology into alignment with other ELCA synods. So from now on, LLM's will be officially known as SAM's!

Respectfully submitted,
Pastor David Van Kley, Committee Chair

Lifelong Faith Formation

Current Members: Sister Noreen Stevens (administrator), Rev. Soren Schmidt, Cindy Sjoquist, Rev. Diane Srutowski, Bishop Katherine Finegan, Matthew Johnson (chair)

In 2025, Lifelong Faith Formation celebrated its 6th year of synod-wide engagement centered around various topics that matter to members of the Northern Great Lakes Synod. We continue to connect learners across the synod toward a shared goal of learning and reflection, thereby “equipping the saints” for living fully into their Christian vocation. The scope and variety of topics, from scripture studies to spiritual practices, bible language to social/cultural concerns, is a testament to the energy of the many instructors and learners in our synod.

Since its inception in 2020 we have welcomed over 1000 participants and teachers to faithfully engage the Word through sustaining and motivating topics. Here is a snapshot of our two most recent semesters:

Fall 2025 Session

Feeding Your Soul: Practicing Spiritual Practices – Revs. Terry Cathcart, Terry Frankenstein, Lee Goodwin, Grant Van Lishout, Sister, D’Etta Broam, Sister Noreen Stevens

In the Beginning: The First 11 Chapters of Genesis – Rev. Tommy Wimsae

Introduction to Biblical Hebrew – Rev. Nicole Hanson-Lynn

Recognizing, Responding and Re-Visioning Discipleship in an Age of Christian Nationalism
–Rev. Dave Van Kley

Spring 2026 Session

Faith in a Digital Age: The Blessings and Burdens of AI – Rev. Pete Warmanen

Neighbors Across Faiths: Building Connections – Rev. Sarah Semmler Smith

Reconciling our Faith and Civic Life Responsibilities – Chuck Thomas, NGLS Vice President

Troubling the Waters for Healing the Church – Rev. Melissa Salminen

Wondrous Encounters: Scripture for Lent – Sister Noreen Stevens

Our goal remains clear: to be an avenue for learning and spiritual fellowship centered around pertinent and applicable topics. We can only do this by the grace of God, through the movement of the Spirit. Thank you to all who have participated, and we welcome anyone to future opportunities!

You are invited to contact Sister Noreen Stevens (nstevens@nglsynod.org) with class suggestions, or to discuss leading a potential class.

Respectfully submitted,

Sister Noreen Stevens and Matthew Johnson

Report of the Leadership Support Committee

The Synod Leadership Support Committee is responsible for supporting Rostered Leaders, Licensed Lay Ministers, and their families as they engage in the specific ministries. We plan and provide opportunities and resources for wholeness of life and continuing education. We hope to encourage and enhance spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical health among our Synod's ministry leaders and their families.

We have continued to be appreciative of the variety of ministries and Rostered Leaders in our synod including, but not limited to, Administrative Interim Pastors, Licensed Lay Ministers, Collaborative Seminary Students, and ordained leaders from Full Communion Partner denominations. As we work on collaborative efforts and continuing education opportunities through the year, we hope that our work can be a support for all leaders serving in the Northern Great Lakes Synod. We continue to support Bishop Finegan as she works with synod staff and churchwide in matching Rostered Leaders to congregations, and in efforts toward debt relief for Rostered Leaders in our synod.

In the last year the Synod Leadership Support Committee oversaw/participated in the following:

- Lifelong Faith Formation opportunities
- Gathering for Retired Rostered Leaders
- Gathering for Widows/Widowers of Rostered Leaders
- Bishop's Convocation in September of 2025
- Boundaries Training for all Rostered Leaders via hybrid Zoom/in-person gatherings in November 2025 along side the rest of Region 5.
- First Call Theological Education for first call pastors in the Northern Great Lakes Synod and the six synods of Wisconsin.
- Professional Leader's Conference in February of 2026
- Working with the Clergy Compensation Subcommittee to communicate compensation recommendations to the Synod Council.

In the year to come the Synod Leadership Support Committee hopes to continue the work of supporting leaders and their families through similar programming, regular check-ins, and any new opportunities that may surface. Many thanks to current committee members Bishop Finegan, Deacon Lori Ward, and Pastor Melinda VanderSys.

Respectfully Submitted,
Pastor Catie Ford
Leadership Support Committee Chair



Report of Prayfaithfully

“Praying incessantly isn’t perpetual recitation of prayers; it is simply abiding in the presence of the Beloved in every place and time.” - Edward Hays

The writers of our Prayfaithfully website devotions are a blessing! Rarely do they hear from those who read the devotions, but the fact that this remains our most accessed page on the website is testimony to how much these devotions are valued. 2025 saw 35 individuals (including several new writers), two Bible study groups, Fortune Lake staff, Project Starling participants, and members of the Synodical Women’s Organization share their faith through their writing. We offer our deepest gratitude for your willingness to write! Your words have provided hope and inspiration, as well as often being thought-provoking and challenging. We are grateful for your words!

Volunteering to write - as an individual, couple, Bible study group, or just a bunch of friends – brings a smile and gladdens my heart! Please contact me at the Synod Office (906) 228-2300 or bakoski@nglsynod.org if you are interested and would like more information or if you would like to schedule a week to write.

Our monthly Prayfaithfully calendars are coordinated by Christine Harkness. These calendars can be found on the synod website and are also included in each issue of the Northern Light newsletter. Chris does a wonderful job of reminding us to keep in our prayers people and ministries that we may not always have at the forefront of our thoughts. Her prayer suggestions are an excellent way of deepening our prayer life, inviting us to increase our awareness of God’s activity in the world. Thank you, Chris, for your outstanding work!

To both our writers and our readers of Prayfaithfully devotions, thank you. As the Hays quote above teaches us, praying is simply abiding in the presence of God (our Beloved) in every time and place. Can there be a better place?

Respectfully Submitted,
Betsy Koski

www.nglsynod.org/prayfaithfully

Report of the Stewardship Committee

The highlight of our 2025 year for the stewardship committee was a presentation that was given at the Bishop's Convocation at Fortune Lake in September. We brought in Victoria Flood and Karen Kretschmann from the ELCA Churchwide offices to give a presentation and lead discussion on stewardship and generosity. The focus around this conversation was empowering ministry leaders to equip the congregation to tell their story.

We have started to look at how we can build on this story telling approach at a synodical level. In the past programs like mission interpreters would do this at a congregational level. As a synod stewardship committee, we hope to not only equip congregations to tell their story but also to share the ways the Holy Spirit is at work in the synod, and the ways that your mission support continues to enable wonderful ministry.

As we look towards 2026, one idea we are going to explore is helping congregations tell the story of how God is at work in their ministry. An idea that was presented to us by the churchwide team is to create a podcast. Through these five-to-ten-minute videos we would interview and highlight the amazing work God and our congregations are doing from Ironwood to Sault Ste. Marie, from Rhinelander to Copper Harbor. This short form podcast format would be easily shareable across the synod and highlight some of the amazing ministry and work that is happening already.

We look forward to continuing to work with congregations and leaders to tell the story of how God is at work in our congregations and across the synod.

Respectfully Submitted,
Pastor Mike Markwell

Report of the World Hunger Team

ELCA World Hunger works toward a world where all are fed. The Synod's World Hunger team provokes the saints to action through story-telling, connection, and collective work with ELCA World Hunger until all are fed. The NGLS World Hunger Team is most visible at Synod Assembly. However, you are working across our congregations to feed hungry folks, especially children, in local settings and communities. The World Hunger Team works to increase generous giving during Synod Assembly and throughout the year, as well as honor and uplift the work of individuals and congregations finding new and creative ways to feed people.

SYNOD ASSEMBLY 2025: Over the past year, as the "Apollos Watered...cast your bread upon the waters" (Ecc 11:1-2) theme unfolded, the whole synod came together to gather close to \$25,000 for Synod Assembly in May of 2025. There were two congregations who received the "Big Bear Award": Bethel Lutheran in Ishpeming, for "God's Work, Our Hands" project that delivered food out into the community; and Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Eagle River, Wisconsin for their Community Backpack Project. The Bread Basket 2025 recipient was Mary Lou Blomquist, member of Messiah, Marquette, for her many years of service to local and synod World Hunger.

LEADERSHIP: The World Hunger Team is grateful for the leadership of Pr. Tommy Wimsae, chair of the World Hunger Team for several years, who is now pastor with an ELCA congregation outside of our synod. Pastor Sharolyn Swenson is the synod staff liaison for the team. The team is always expanding to welcome new co-workers into this abundant work.

GENEROSITY: Together, the congregations of the Northern Great Lakes Synod feed hungry folks all across the U.P. and northern Wisconsin in life-giving and community building ways. Congregations give steadily or with bursts of generosity throughout the year to the tune of \$47,030. Combine that with the Synod Assembly offering, the people of the Northern Great Lakes Synod sent \$71,903.52 to ELCA World Hunger last year, to feed folks around the world, while still feeding folks in our communities and towns.

LOCALLY: Three of our NGLS congregations applied for and received a one-time World Hunger Daily Bread Grants of \$500 each to supplement their food-based ministries in their local contexts. We are grateful for the local leaders who have been doing food-based work locally, wrote the grants, and now will help these World Hunger dollars feed our hungry neighbors.

- United Lutheran Church in L'Anse, MI
- Faith Lutheran Church in Calumet, MI
- Bethel Ev. Lutheran Church in Menominee, MI

GLOBALLY: Your generous giving, through World Hunger, when gathered with the gifts of the whole church, has contributed to our companion synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania: a Palliative Care Project for \$117,000; Training of Health Educators for \$36,000; Mosaic Whole Community Health for \$18,000; and a Community Empowerment Project CEP for \$72,000.

Report of the Worship Committee

The worship committee meets quarterly to assist in planning worship for synod assembly and other synod events as well as providing opportunities such as workshops and events that equip, educate and deepen worship and worship leaders in the synod.

The 2025 Synod Assembly opening worship was held at Bethel in Ishpeming this year. A different space with different opportunities. We installed Pastor Sharolyn Swenson as Assistant to the Bishop. We used many of our pastors who play brass and guitar to enhance and lead the music. We supplemented them with local professionals. Jon Weit from the ELCA worship office was our organist.

Once again, the Synod had a broadcast Christmas worship service on WLUC TV 6 and our YouTube page.

We have begun planning worship for our 2026 hybrid Assembly.

Thank you to all the worship committee members for their hard work. They are Bishop Katherine Finegan, Shirley Norquist, Pauline Kiltinen, Tonya Perry, Pastor Soren Schmidt, Lucas Wickstrom, and Christine Ebert.

Respectfully submitted,
Lucas C. Wickstrom, Committee Chair

Report of the Synod Youth Team

Greetings members of the Northern Great Lakes Synod!

The synod's Youth Ministry Team works to plan and support youth ministry activities and events, develop and share resources in youth and family ministry with congregations, and provide training opportunities to develop leaders of every age in youth and family ministry.

Over the past year, our Synod Youth Team has been hard at work alongside our Synod Youth Coordinator, Stefanie Ehle. The young people in our midst inspire us to continue to provide accessible opportunities for faith formation and to support adult leaders working in congregations as they foster relationships with youth and encourage their participation in congregational life. We are exceedingly grateful for NGLS youth, their families who support their endeavors, adult youth leaders and pastors working in congregations, and the great cloud of witnesses who support youth ministry in our synod.

In 2025, the Synod Youth Team :

- Continued to support the youth ministry efforts of the diligent youth leaders throughout the synod. The spirit of collaboration is alive and well in our synod! This is most apparent in the open invitations to all NGLS youth, regardless of whether they are members of a particular congregation or not. We are grateful for the dedicated leaders who coordinate these service trips, special events, and faith-centered experiences.
- Approved and distributed the last of the funds available for Collaborative Youth Ministry in the Synod. The events sponsored by these grants were each unique, but they all featured collaboration between two or more congregations and centered youth as their main demographic.
- Met in person for our team retreat at Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp June 27th-28th. We spent the weekend revisiting our ongoing efforts and dreaming about what the Team's role in the synod looks like as we live into our mission.
- Created a Youth & Family Resource Calendar, which includes ideas for youth engagement in a congregational setting throughout the year. The document is intended to serve as a functional tool for lay leaders who have questions about what they could be doing in the absence of a rostered leader. This resource is free for all and available on the NGLS website.
- Supported Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp in their efforts to provide a workshop for adult leaders at each of their youth retreats in addition to encouraging youth to participate in their summer and year-round programs.
- With funding support from Zion Marinette's Endowment fund and an Evangelism Grant through the ELCA, we are hosting a retreat for adult youth leaders this summer at Fortune Lake! The retreat is open to all adults interested in youth ministry and is scheduled for August 13th-15th, 2026. The retreat will include workshops, storytelling, worship, opportunities for resource sharing, and designated time to build connections amongst the group. All are welcome, whether they are a seasoned leader or just beginning to engage with this work. The cost for participants is just \$25! Those interested in registering can find more information on our page on the synod website.
- Started sharing stories from youth in the synod through our Synod Youth Spotlight series. We've shared four stories thus far, and we look forward to sharing more from the incredible young people in our midst! Each story is shared on our social media and linked in the Synod E-Notes in addition to living on the Synod website.

Overall, our work is a celebration of our youth. We're always looking for new voices and perspectives as we continue our endeavor to support the young people in our synod. My contact information is listed below for those interested in joining our team. If you have questions about anything in this report, I am happy to talk with you.

Blessings,
Charlotte Strom
Synod Youth Committee Chair
Northern Great Lakes Synod
E: cmstrom78@gmail.com
P: (906)360-7357

Report of Conference 1—Iron-Gogebic-Ontonagon

The Iron/Gogebic/Ontonagon Conference met this year to elect synod council representation and president. We are so thankful to Pr. Brittany Barkus for stepping up as our newest synod council representative, as well as Gabriel Lannet for continuing to serve. We also thank Chris Wirtanen and Kris Carlson for continuing their service as Vice President and Secretary. This is my first year as conference president, so I look forward to this position as well. The pastors from our conference meet for weekly text study and mutual support. This year, there has been a new effort between congregations to start a branch of UP Wild (UP Wild West) in our conference, and while it has been going for less than a year, it is an exciting opportunity.

Shalom,

Pastor Nicole Hanson-Lynn

Conference 2 - Copper Country Conference

Grace and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.” +Hebrews 12:1-2

We would like to acknowledge and give thanks for the gifts of our retired clergy who continue to support, uplift, encourage and preach the Gospel: Rev. Peter Vorhes, Rev. Bucky Beach, Rev. Bill Jacobson, and Rev. Philip Johnson. And in a similar fashion give thanks for the life and ministry of Rev. Micheal Laakko. We grieve at the loss of our colleague, yet rejoice that his faithful energy and work in the Spirit touched so many, and we are certain that Spirit continued to be shared and carried forward into the welcoming promise of eternal life in Christ. We grieve and give thanks for the ministry of Holy Cross, Baraga lead by Pr. Julie Belew, which held their final service on June 8th, 2025, and we honor their loving, faithful servant leadership throughout the many years of service to the community as well as their gracious sending out. We hold in continued loving, healing prayers, our colleague Pr. Larry Molloy (Bethany, Mohawk). We want, with God’s grace, to also acknowledge and give welcome and blessings to those who are familiar to us and who have had special installations, ordinations and/or appointments within the past year and in our Conference area:

Pr. Julie Belew is Interim Pastor in L’Anse.

Pr. Jared Howard has been elected as the Executive Director for Main Street Calumet

Pr. Bill Jacobson was interim pastor at Northern Lights Lutheran Parish in Ontonagon County.

Pr. Soren Schmidt is our new Conference President-elect.

Pr. Peter Vorhes is interim at Bethany, Mohawk / Shepherd of the Sea, Copper Harbor.

Pr. Kelly Ylitalo is pastor at Mission United, Pelkie, and formerly at yoked congregation Grace, South Range. Is also our out-going Conference President. We give thanks for her faithful leadership.

Each of our clergy have been integral for the continued ministry leadership in and around our conference. Our Tuesday text studies have been enriched with ecumenical conversations and conference-wide collaborative work and wide array of community outreach efforts. There has also been amazing outdoor experiences of faith through the collaborative efforts of UP Wild in the Keweenaw, and great inter-religious gatherings and luncheon discussions of Keweenaw Faiths United – thanks, in part, to the collaborative work of Rev. Sarah Semmler Smith and of Episcopal Priest: Rev. Sarah Diener-Schlitt. I thank God for the amazing clergy and leaders in our Conference who so tirelessly work to uplift and encourage this beautiful conference community, and tend the creation that encompasses us and to all in need.

Our Conference leaders continue to share thoughts and ideas about collaborations, events, and activities throughout our Conference for all ages. We are always asking and seeking input, time, and talent from others to develop even stronger bonds of relational events. Our year was filled with many collaborative youth & family events (Hwy clean-up, VBS, Faith-In-Action events, Confirmation and acolyte events, social events with food, “Soup’s On” meal service, “Let’s Eat” meal service, partnerships with Feeding America, “Let’s Rebuild Community” efforts, various service projects, trips to Niagara Falls, etc.), and we give thanks for MTU Campus Ministry and their services, events, and food ministry; and to our ecumenical and inter-religious partnerships and continued actions and developments and special events. We are looking forward to another active, productive, and servant leadership year together in community...in God’s family.

Thank you for sharing. Thank you for continuing all you do as servant leaders in the faith, hope, and love of Jesus Christ! We see you. We see Christ in you. We see the Holy Spirit active in you and the community and spaces we come together in. We pray that the Holy Spirit continue to be ever present and vigilant in you and for our great community. Amen.

Be blessed. Be a blessing. In Christ,

+ Pr. Soren S. Schmidt, Conference 2 President-elect

Report of Conference 3—Headwaters

Hello from the Headwaters Conference!

This report is being submitted by the Headwaters' newly elected Conference President, Pr. Pete Warmanen. Having returned to the Synod I grew up in, I'm honored to step into this role – especially following Pastor Maxine Gray, who served faithfully and helped shape a strong and connected conference. I step into this role with deep appreciation for her leadership.

It's been a year of both transitions and celebrations in our Conference. We began by giving thanks for the ministry of Pastor Sherry VanLishout, who served faithfully at Ascension Lutheran in Minocqua for several years. We wish her all the best as she steps into a new season focused on family and hobby farming.

We also celebrated a new beginning, as Pastor Morgan Simmons was called to serve at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Rhinelander. We give thanks for this new partnership in ministry and pray God's blessings on the journey ahead.

Our Conference continues to stay connected through regular gatherings of pastors for check-in, devotions, and fellowship. Most recently, we've been meeting at Immanuel in Rhinelander, and these times together have been meaningful – offering encouragement, support, and a reminder that we're not in this work alone.

We also gathered for our annual Conference Meeting this year at Calvary Lutheran Church in Minocqua. It was a wonderful opportunity to reconnect, share updates, and look ahead together.

One of the highlights of the year was our "Light the Fire" campfire event, held in partnership with Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp. Hosted at Ascension in Minocqua, it brought together people from several of our Conference congregations for a campfire, fellowship, and so much S'more! We're excited to continue this tradition, with this year's gathering planned at Faith Lutheran Church in Three Lakes.

Another part of our shared life together has been "Worship in the Wild" – opportunities to gather outdoors, experience God's creation, and worship in a different setting. These gatherings continue to be a unique and meaningful way to connect faith with the beauty of the Northwoods.

Our Conference leadership remains steady and strong. Continuing to serve are Nancy Heykes (Secretary) and Pastor Catie Ford (Vice President). I'm grateful to serve alongside these faithful leaders.

God's Peace –
Pastor Pete Warmanen

Report of Conference 5—Menominee Valley

Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod,

Hello from the Menominee Valley Conference! We are the faith filled congregations and specialized ministries in central and Southern Marinette (WI) and Menominee (MI) counties. We give thanks for collaboration with one another and the larger expressions of the church such as the NGLS and ELCA.

In this time, we give special thanks for the retired ministers in our midst. Not only do they support the clergy under call and lay leaders, but they are also willing to step into positions of leadership in crucial times of transition. They may call it ‘failing retirement,’ but the rostered leaders and the communities they serve attribute our success in ministering in Christ’s name to their wisdom.

In particular, we in the MVC are grateful for the work and partnership of Rev. Lee Goodwin and Rev. Nick Johannes who are currently serving the congregations of Our Savior’s in Marinette and Good Shepherd in Peshtigo while Rev. David Murphy has been called to a year of active duty as a Navy chaplain.

Northland Lutheran Retirement Community exists within our conference, but depends on the support of the entire synod. The only assisted living and skilled nursing facility in our area that is run with a foundation of faith, it depends on congregational support. With Go to Meeting, it has never been easier to serve on a board! We give thanks for the work of CEO Darrell Lancour, Chaplain Karen Anne Hanson (member of Porterfield Lutheran), and all the staff and residents of NRLC. Rev. Keith Kolstad and Rev. Linda Forray recently ‘re-retired’ after supporting Chaplain Karen Anne on a part time basis. Northland and area pastors give thanks for their work as part time chaplains and wish them well as they have concluded their work with Northland.

We also give thanks for Rev. Craig Mansur, chaplain at Aurora Hospital Baycare in Marinette. A member of Emmanuel Lutheran Menominee, he ministers to patients, their families, and the staff of caregivers. He is also called upon frequently for pulpit supply.

In a world that is often divided, it is a blessing to be in community with leaders and the congregations they serve that don’t let differences obscure the oneness found in the baptism we share.

Blessings,

Rev. Scott Ehle

Pastor Bethel Lutheran, Menominee, MI

Menominee Valley Conference President

Runner Up, NGLS Clergy Solo Synchronized Swimming Competition

Report of Conference 6—Tri-County

The Tri-County Conference met twice in 2025, in the spring at Bethany Lutheran in Perkins and in the fall at Immanuel Lutheran in Escanaba.

The Spring 2026 Meeting was held at Christ the King Lutheran Church in Escanaba on March 8, 2026.

The conference again had a successful ministry presence at the U.P. State Fair, with its water, snack, and place-of-refuge tent. After expenses, the tent operation netted \$3,833.28 in revenue for ministry grants. This year, the conference resolved at the fall meeting to grant \$3,300.00 to fund a new, safe water well at the Sangwe Medical Clinic in a remote area of Tanzania. The NGLS Companion Synod Committee, in partnership with the InterFaith Water Stewards Initiative in the Marquette Area, has been raising the needed \$ 6,300 to fund the construction of this water supply well. The Conference's donation will get them very close to the needed amount.

The conference also resolved to donate \$250.00 to the Faith Lutheran Food Pantry to help feed the hungry in their area.

The Conference's finances remain in good standing. We started the year with a checkbook balance of \$1,354.42 and ended the year with a balance of \$1,531.07.

At the Fall 2025 Meeting, Pastor Elisabeth Daniels was elected the new conference president. Thank you to Pastor Mike Markwell for two great terms as President and for his continued commitment to being our Conference Fair Facilitator. Pastor Melissa Salminen was elected as Secretary. Vice President is unfilled. Chuck Thomas is finishing his term as treasurer at our Fall 2026 meeting.

At the Spring 2026 Meeting, the Nominating Committee was formed with Pastor Mike Markwell, Pastor Melissa Salminen, and Pastor Lily Brondyke.

Our goals as a Conference remain the same: to work together to minister to the Tri-County Community by sharing resources. Our biggest joint projects are the Water Tent at the Fair and several joint VBS programs.

This past year, we said goodbye to Pastor Tommy Wimsae and hello to Vicar Robert Lake. Vicar Sarah Sleeter has continued her work at Christ the King and Faith, and we look forward to the next step of her journey. Pastor Lily had her baby, and we are glad to have her and Evelyn in our Tri-County Family. Pastor Ellie Russey continues to be an absolute blessing to our Conference, and we have some other retired clergy that step in when we need help, such as Pastor Terry Frankenstein and Pastor Tom Otis.

We also have a robust Clergy Text Group that meets weekly on Zoom and occasionally in a hybrid model, with an in-person gathering included, followed by lunch. We have other clergy from the synod who join us when travel or location is an issue. The clergy group remains a positive place to study together and support one another. It is a group rooted in scripture and support, and it is an important connection point in work that can be high-stress and low-support.

At our March 8th meeting, we worshiped together using the Holden Healing for the Nations Litany. It was good to pray and sing together before entering the business session. All of the churches host and feed us well for our bi-annual meetings, and we are thankful.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pastor Elisabeth Daniels, First Lutheran Church, Conference President

With Detailed input from Chuck Thomas, Conference Treasurer and Synod Vice President

Report of Conference 7 - Three Lakes

The Three Lakes Conference has been busy. Each congregation is finding ways to serve their communities, through community meals, coat and boot closets, fundraisers, and ecumenical worships. In October we coordinated to bring our quilts to LWR, and the quilters at St. James, Rudyard celebrated a special milestone of sewing their 2,000th quilt.

2025-2026 has been a year of big changes. In October, Faith Lutheran Church in Sault Ste Marie bid farewell to Pastor Rita Chirala and her son, Derrick. Zion Lutheran Church in St Ignace celebrated their ministry during their Holy Closure in November. Pastor Renee MacLeod retired in February from Zion Lutheran in Allenville and Bethal Lutheran in Cedarville. Through all the changes, our congregations gather faithfully in worship, and we have the joy of worshipping with ecumenical worship leaders.

Hopefully in 2027, we will have a group of youth headed to the Youth Gathering, and maybe have a few adults attend as volunteers. We look forward to strengthening our inter-congregational relationships.

Submitted by Pastor Elise Hynek

Report of Conference 8—Superior Central

This has been a hard year for the Superior Conference as we say goodbye to multiple pastors who have served their congregations and have left a need for multiple calls. Prayers for Grace in Gwinn and Messiah Lutheran as we have said goodbye to Pastors Jack Busche, Molly Hunter, and Andrew Plocher. We pray for the synod office as they provide support and administrative guidance. We pray for Elaine Robbins, vicar at Eden as she leads in Munising while studying too.

One of my harshest winters has brought with it more cancelled school days, Wednesday midweeks, and even a Sunday. This long winter reminds us of the seasons we go through in the UP/Upper WI and lifestyle changes from darkness and light and cold and warm. As we prepare for Spring we look back at the year.

Our great joy is the continued shared ministry we have in our youth ministry and confirmation program. Multiple churches meeting together, working together, and making space to connect our students to multiple pastors and leaders. We have provided a monthly conference confirmation class during the academic year. We have a monthly youth ministry opportunity and a summer trip. This last summer we went and participated in hurricane clean up in North Carolina. This year we plan to return to a different part of North Carolina and learn about homeless ministry from a woman who spoke at the National Youth Gathering some of us went to 3 years ago.

As we go forward, I hope we continue to use our youth as an example and play off each other and work together to minister to one another. Shared ministry is our future. We are in awe of the work Pastors Tim Johnston and J Michael Mills have produced in creating conversations in Ishpeming to better yoke their churches together and share the ministry to their community. We look forward to their ability to help us work together and shed our identity as a church to the church without walls.

We have a small contingent of WELCA (Women of the ELCA) members and they are striving to have a few meetings a year. There is an encouragement to have real conversations with women in your congregations and asking what would make WELCA more useful and more applicable to their lives and the lives of those who are coming into adulthood.

My prayer for each of our churches is we are able to keep our uniqueness as we let down our walls and learn to share. The bishop has asked us and promoted pulpit swaps. Something I personally participated in with Grace, Gwinn and Bethel, Ishpeming. Continuing to share ourselves, we will be able to list our strengths and allow others to help us in our weakness. Continue praying for one another and learning from one another.

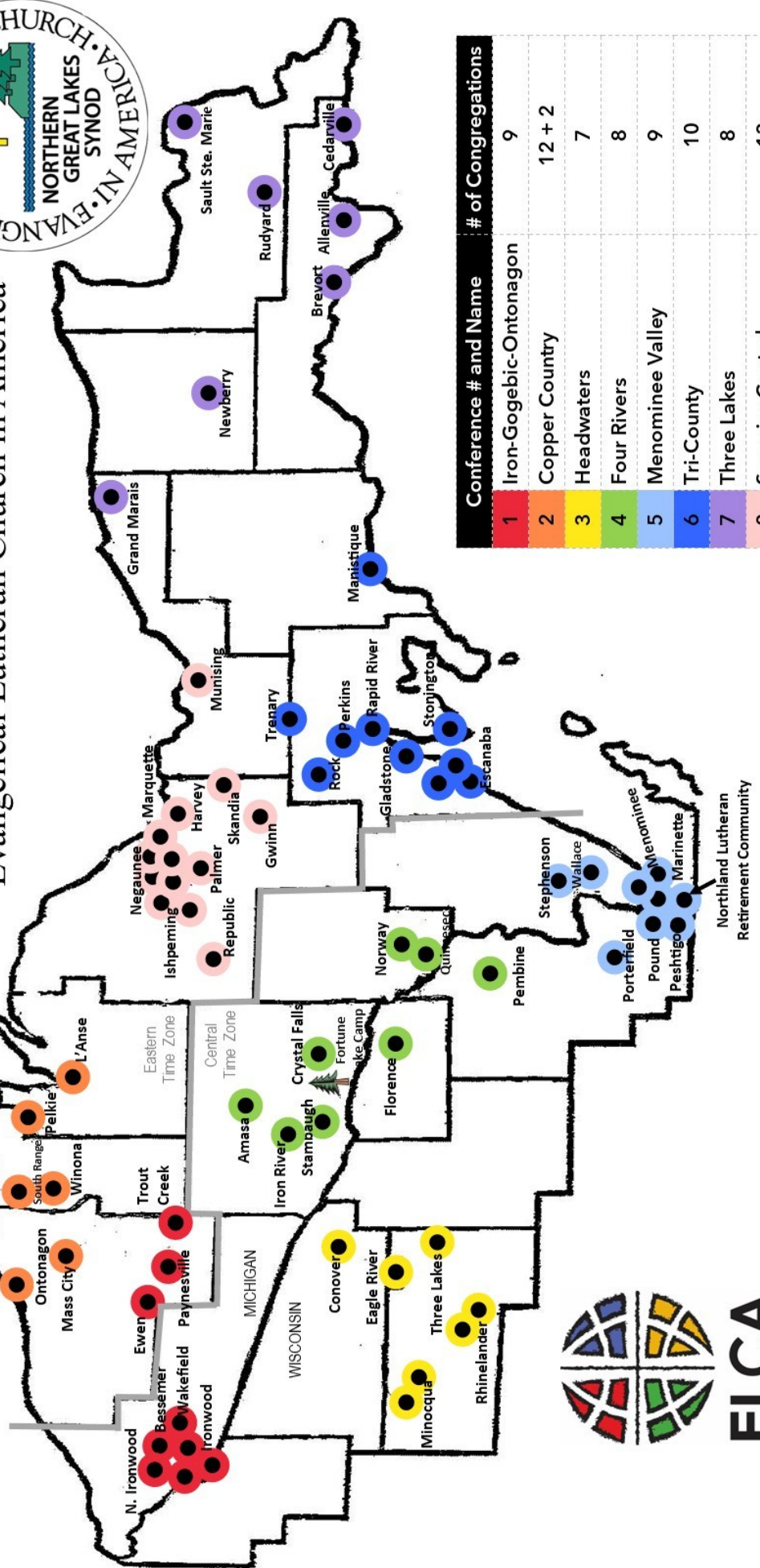
Submitted by Pastor Alex LaChapelle

Shepherd of the Sea

We acknowledge and honor the Anishinaabeg, the original peoples, upon whose ancestral homelands we live and work, who have cared for and continue to care for this place and call it their home. We respect the rich history and ongoing relationship Indigenous peoples have with this land and the many contributions they have made. We continue to acknowledge the need for healing and reconciliation around the harmful legacy of colonization.



NORTHERN GREAT LAKES SYNOD Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



Conference # and Name	# of Congregations
1 Iron-Gogebic-Ontonagon	9
2 Copper Country	12 + 2
3 Headwaters	7
4 Four Rivers	8
5 Menominee Valley	9
6 Tri-County	10
7 Three Lakes	8
8 Superior Central	13
TOTAL	77



ELCA