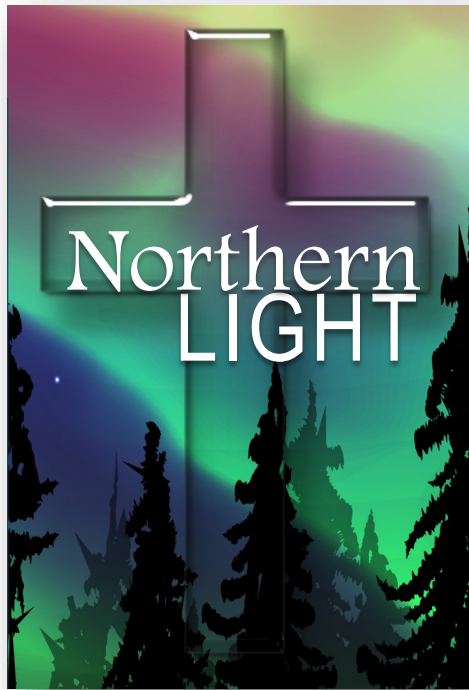


Shining with the Light of Christ in the Northern Great Lakes Synod

Volume 38, Issue 1 | January - February 2026



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Candles

Candles are evocative. It is not just a way to shed light, but they stir in us a strong image, memory, or feeling, along with the sensorial pleasure of the light and aroma. The meaning attached to lighting candles varies across religions, denominations, congregations, and households.

This is the time of year that candle conversation can preoccupy Council or Altar Guild meetings. We swirl around blue or purple Advent candles. When do we light the pink Gaudete candle and do we even need it? When does the Christmas candle appear (and do we even need it?). And let's not forget the year-round wonder of decorative candles in many of our spaces, beyond the two that light the words of the Word...at the pulpit and on the Altar. Or the borrowed tradition of the red "eternal flame" denoting for our Catholic siblings the presence of the reserved sacrament...we will keep that spark burning even when we have no theological basis for it. There are the skinny beeswax tapers, carrying the light of our hearts, as we gather in Evening Prayer, as we remember loved ones, or sending out Advent hopes during the long nights.

The most important candle may be one we don't speak about often. We might assume everyone knows the ritual and symbolic load it bears in our religious language system. It is the Paschal Candle. It is the tall, (often) beeswax candle...inscribed with an Alpha and Omega and the year, standing at the ready near the baptismal font. "Paschal" means spring or Easter, and



for liturgical Christians, it symbolizes the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

The way the Paschal Candle is imbued with meaning is through story. The Paschal Candle is lighted for three occasions, all days full of story, with beginnings, endings, and life in between. The light of the Paschal Candle begins in the most storied night, the Easter Vigil, with the blessing of the new fire, to increase in us a desire to shine forth with the brightness of Christ's rising. The Paschal Candle brings the light of the bonfire into the worship space and burns throughout our gatherings all through the Easter season. Just like the fire of Pentecost...the Paschal light goes out in the streets to bear the Light of Christ in the wild. It is only lighted again at a Baptism, the beginning of a new Christ story, and at the Funeral, the completion of that story begun at baptism.

On All Saints Sunday (November 2, 2025) at Zion Lutheran Church in St. Ignace, Michigan the candles illumined the leader books. The ELW were carefully laid out in the narthex so folks might find ones they had given in honor or memory of loved ones. There were special doughnuts and coffee. And many more folks than expected. And tapered beeswax candles were ready to light for the ones we'd lost this year, and the ones we've carried in our hearts a long time. AND the Paschal Candle was lighted. One last time...proclaiming Christ's life, death, and resurrection...the Alpha and Omega...the beginning and the end. As Zion celebrated the completion of its mission as a congregation, stories were shared, smiles and tears were abundant, peace seeped in, and the candles burned. When the other candles were extinguished for the smoke to drift around the room and out the door...the Paschal candle was still burning (but poignantly short for all the baptisms and funerals) with the promise of Christ...yesterday and today, the beginning and the ending, belonging in all of time and all the ages, now and forever.

Shalom+
Pastor Sharolyn Swenson

Questions, Perspective, and Unexpected Holy Learnings

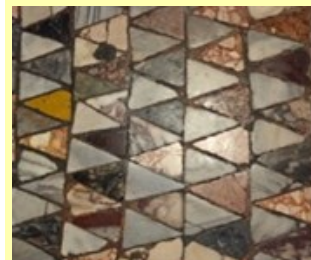
Recently, I had the opportunity to journey through the boot of Italy. Walking through history, pausing for conversation to learn stories, and taking in the culture opened my heart and mind as I listened and learned – celebrating all my senses. As I walked down the narrow streets and took in the ruins across the regions of Italy, the impact of history, culture, and shared story called me to listen faithfully.

Walking across marble floors allowed me to literally see **perspective** develop over centuries and experience the lasting impact of Roman Empire as its history cried out of the ruins.



Dwelling in the works, writings, and knowledge birthed in the Italian Renaissance created awe as I breathed in the works of Lavinia Fontana, Galileo, Michelangelo, da Vinci, and Lucrezia Tornabuoni. Their works continue to call us to question, grow in knowledge, our full potential, and as Luther also taught, grow in our relationship with God.

While **questions remain** as I hold this history that is weaving through our lives today, I also walked through hope and joy as our missed turns led us to experience Italy's regions and culture. Patience and hospitality were poured over us as we literally were detoured into a Donkey Fest during one unplanned adventure. We took it all in as community was celebrated in the town square. **An unexpected holy space to breathe in the sharing, respect, and hope of community.**



I had not realized the impact the journey would have on me. My heart and mind were opened to history I had not known and called to **listen anew** as my knowledge was stirred by the stories of perseverance, intelligence, strength, and humility that faced power and authority. These stories of yesterday and today, create questions and with this a motivation to grow my knowledge.



Walking the streets of Italy, I was reminded again and again of a faithful mentor's constant reminder – we learn as we walk. It is the simultaneous action of learning and walking for me as my questions and faithful seeking call me to step into each day with intention.



Listen anew as you walk with our neighbors – what is the perspective, story that stirs your questions? Open your heart to unexpected learnings as you walk and learn with our synod – join us for one or all of our 2026 Lifelong Faith Formation classes! Visit our synod website to learn more.

Sister Noreen Stevens
Synod Missioner serving with Lifelong Faith Formation and Licensed Lay Ministry

Images: Floor Mosaics from Basilica di San Marco, Venice, Donkey from Festa Dell 'Asino in Barni, and A taste of calamari, Riomaggiore - Cinque Terre

New ELCA Social Message – Child Protection

By: Chuck Thomas, NGLS Vice President

I hope each of you had a joyous and grateful Christmas with your friends and families. Speaking of family, let's turn to the gospel and read what Jesus had to say about the younger members of our households, the children. From Matthew, chapter 19, verse 14: *“Jesus said, ‘Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.’”*

Unfortunately, many families across our country, and especially countless children, did not have a happy Christmas. Did you know that more than 1 in every 7 children in the United States have experienced abuse or neglect? Our Church, the ELCA, recognizing this sorrowful and serious problem, just approved a new Social Message, “Child Protection.” This Social Message teaches us the horrible reality of child neglect, recognizes our collective failure to address the issue, and provides direction on what actions we as a Church could take.

Because the new Social Message was just approved on November 12 by the Church Council, only a pre-release copy is currently available. Even so, I encourage you to follow this link to download it from the ELCA website. <https://resources.elca.org/faith-and-society/child-protection-sm-adopted-prerelease/>.

The Social Message is lengthy and informative, while at the same time quite sobering. Because this important Social Message cannot be adequately summarized in a short newsletter article, I bring it to your attention in the hope that you may download it and consider forming a study or discussion group within your congregation about this serious issue. The Social Message has four sections: Understanding Child Maltreatment, The Church and Child Protection, Elements of a Lutheran Theology of Childhood, and Guidance

for Protecting Children.

The first section describes in detail the many forms of child maltreatment, which include physical or material neglect, medical neglect, emotional or psychological abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Also explained in this section are the many ethical and social issues that can contribute to child maltreatment including, but not limited to poverty, inadequate knowledge or preparation for raising children, substance abuse, and racial or gender-identity social justice issues.

The second section speaks about the Church's failures to adequately follow the example of Christ in welcoming and caring for children with love and safety. This section provides perspective on how the Christian Church has contributed to the prevalence of child maltreatment. Recognizing this collective failing, the ELCA recommits to its calling to protect children and to witness the good news of the gospel to all.

In the third section we learn that protecting children begins with perceiving all children as images of God. As such, they must be included as the neighbors we are commanded by Christ to love as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39). Along with many more theological truths within this section, we are reminded that Luther referred to children as "eternal treasures" and regarded the care and education of children as sacred responsibilities.

The fourth section provides many suggestions to answer the question: "What are some basic commitments of the ELCA to child protection?" Commitments may include reporting suspected child neglect or abuse, countering violence with peace, discerning forgiveness, and practicing a trauma-informed approach to ministry.

In addition to studying the problem, the most important way a congregation can protect children from harm is by establishing and following clear policies. In the appendix of the

Social Message there are nine specific policy actions a congregation can enact to help alleviate the possibility of harm within its own worshipping community.

As we celebrate the arrival of Jesus, let us do all we can to make sure every child in our communities can truly experience the love of Christ.

This time of YEAR, congregations should remember to:

- Add to your Annual Meeting Agenda the election of your voting members to Synod Assembly, meeting in hybrid form in conference locations on May 16, 2026 AND Conference voting members from your congregation
- Anticipate the ELCA Form A to be filled out before the mid-winter deadline
- Send your Mission Support letter of intent to the synod office
- Send a copy of your Annual Report to the synod office
- Treasurer's should update your Pastor's (or Vicar's) updated 2026 compensation with Portico Benefits Services

FINACE REMINDER

January 13, 2026

Last day for checks to arrive in the synod office, so that 2025

February 11, 2026

Last day for checks to arrive in the synod office, so that January 2026 giving can be credited to Synod fiscal year which ends January 31.

benevolence gifts can be credited to 2025 giving.

NGLS Youth Ministry Spotlight

No Act Too Small – a story about Mylee

Mylee Tusa is a high school senior with a full schedule. In addition to her busy school life and extracurriculars, she is also involved in her home congregation of Calvary Lutheran Church in Quinnesec, MI. Like many young people in our synod, Mylee often has opportunities to join in with youth groups from other conferences. This past summer, Mylee joined a group from the Superior Central Conference on a service trip to Lutherock in North Carolina, a NovusWay outdoor ministry site that sits on over 750 acres of land. Lutherock and the surrounding areas are still recovering from the devastating effects of Hurricane Helene after it made landfall late last year. The group didn't know what to expect when they got there, only that they would be lending a hand wherever they were needed.

When they arrived at Lutherock, there was an adjustment period. The camp was much larger and more rustic than what the group was used to, and even simple things like meals required walking long distances. The service projects the group completed in their time at Lutherock varied from day-to-day. Some days saw them doing physical labor such as staining a fence or hauling large logs and debris left behind from the storm. These tasks were challenging for the group, not only because they weren't used to such strenuous work, but also because it was difficult for them to connect what they were doing with the image of helping the communities of North Carolina they had in their heads. How did staining a fence or hauling wood help anyone? The group also spent a day working at a local food pantry, where it was more obvious to them that they were making an impact. Mylee also had the opportunity to spend

an hour offsite to help an older couple who had to move due to the effects of the hurricane. It was easier to see the connections with this type of work. When she was face-to-face with the people she was helping, she felt as if **she could actually see that what they were doing mattered.**

Throughout her time at Lutherock, Mylee learned that **even the smallest amount of service makes a difference in the lives of others.**

Later in the week, she learned that the fence they had stained

belonged to what would be a new home for a family displaced by Hurricane Helene. While hauling wood is a daily task for Mylee at home, the work she and her peers did at Lutherock was part of the process of clearing trails that their campers use daily. While it wasn't glamorous, the importance of safe and accessible trails was obvious to Mylee. The group returned home at the end of the week, but Mylee continued to reflect on her experience, going as far as writing her senior essay about it. Her trip showed her firsthand that we make an impact when we serve others, even if we can't see it at the time.



Synod Assembly 2026

Synod Assembly will be on May 16 and will be in a hybrid format at conference locations.



Registration will open March 3 and permanently close on April 30. Late registration (extra fee) will be April 7 to April 30. Look for more info in E-Notes in the new year.

Thank You

FOR YOUR SUPPORT

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

Answer the Call

Immanuel, Rhineland

ELCA Disaster Relief

Immanuel, Negaunee
Ascension, Minocqua
St. Paul, Mass City
Leroy & Verna Johnson

Companion Synod

St. Paul, Mass City
Deloris Langseth

Lutheran Social Services

Immanuel, Rhineland
Emanuel, Skandia

Lutheran World Relief

Calvary, Rapid River
Prince of Peace, Marquette
Messiah, Marquette
Zion, Marinette
Calvary, Minocqua

Synod Ministry Fund

Chuck & Lynn Thomas

Campus Ministry

Calvary, Rapid River
Prince of Peace, Marquette
Good Shepherd, Peshtigo
Bethel, Ishpeming

Youth Ministry

Larry Pagel

Mission Outreach

Immanuel, Escanaba

Leadership Support

Larry Pagel

Missionary Support

Mission United, Pelkie
Bethel, Ishpeming

Stewardship

Larry Pagel

Clergy Debt Retirement

St. Paul, Mass City
-In memory of Pr. Mike
Laakko

Global Refuge

Messiah, Marquette

Sangwe Well Project

Tri-County Conference

Endowment Fund

Wes & Rev. Elizabeth
Daniels

Seminarian Support

Bethel, Ishpeming



Zion, St. Ignace

• Synod Calendar •

January 2026

- 1 - Synod Office Closed
- 12 - NGLS staff meeting
- 13 - Calendar close
- 14 - E-Notes due
- 14 - Synod Assembly Planning Committee
- 15 - Finance committee
- 16-17 - Synod Council
- 26 - NGLS staff meeting
- 29 - E-Notes due

February 2026

- 8 - Morgan Simmons Installation at Immanuel, Rhineland
- 9 - March/April Northern Light due
- 11 - Mission Support Fiscal Close
- 12 - E-Notes due
- 12 - E-Notes due

Pastoral Vacancies and Interims

Ready to Receive Potential Candidates

United, L'Anse – Rev. Julie Belew
 Northern Lights Parish – Rev. Bill Jacobson

In Discernment Regarding Next Steps

Trinity, Brevort – Rev. Melinda VanderSys

Engaged in Transitional Process

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

Not Actively in Call Process

Christ the King, Escanaba and Faith, Rock – Student Vicar Sarah Sleeter
 Porterfield, Porterfield & Beaver American, Pound – Student Vicar Dan Moschea
 Eden, Munising – Student Vicar Elaine Robbins
 Bethany, Ishpeming - Rev. J. Mills
 Faith & Trinity, Ishpeming – Student Vicar Robert Lake
 Bethany, Mohawk & Shepherd of the Sea - Rev. Peter Vorhes
 Faith, Sault Ste. Marie - Rev. Elise Hynek

*“Open wide our hands in sharing, as we heed Christ’s ageless call,
 healing, teaching, and reclaiming, serving you by loving all.”*
 - God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending – ELW #678

The congregations of the NGLS have been generous in their giving through November for which we are deeply grateful! While mission support has decreased by over \$9,500 from last year, this is far less than anticipated. These gifts allow the ministry we share to remain vital in our communities and the world, as we heed Christ’s call to share God’s love with all.
 - Betsy Koski, Bookkeeper

As of 11/30/25	2024	2025	\$ Change	% Change
Annual Pledged Amount	729,507	695,080	-34,427	-4.7%
Amount Received Year to Date	637,456	627,903	-9,553	-1.5%



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Prayfaithfully

NGLS Daily Devotions Schedule January & February 2026

December 29 - January 4	Pastor Lee Goodwin
January 5 - 11	Pastor Jared Howard
January 12 - 18	Pastor Steve Solberg
January 19 - 25	Zion & Salem, Ironwood Bible Study
January 26 - February 1	Pastor Maxine Gray
February 2 - 8	Pastor Bill Jacobson
February 9 - 15	Melzee Jacobson
February 16 - 22	Pastor Tom & Luanne Skrenes
February 23 - March 1	Dave & Mary Lou Blomquist