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FORTUNE LAKE LUTHERAN CAMP

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CAMP DIRECTOR'S REPORT 2025 - A YEAR OF GROWTH

submitted by Amanda Rasner



Summer Camp Growth

After a 22% increase in summer campers in 2024, we saw a 17% increase in 2025, for a total of 678! Our theme was "God's Word Comes Near" based on Romans 10:8. We hosted a fantastic All-Staff Alumni Reunion.



Church Partnerships

In summer 2025, we sent Day Camp teams to 8 communities where they partnered with 16 congregations! We had 15 pastors volunteer at camp. Bethel, Menominee had the most registered campers with 29!



Hardworking Staff

Our steady year-round team of Valeria, Charlotte, Chris, Cindy, and Hannah lead our ministry with grace and purpose. We also hired 33 seasonal staff - including staff from Mexico, Uganda, Nigeria, and Colombia - to lead our summer programs.



Dedicated Volunteers

From the Sisters of the Cloth, to our Camp Pastors, from the Art Camp Instructors to our Board of Directors, we couldn't do this work without you, and we thank God for each and every one of you!



Emanuel Lodge Upgrades

We accomplished significant upgrades to Emanuel Lodge including new flooring and ADA toilets. A large gift from the closure of Holy Cross Baraga funded the roof replacement. Reach out to book your stay!



Report of The Synodical Women's Organization

In September 2025, we held our annual convention and retreat at Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp. Our theme this year is "Living Water". Our 2026 convention is scheduled for Friday, September 19 from 9:00 am to 4 pm. Registration for the retreat will begin Friday at 4:00pm and we will conclude the retreat on Sunday September 21 around 11:00am. For the in-gathering offer we are asking if you travel and stay in hotels, motels, etc. and you do not use the toiletries that you bring the items to convention and/or retreat. Perhaps you could invite the members of your congregation to take part in this project also. The May Reflections Newsletter will contain all the information and forms with regards to the convention and retreat. The retreat will be hosted by the SWO Board which includes myself, Diane Gendron, Barbara Rice, Barbara Marden, Susan Hill, Holly Guerin, Connie Schmidt, Lynnette Broxson and Pamela Chouinard.

We have three board members that will be attending the Churchwide Triennial Gathering in Des Moines, Iowa in July. We also have three voting members that will attend the Triennial Convention virtually the Monday and Tuesday prior to the gathering. These members will be myself, Barbara Rice, and Diane Gendron. The gathering is still open to registration, and the information can be located on the Women of the ELCA website. A group of women from Wisconsin have invited anyone going to join them for a bus ride to Des Moines on Wednesday prior to the gathering. Marilyn Quirk, who lives in Green Bay and is a member of the East Central Synod of Wisconsin (ECSW), forwarded the following information:

My name is Marilyn Quirk, and I live in the Green Bay area. I have been asked to coordinate a bus for the trip to the Triennial Gathering in Des Moines in July. The bus I am considering is from Marinette, WI. Is there anyone from your synod who may be interested in traveling on a bus from the Northern Great Lakes Synod? You may contact me if you are interested at 920-362-5746. If I don't answer when you call please leave a message and I will call you back.

We continue to have conversations about how we can revitalize the congregational units to become active as they are able and how to reach out to any younger women in the congregations as to what they are looking for to be active in the organization. In our world today we are not the same organization as those who came before us developed. As organizations grow and change to meet the dreams and ideas of future generations, we must adjust so that we offer opportunities for all who come after us. We look for new ways to let them know what the organization has to offer them in ways to serve others with the gifts and passion. We look to the future vision of what the women's organization can become with new ideas and energy. As we who currently are involved are becoming more aged and slower in our mobility, we invite the future generations to lead our service, actions and events into the world we live with working with them. We have to ask ourselves are we wanting the future women to do the things our way or are we asking them to teach us how to reach out in their world.

We all reach forward to become a Christian Community in Action through Bible Studies, learning how to be bold and move toward justice for all. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America desires to be inclusive and live together in peace and love. We look to those who follow us to help us to become more involved in reaching out to others in telling the gospel story, our faith stories and to live our lives so other may see Jesus with skin on through all of us.

God Loves You, our sisters in Christ, and So do We.

Melzee Jacobson, President 2025-2026

BE BLESSED

U.P. Wild's REPORT FOR SYNOD ASSEMBLY

In the overall context of our community, there are 7 branches across the U.P. Each branch has their own point leader and their own team- they are guided and mentored by our Mission Developer, Lanni Lantto. There are guidelines, mission and vision that stay the same- but each branch gathers at different frequencies that work for them. Community life is taking a wilderness walk (snowshoe in winter sometimes) reading scripture by a stream, Nature Prayer Services which have Christian ritual elements, coffee in community where people can share the hurts and joys of their religious journey, and crafting in community which helps isolate a very isolated community.

Many people who have been abandoned, outcasted, or are breaking cycles of dysfunction of traditional church are coming to Wild Church and inviting their friends. They trust this community spiritually and they are given the opportunity to share without judgement and that is bringing them closer to the God of their understanding.

Our community's way of worship is to open the Book of Nature- wondering, pondering God's love for all people and all creation. Knowing that the great I AM is the source of all life, we kneel on the ground and put our hands on the leaf and marvel at the caterpillar and we know that we aren't alone. We have prayers of the people, we have a passing of our abundance and passing of the peace (including all life). We walk with awareness and intention sacramentally on God's holy ground. Some branches have begun to do more house church in the winter when the weather is freezing cold while some still meet outdoors around a bonfire.

During the previous 12 months, three (3) key goals we have worked on to advance the development of this ministry are as follows:

1. Building existing relationships within U.P. Wild Marquette (main hub)
2. Strengthen 6 new branches of U.P. Wild including Keweenaw Branch
3. Financial Stability

Building relationships within the main hub branch remains steady. The core people who have been with us from the beginning are still the main evangelizers. New people have come and have taken the invitation to offer their gifts to us. Some bring materials to crafting, some have new ideas and implement them, others are consistent with their roles such as delivering Valentines to the warming center. As more people come, our bonds strengthen and they look forward to seeing each other and call people if they haven't seen them in a while. Also, the Keweenaw Branch has been dissolved into the main U.P. Wild SOAM and is no longer a separate SOAM, however, their core planning team remains solid, well-organized and very active.

Our three (3) key goals for the upcoming year are as follows:

1. Create further elements of ritual allowing U.P. Wild to go deeper spiritually
2. Creation of a Board structure or mutual ministry congregational model
3. Have Branch leadership present at the 3rd annual Convocation held at Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp in Crystal Falls, MI on August 23-25, 2026

We will continue to have one-on-ones with so we can get to know the people who attend or those who might like to attend. People who attend appreciate feeling seen and not over-looked- many are coming from large churches where they felt invisible and unheard. Having these conversations on a micro level is important. We are able to get feedback like what types of rituals the younger 'done' demographic is seeking and to personally ask leaders to become board members and to join us at the convocation. Growth of the branches in terms of them feeling more like a part of the whole unit functioning together is a part of reaching these goals. Having two yearly gatherings will be tested out this year, with one branch hosting the rest of us.

Lanni is hired as a Full-Time Mission Developer through the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan and this ministry is supported financially by grants from the ELCA's Synod Authorized Outreach Ministry (SAOM) with contributions from the Northern Great Lakes Synod and through participant donations at gatherings and via our website <https://upwild.org/contact-us>. Since our beginning in 2019, we have had "Wisdom Council" meetings which consist of the Director of Evangelical Mission, Rev. Sharolyn Swenson, Bishop Katherine Finegan, Episcopal Bishop Rayford Ray, Canon to the Ordinary, Rev. Steve Godfrey and Lanni Lantto.

A great many thanks to all those from across the ELCA who participate, lead or volunteer with branches and who pray for us. May God grant us many more years!

Respectfully submitted by,
Lanni Lantto

Report of the Lutheran Campus Ministry at Michigan Technological University



Dear Partners in Ministry of the NGLS,

Spring 2026

Lutheran Campus Ministry has had an active year – growing faith and servant leaders weekly at Michigan Tech. Thanks to the generosity of many to update our kitchen, this academic year we returned our Tuesday **Student Community Meals!** With an average of **40+ weekly diners**, we've had over **50 different volunteers** help serve **180** of their peers, nearly **800 plates** of food. God is good! The Spirit has been on the move in other aspects of ministry, too:



- + **Worship** on Sundays sees **6 -15** students in regular attendance and the **LCM Band** leads worship monthly.
- + **9** LCM students took part **Alternative Spring Break**, building houses with Habitat for Humanity in Fort Smith, Arkansas, joining three friends from NMU and 13 students from Gustavus College in MN!
- + We camped at Lake Superior this fall and **12** MTU students enjoyed the **Young Adult Winter Retreat** at Fortune Lake in March.
- + With **Cooperative Campus Ministries** at MTU, LCM organized an Interfaith MLK Day prayer service with nearly 100 people in attendance, hosted “A Taste of Faith” potluck event, and helped organize three separate Interfaith Luncheons.
- + Over **40 people** – students and church members – stayed up well past midnight to complete our angel-themed snow sculpture during **Winter Carnival** in February, raising money for Habitat at our Saturday Soup & Pie luncheon.



Making a difference in the lives of students & forming church leaders for tomorrow, happens because of your support. Thank you for your continued prayers and engagement with this vital young adult ministry in our synod. If you're ever in Houghton on a Tuesday night, stop by and let the students cook for you!

In gratitude for your partnership,

Rev. Sarah Semmler Smith
pastor@goodshepherd906.org
www.goodshepherd906.org

Report of Lutheran Campus Ministry at NMU

As some may know, Lutheran Campus Ministry at Northern Michigan University participates in an ecumenical variety called **Sacred Space**. Renting space from Marquette Hope after the sale of the LCM house, we have a large portion of the basement allotted for campus ministry from the church. We have a large community space used only for us, and we have access to a kitchen as well. Sacred Space has held Wesley, Lutheran, Episcopal, and Presbyterian Campus Ministry over the last several years. This year, Episcopal Campus Ministry abruptly removed themselves from Sacred Space. The Presbyterian Campus Ministry which has been quiet over the last few years, has had some new blood with the arrival of Pastor Natalie Handley of First Presbyterian. Although she is not a campus minister, she has a fair amount of campus ministry experience, and has made her self available for help and consultation.



At the start of spring break, we were informed my colleague and longest tenured campus minister amongst us, Erica Thomas, would be moving down state in a few months with a new job. This has left the remaining months of the year on myself and Lutheran Campus Ministry. This also leaves us in a position of wondering what is next for Wesley Campus Ministry, wondering how Marquette Hope will move forward without the tenure of their campus minister having left, and will they continue to rent space to us, and hold space for campus ministry.

This last year, we consistently have had Sunday night dinners and devotions. We have used our space at Marquette Hope, called Common Grounds, and made it available as a coffee house/study space. We have had smaller events like pumpkin carving, baking, and game nights randomly through the year. We also consistently meet weekly for Theology on Tap, for conversations at local coffee shops, breweries, and specialty drink places to connect about a topic which fuses our thoughts on God and thoughts on the world.

This spring break we made a trip alongside Michigan Tech (a rarely shared spring break) to Arkansas to work with Habitat for Humanity.

I am thankful for my colleagues Erica and Natalie this last year, my Lutheran Campus Ministry colleague in Sarah Semmler Smith. I am thankful for the NMU Lutheran Campus Ministry board, and their support. We are also looking for some new members in the coming year to share in the work we do. Lastly, I give thanks for the support of this synod in making space for students, students who commit to eating together and supporting one another, who show up weekly and work within the space processing God's love and grace as they journey through university.

Submitted by Pastor Alex LaChapelle

LUTHER COLLEGE

Luther College inspires and equips students to courageously serve the common good through a holistic education in the liberal arts.

Greetings and prayers from Luther College and from our home here in Decorah, Iowa. We are pleased to again share with you some reflections about our campus life and work from this past year.

Last summer, after an intentional period of reflection and discernment, we adopted a new mission statement (included above), an accompanying constellation of vision and identity statements, and a foundational set of core values: Community, Curiosity, Excellence, Inclusivity, Sustainability. We remain in a season of re-engaging our campus, alumni, and community with the essential and profound pieces of our identity as a liberal arts college, founded by Norwegian immigrants, in the Lutheran Christian tradition, with a vocation to serve the common good.

We hosted a series of high-profile events on campus in this past year, each of which connected us in particular ways to our identity and mission. In April 2025, we welcomed travel author and historian Rick Steves to campus for an address that highlighted themes of global citizenship, lifelong learning, and bridge-building through curiosity, compassion, and the value of human dignity.

Homecoming Weekend in October was bookended by two significant campus gatherings. First, a presidential inauguration, themed “For the Common Good” to honor the intersections of faith, learning, and vocation that define our college’s identity. Just a few days later, we hosted a celebration convocation to welcome the visit of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Haakon of Norway. His remarks highlighted our Norwegian relationships and emphasized the immense value and power of education to shape societies.

This January, we were thrilled to welcome Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry as our annual Martin Luther King, Jr. day lecturer, and were blessed by his remarks encouraging us to lean into our faith to find the courage to seek justice and to stand with the vulnerable.

We feel blessed and enriched by this year of learning from these key figures in our nation, church, and world. In addition to these significant visits, we continue to take joy and pride in our students, staff, faculty, alumni, and local partners—both for their accomplishments and for their character.

Luther College has been awarded the 2026 Senator Paul Simon Award for Comprehensive Internationalization from the National Association of International Educators (NAFSA), honoring our long-standing commitment to making global learning opportunities accessible and impactful to students.

The Luther College Concert Band traveled to Japan for a series of performances last June, Luther College Symphony Orchestra alumni and friends gathered for the inaugural Dorian Orchestra Reunion weekend in July, and the Luther College Nordic Choir traveled the Midwest and Southeastern United States for their annual concert tour in early 2026.

The Office for College Ministries received a two-year, \$40,000 grant from the Network for Vocation in Higher Education to establish a new student internship program in fall 2025 entitled *Called Outward: Exploring Skills for Faith-Based Leadership*. This program connects students with area congregations for focused discernment, exploration, and experiential learning around core skills and topics in ministry.

We continue to give thanks for the immense generosity of our Luther College community, across the nation and world. Our 2026 annual Giving Day raised nearly \$1.4 million to support and enhance the Luther experience at the college through the Luther Fund, Luther’s unrestricted current fund that supports all students, faculty, staff and community endeavors on campus. This is in addition to our annual One Team day, which raised nearly \$600,000 in a 24-hour span to support student-athletes, as well as all of the donors who have contributed to our \$24 million Gerdin Fieldhouse renovation project, which is in its final stages.

This past year for Luther College has been a time to lean deeply into our calling to seek, serve, and nurture the common good, both in our campus life and in the world beyond. It is a privilege to serve on behalf of this campus community. Together, we share a vision for the power of learning, faith, and service to shape and heal the world.

Soli Deo Gloria!

President Brad Chamberlain

Pastor Melissa Bills



Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Dear ministry partners in the Northern Great Lakes Synod,

The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago is grateful to share highlights from our seminary in this 2026 report to supporting synods. Thank you for your continued support of our innovative and thriving seminary. As we reflect on the past year and look ahead to 2026–2027, I am pleased to share some key developments and our aspirations for the future:

- This year marked a historic leadership transition as I began service as LSTC’s eighth president on July 1, 2025. My vision for this new chapter is rooted in accessibility, collaboration, and hospitality: theological education for all who desire it, strengthened partnerships across synods and the wider church, and a community where every learner is seen, valued, and accompanied. My inauguration, held alongside our Seminary Showcase this past November, publicly launched this next era of mission-driven innovation at LSTC.
- LSTC is also pleased to announce the appointment of The Rev. Robert O. Smith, Ph.D., as our new Vice President and Dean of Academic Affairs, effective January 12, 2026. An enrolled citizen of the Chickasaw Nation and an ordained ELCA pastor, Dr. Smith brings deep expertise at the intersections of race, religion, and Indigeneity, along with extensive experience in global mission and ecumenical leadership. In addition to serving as Associate Professor of Authentic Diversity, Justice, and Public Church, he will oversee our academic programs and guide LSTC’s Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice commitments, including the Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice and the Pero Center for Intersectionality Studies.
- Our 2024–2029 Strategic Plan, *On the Way*, continues to guide LSTC’s work across four core areas: Asynchronous Education, Philanthropic Campaign, Policy Review, and Staffing Strategy. This past year we celebrated the successful completion of Phase I of our “Time to Re-Imagine, Re-Invent, Reaffirm, and Re-New” campaign, surpassing our initial goal and securing significant scholarship support. Now, we are embarking on Phase II of our Campaign, a two-year journey to support our institution’s programs, pathways, and scholarships.
- Project Starling—LSTC’s asynchronous digital learning platform—has moved from vision to reality. Under the leadership of Vice President for Enterprise Innovation Keisha Dyson, Project Starling is now in its final user testing phase and provides flexible formation for TEEM (Theological Education for Emerging Ministries), Synodically Authorized Ministers (SAMs), and independent learners who seek high-quality theological education beyond traditional degree paths. Through Project Starling, learners can access content at their own pace, engage with LSTC faculty and practitioners, and participate in user-testing cohorts that help shape future offerings. Partnerships with synods, including the Northern Great Lakes Synod, continue to inform our design and priorities for this work.
- A central expression of Project Starling is the SAM Development Training Program, an asynchronous, certificate-based training pathway for Synodically Authorized Ministers. Developed by LSTC faculty and aligned with ELCA competency areas, this program helps SAMs:
 - understand and assess ministry contexts using public-church and ethnographic frameworks;
 - engage key themes in church history and Lutheran theology;
 - reflect on identity and vocation through intercultural and intersectional lenses;
 - grow in community organizing, contextual leadership, and pastoral practice; and

– deepen spiritual disciplines for lay ministry.

Designed for use in cohorts or as individualized study (with bishop authorization), the SAM program provides synods with a scalable, high-quality resource for forming lay leaders for emerging ministry contexts.

- In 2025, LSTC received a Pathways for Tomorrow implementation grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to launch a Public Church Hub and expand accessible, community-designed learning for pastoral and lay leaders. Building on Project Starling, this three-year initiative will co-create short, flexible offerings—modules, intensives, workshops, certificates, and cohorts—with LGBTQ-affirming missional communities and Latiné and African-descent ministries. New staffing funded by the grant will support congregational listening, pilot sites, and iterative program design. The Public Church Hub widens pathways beyond degrees, strengthens recruitment into our degree programs, and advances LSTC’s commitment to form leaders in partnership with the communities they serve.
- Campus life and formation remain central to our mission. Christian worship continues to be enriched by the leadership of the Gordon Braatz Chair of Worship, Dr. Christian Scharen, and our faculty and student leaders. Homecoming and the Queer Symposium will gather alumni, students, and friends for learning, celebration, and reflection on the intersections of faith, identity, and justice. We look forward to welcoming a new class of learners in the coming year and to celebrating our next commencement, when we send graduates into the world as public-church leaders.

To learn more about LSTC, Project Starling, the SAM Development Training Program, and the Public Church Hub, please visit www.lstc.edu. We are deeply grateful for your prayers, financial support, and partnership in forming leaders for the church and the world

With gratitude,
Rev. Dr. Shauna Hannan, President
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago



Forming Valued Leaders for God's Mission

The Rev. Dr. Kristin Johnston Largent

Dear Partners in the Northern Great Lakes Synod,

Greetings from your siblings in Christ at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. I am excited to share with you some of the ways Wartburg is fulfilling its mission, with your partnership and support.

Last year marked the completion of the first year of The CaSTLE Project, funded by a \$7.4 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., to instantiate a new *baptismal ecclesiology*, focusing not on pastors and programming, but on the formation of Christian discipleship in daily life. To date, we have launched a new website (<https://thecastleproject.org/>), awarded sub-grants to 26 synods, and curated dozens of resources that support leadership formation and thriving congregational life in rural and small town contexts.

This year, we launched *FLOURISH*, a holistic network of support for students and staff in all aspects of life. This program includes coaching, counseling, meditation tools, and financial coaching, all without cost to our community members. We are forming leaders for the long haul, and as a part of their formation at Wartburg Seminary, we seek to include practices that support long-term health and wellness.

Wartburg Seminary is a leader in competency-based education, and our CBE TEEM program, available fully in both English and Spanish, is growing rapidly. Students appreciate the go-at-your-own-pace approach, with a team of advisors and mentors that supports student formation in doing, knowing, and being, a hallmark of the competency-based approach. In fact, this distinct pedagogical model has been so successful that this year, we have launched a pilot SAMs (Synodically Authorized Ministers) formation program. This is a one-year experiment to see how this model might support the distinctive call of a SAM to foster Christian discipleship in daily life, with the congregation as the locus for this transformation.

Let me conclude my report with a genuine expression of gratitude for your prayers, for your crucial financial support, and especially for your partnership in raising up leaders for service to the church and the world in the name of Jesus Christ. Wartburg Seminary forms leaders in intentional Christian community, including in a vibrant residential community, with daily worship as our center. We are a special place, and you are warmly invited to come and see! For more information about Wartburg Seminary, please visit us at www.wartburgseminary.edu.

Yours in Christ,

The Rev. Kristin Johnston Largent, Ph.D.
President

Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin:

The Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin (LOPPW) is a ministry of the ELCA engaged in advocacy for policies that promote peace, justice, and care for creation. We support ELCA congregations and members in Wisconsin and the UP of Michigan.

New Director

In September 2025, LOPPW welcomed a new director – Kacy Kostiuk. Kacy comes to this position with experience in policy, advocacy, and communications on issues such as early childhood development, disability inclusion, and immigration and refugee resettlement.

NGLS Visits

Kacy has scheduled several outreach visits in northern Wisconsin in mid-March and hopes to have an opportunity to connect with more NGLS congregations in the near future. Having grown up in Merrill, WI, and spent many summers in Ironwood, MI, she has a special place in her heart for the NGLS area. Please contact her at kacy.kostiuk@elca.org or 608-940-1808 to share perspectives on how LOPPW can support advocacy and civic engagement.



New Website

The LOPPW website underwent a major refresh in January 2026. It now has an improved look and is easier to navigate. Check out the News & Blog page for ongoing updates, and visit the Resources page for advocacy tips and tools.

State Policy Advocacy

During the 2025-26 legislative session in Wisconsin, LOPPW engaged in advocacy related to bills focused on the LOPPW priority areas of hunger, poverty, care for creation, and immigration. At the time of this report, the regular legislative session was coming to a close and expected to finish in March. Highlights from the 2025-26 session include:

- Securing state funding to help offset federal cuts and changes to the Supplementary Food Assistance Program (SNAP) in Wisconsin.
- Advocating for a bill with bipartisan support that would enable qualified Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients to obtain professional licenses to work in professions such as nursing, education, plumbing, and other fields.
- Advocating against a bill that would deregulate predatory rent-to-own transactions, which resulted in significant improvements to the bill’s language to increase protections for vulnerable Wisconsinites.

During this session, LOPPW also built stronger relationships with ecumenical, interfaith, and secular partners; created new connections with legislators; and built momentum on bills related to groundwater pollution and anti-human trafficking, which we expect will lead to possible passage in a future session.

Elections in 2026 & Civic Engagement

LOPPW is currently developing a civic engagement and elections outreach plan for 2026. We anticipate creating and sharing nonpartisan election resources and organizing online events this year. Election dates in Wisconsin and Michigan include:

Wisconsin	Michigan
April 7: Spring General Election	August 4: Fall Primary
August 11: Fall Primary	November 3: Fall General Election
November 3: Fall General Election	

Sign Up to Receive Action Alerts!

Join LOPPW’s mailing list for action alerts and e-newsletters: loppw.org/action/mailling-list

Report of Region 5

Greetings!

It is a privilege to serve as your Candidacy and Leadership Manager (CaLM) for Region 5 of the ELCA, a call I began in January 2026. This synod, along with eleven others, makes up the whole of Region 5, which covers Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Collegiality is important to the region. The bishops, synod staff, and other synod leaders gather in various ways throughout the year, including online check-ins and an annual retreat for bishops and synod staff. These connecting points provide space for idea-sharing, mutual support, and partnerships that help ministry across the region to thrive. The 2025 Bishop and Staff Retreat took place in Middleton, WI and provided time for worship, learning sessions, affinity groups, and collaboration. This gathering is a vital part of our regional ministry, offering opportunities in formal and informal settings for both bishops and synod staffs to share wisdom and build relationships.

In addition, the twelve bishops and the CaLM form the regional steering committee, whose work it is to dream and vision new ways for our synods to partner together. One of the outcomes of this visioning is a three-year collaborative boundaries education cycle, including the topics of professional boundaries, gender justice, and racial justice. The cycle began in 2024 with professional boundaries and continued in 2025 with gender justice. In this third year we will gather as a region on November 5 for learning around racial justice and boundaries. This event brings together between 800 and 1000 rostered ministers at approximately 40 sites around the region.

The CaLM also works with candidacy committees from all twelve synods. Together we walk alongside individuals who are discerning a call to rostered ministry. I am impressed by the faithful ways each committee works to ensure those who seek a vocation within the church are equipped for the demands and joys that ministry offers. In addition, once candidates move into the first call process, it is part of my work to convene the regional first call consultations, at which the bishops and staff work diligently to match the gifts and needs of candidates with the gifts and needs of the church.

Our region also manages archival records, which are housed at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, IA. Sue Dodd is the regional archivist. Her work includes receiving documents and artifacts from congregations as well as responding to inquiries regarding the information contained within those documents. Sue also serves as a resource to congregations, particularly throughout the holy closure process, in determining which documents are important to preserve. Her work is a loving combination of preserving institutional knowledge and the history and stories of the congregations in our region.

It is a privilege to serve with and among you. I look forward to learning more about your synod and the work you are doing to share the love of Christ with your communities and the world.

In Christ,

Rev. Jen Christenson, Candidacy and Leadership Manager, Region 5 – ELCA

Sue Dodd, Region 5 Archivist



ELCA Federal Credit Union

Faithful financial services for ELCA members and ministries



The ELCA Federal Credit Union (ELCA FCU) provides a full range of financial products and services to members, congregations and ministries of the ELCA. **As the first of the ELCA's financial ministries to offer loans to individuals**, the Credit Union offers savings and checking accounts, CDs, loans and lines of credit, credit cards, home mortgage loans for purchases or refinances, as well as home equity loans and lines of credit.

The ELCA FCU serves ministries through federally insured deposit accounts, a flexible corporate credit card program, auto loans and unsecured ministry loans up to \$100,000 to support smaller projects such as building repairs and purchases. In addition, the Workplace Banking program allows ministry organizations and congregations to offer ELCA FCU Credit Union products and services, along with other exclusive perks, to their employees.

A new cohort joined the ELCA's Resourceful Servants program, **designed to improve financial wellness and assist rostered leaders in building emergency savings funds**. Through this matching program, ELCA rostered leaders make ongoing deposits to their Credit Union emergency savings accounts. The Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA matches those deposits up to an established amount. Together, more **than 700 rostered ministers** have been served, collectively depositing more than \$1 million in emergency savings.

A **strong online presence** means members have access to funds with an ELCA Federal Credit Union Mastercard Debit Card at more than 30,000 surcharge-free ATMs. The ELCA FCU also offers account-to-account (A2A) transfers, person-to-person (P2P) payments (similar to Venmo and Zelle), remote deposit, bill pay and more.

Why choose the ELCA Federal Credit Union?

- **The ELCA Federal Credit Union supports the ELCA's mission of good stewardship.** We provide full services to all ELCA members, congregations and related ministries.
- **As a not-for-profit financial cooperative chartered to serve our church, we offer socially responsible banking solutions often priced more competitively** than traditional banks. We have demonstrated success in providing savings to our members.
- **With the church as our sponsor, we operate in ways that are consistent with the church's values.**

Membership is open to every ELCA member, synod, congregation and ministry—and their employees.

For more information about the products and services of the ELCA Federal Credit Union, please visit our website, elcafcu.org or call us toll-free at 877-715-1111.



The Mission Investment Fund: Helping ELCA congregations bring ministry to life



The Mission Investment Fund (MIF), a financial services ministry of the ELCA, has been a **steady and reliable financial partner** for congregations, ministries and individuals for more than 150 years. Through times of growth and uncertainty alike, MIF has remained committed to strengthening ELCA ministries and communities — delivering customer-first support backed by flexible financing solutions.

In 2025, MIF continued to support ministry growth across the ELCA. Your investments helped expand worship spaces, rebuild congregations after fires and natural disasters, provide spaces for people to age with dignity, start green projects and support accessibility remodeling for community spaces. Each project strengthens ELCA ministries, ensuring that they stay vibrant, inclusive and fully prepared to support the communities they serve.

By the numbers:

- **Total Loans Outstanding:** \$614,967,000
- **Total Assets:** \$779,189,000
- **Total Investment Obligations:** \$551,452,000
- **Net Assets & Capital Ratio:** 27.4%

What makes MIF unique?

- **Proven stability:** With more than a century and a half of experience, MIF has weathered changing economic and political landscapes, maintaining financial strength for ELCA ministries.
- **Deep expertise in church and ministry financing:** We understand the unique needs of faith communities and have longstanding experience in congregation and ministry building projects.
- **Competitive rates and terms:** Our financial offerings are structured to support ministries of all sizes.
- **A full suite of financial services:** In partnership with the ELCA Federal Credit Union, we provide a range of financial solutions for congregations, ministries and individuals.
- **Faithful stewardship:** Investments in MIF directly support loans that fund hundreds of capital projects across the church.

MIF continues to enhance our tools and financial services to better support ELCA ministries. And even as we look ahead with fresh vision and innovation, our foundation remains the same: enduring trust, time-tested stability and commitment woven through generations. In every chapter, we journey with ELCA members and ministries, united in faith — a steadfast partner supporting God’s work in the world.

MIF at work in the Northern Great Lakes Synod (as of December 31, 2025):

- 1 Mission Investment Fund loan, with a balance of \$137,669
- \$3,756,826 in Mission Investment Fund investment obligations.

For more information about MIF capabilities, please visit our website, mif.elca.org or contact Dan Schwiesow, Senior Director, Sales and Consulting Services: 773-682-5284 dan.schwiesow@elca.org



Dear Partners in welcome,

Grace and peace to you this synod assembly season. **At Global Refuge we remain committed to the work of welcome, no matter the challenges.** For more than 85 years, Global Refuge (formerly known as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service) has championed the work of welcome by providing support to immigrants and refugees as they rebuild their lives in the United States. Founded by heartbroken Lutherans in the United States who felt called to provide a home for those fleeing violence during the World Wars, Global Refuge has continued this good work welcoming more than 850,000 newcomers since 1939.

Our mission states, "As a witness to God's love for all people, we stand with and advocate for migrants and refugees, transforming communities through ministries of service and justice." With help from Global Refuge, families are welcomed into their new homes with support from our case managers who ensure that; adults are enrolled in English language classes, children are enrolled in school, and Global Refuge partners guide newly arrived refugees in using public transportation and accessing community resources.

In early 2025, Global Refuge and the 9 other national resettlement agencies received a **stop-work order** from the U.S. Department of State as it relates to our funding for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, effectively cutting off vital support to families who have already lawfully resettled in the United States. In the time since then, we have witnessed an incredible increase in the amount of support we receive from faith communities and individuals. This additional financial support and volunteer support has enabled Global Refuge to continue services to our immigrant neighbors that would have otherwise been stopped. We are thrilled to say we continue serving immigrants through nearly all of the programs we had before, albeit at a smaller scale in some cases. Support from faith communities more than doubled in 2025, and new congregations from around the country are responding to the call to welcome. This support has not only enabled us to continue services as mentioned above, but it has also made us less vulnerable to shifts in government funding.

With the support of these new partners and Lutheran communities like yours, in 2025 we were able to...

- Serve **171** people through our new **Post-Arrival Stability and Empowerment (PASE) program** in Baltimore to fill urgent gaps left by stop-work orders and funding freezes.



Global Refuge

- Empower and support **55 Clients** and **44 Businesses** through personal and business loans, with a total of **\$1.086 million dollars** funded.
- Serve **3,099** participants through the Camino A Casa program through training, case management, mental health services, and educational opportunities.
- Write and distribute **11,000 Hope for the Holidays cards** that provided messages of welcome and hope to newcomers.
- Mobilize the public to pack and ship **1,000 Neighbor Kits** to our clients, totaling a fair market value of **\$17,500**

In a political season rife with anti-immigrant rhetoric and messages that villainize newcomers, we have a unique opportunity to change this narrative and refocus on all the gifts newcomers bring to community. We invite you to join us in this work! [It is needed now more than ever.](#)

- **Join the Faith Alliance** – Global Refuge is proud to offer a new training for communities of faith who seek to safely welcome and embrace immigrants and refugees. This four-module series allows your faith community to learn together and make a commitment to welcome newcomers in your community <https://www.globalrefuge.org/faith-alliance/>
- **Hold a Vigil** – The new Vigil For the Taken resource offers an opportunity to name, recognize, and remember members of the community that are disappeared, detained, or deported. Whenever we lose precious members of our communities, we must stand together and affirm that every person deserves dignity and our support, and that no one should be forgotten. <https://www.globalrefuge.org/vigil-for-taken/>
- **Sing For Your Neighborhood** – *Here I Stand* is an original song written for the Vigil for the Taken mentioned above. It reads “Here I stand where my neighbor stood, holding peace for my neighborhood.” Written as a Taizé-like offering for the times we’re in, it is meant to equip neighbors with a song to “hold a candle” for those who have been harmed or removed from our communities. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TeFtjoSQ_FWNd7rQu4UHkELeMpY7e66e/view?fbclid=IwY2xjawQ5BUleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETF4NlZ2Smp6Y2NCRllsSIN6c3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHljJ3IWmE8EYtDcfE8ozQcoHVvyl5OPYjCxRZSfl4BnKP0vKH7Qk_LFCxxa8_aem_XBFK4jpbwWWU6JnTBkellw
- **Support Refugees with a gift** – If you or communities you’re connected with are willing to support financially, please use and share this link: www.globalrefuge.org/give
- **Learn more and Advocate** – Explore resources with more information about executive orders and accompanying actions: www.globalrefuge.org/advocate

Global Refuge

- **Know Your Rights** - Our partners at AMMPARO have a great resource for communities to read about their rights and those of immigrants in their care. <https://resources.elca.org/ammparo/know-your-rights-2025/>
- **Explore Resources** - Visit our Congregational Resources page to explore all the resources available to you: www.globalrefuge.org/congregations
- **Sign up for our Monthly E-newsletters** - Get the latest updates for faith leaders by emailing outreach@globalrefuge.org.

Thank you so very much for your support, we look forward to another year of partnership in welcome.

Go in peace. Welcome the stranger.



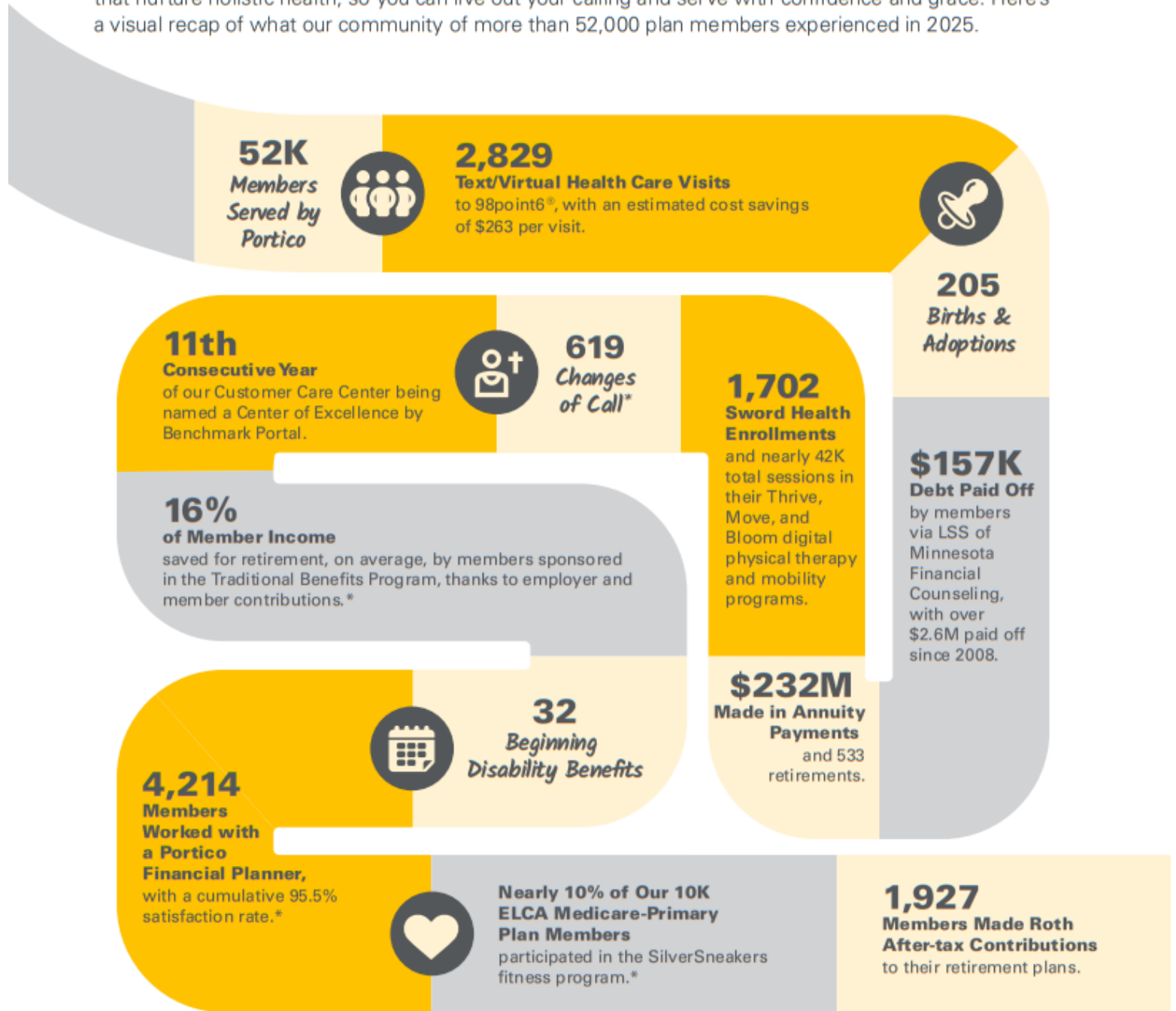
Pastor Dan Beirne

Director for Mobilization and Faith Relations
outreach@globalrefuge.org

Your Calling + Our Benefits

Portico Benefit Services' Report to 2026 Synod Assemblies

Your calling is to serve. Ours is to support you. As the ELCA's benefit ministry, Portico provides benefits that nurture holistic health, so you can live out your calling and serve with confidence and grace. Here's a visual recap of what our community of more than 52,000 plan members experienced in 2025.



We design our benefits to align with the needs of the church, pooling resources through a community benefits plan to deliver stable, sustainable support that enhances everyday life and brings value to those who serve. Follow us on social media @PorticoBenefits.

*Source: Traditional Benefits Program. All other numbers and percentages are drawn from across Portico's benefit programs.



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