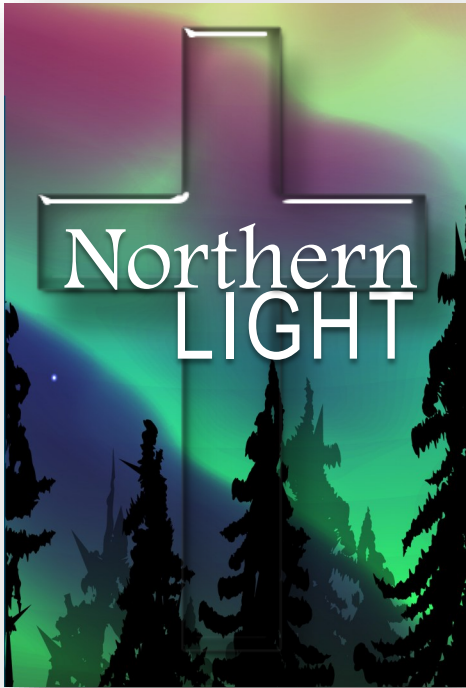


# Shining with the Light of Christ in the Northern Great Lakes Synod

Volume 38, Issue 4 | July - August 2026



## Northern LIGHT

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Dear People of the Northern Great Lakes Synod,

Our theme of “God gives the growth” becomes visible in all its glory in these lovely summer days of greenness, blooming flowers, and growing gardens.

At our Synod Assembly of 2026, we met under that theme in a hybrid format, meeting in person by conference connected to each other through zoom, common worship, and shared reports. Every year we have done this, the technology and our ability to use it have improved. This year’s assembly was largely glitch free, except for some connectivity and bandwidth issues at some of our sites.

Huge thanks to the many people needed to pull off what amounts to eight mini-assemblies. When we are in one place, the lion’s share of the details is managed by the synod staff with help from the venue. With eight host sites, we needed volunteers for all of it. Recruiting volunteers and communicating with everyone regarding their roles and expectations remains the greatest challenge.

The evaluations reflected the following responses:

1. Worship was appreciated. It worked well to move into Holy Communion at each host site during the Sharing of the Peace.
2. People enjoyed the videos: meeting the Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry, learning more about LSS, the ELCA, the Youth Gathering, and more.
3. While the business portion is less than riveting by its very nature, we accomplished what was needed.
4. People both lamented not being in person with everyone and were appreciative of the shorter drive and one day schedule.
5. Problems with freezing, glitching, and hearing still happened in at least two of our conferences due to the lack of quality wifi/internet available in their context. This presents the challenge of equal access for the whole synod.
6. Some evaluations reflected frustration in what they experienced as a lack of instruction. Given that ample

instruction was provided through copious emails, it may be that the voting member's personal email was not provided by the registrant but perhaps used the church's email instead. Always provide your personal email.

7. Things to know for the future:

- A. The Pre-Assembly Report (PAR) is always posted on the Synod website under the "Synod Assembly" tab 30 days prior to assembly.
- B. Sign up for E Notes.
- C. If a voting member wishes to have a hard copy of the PAR, it is up to them to print it. Another option would be to download it to a laptop or tablet ahead of time.

Next year, Synod Assembly will be earlier. We will meet at Messiah Lutheran for opening worship on Thursday April 22, 2027, and then gather at Northern Michigan University in Marquette Friday and Saturday April 23 and 24. I encourage congregations to do the following:

1. Elect/identify your voting members at or by your Annual Meeting.
2. If the same voting members have been the ones to attend every year, let someone else have a turn. The best way for us to experience who we are as church together is to take a turn attending Synod Assembly.
3. After Synod Assembly, share your experience with the congregation during announcements the following Sunday and write a brief article for your congregation newsletter.
4. Congregations should plan to cover the registration fee and expense of their voting members in their 2027 budget.
5. Register on time. 😊

The things that people most appreciate about Synod Assembly happen when we meet in person. The worship, the fellowship, the energy, the learning, and so much more. I look forward to being with you and us together as a synod April 22 – 24, 2027.

Plans are already in the works!

In Christ,  
Bishop Katherine Finegan



Years ago, the Augsburg Youth & Family Institute carried the banner phrase "Faith is caught, not taught." This sticky phrase, that I remember decades after first hearing it, provides words to what we already know. Growing in faith is like learning a language...it is by cultural immersion. A baby knows the tune of a familiar Lamb of God as choreography to be carried to the altar for a smile, a blessing, and maybe a bite of bread. The child knows which grandpa-figure tells the best stories and may share an extra brownie at the potluck. Or the teenager is amazed he had a little cheering section from his church-family at his track meet. "Faith is caught, not taught" doesn't dismiss faith nurture in Sunday School, or Vacation Bible School, but honors that we are all generative in nurturing one another in faith, all the time.

Bishop Finegan and I recently met with

congregation leaders in Copper Country Conference 2. There were over eighty folks who gathered for brunch and conversation around naming challenges and hopes, as several congregations are experiencing pastoral vacancies at the same time. It should not have surprised me as much as it did that MANY named the challenge of not enough youth among them in their congregations. This was not garden variety “we need some youth to carry the Christmas boxes back to the basement”, or “we have empty Sunday School rooms”. What I heard was a deeper longing and acknowledgement of the need to be generative...to share our faith with the future.

The “grandmother hypothesis” is that females live so far beyond child-bearing years because it has an evolutionary advantage to the species. Humans, and ironically a handful of toothed whale species, are the only creatures on the planet that have blossomed through the advantage of the nurture of grandmas. And church is one of the very few places in our culture that still thrives on such intergenerational flourishing. And so when I hear the lament of older voices longing for children and youth among them once again, it pulls the heart-string akin to Rachel crying out for her children. Children need grandmas (and surrogate grandparents) AND aging folks long for the generative promise of hope that comes through experiencing children and youth around them.

So what to do when the hospital stopped delivering babies, and the school is shrinking in your town or you do not have children in your own family? How can our congregations be generative for the sake of caring for all children, without checking the box to fill the pews, offering plates, Sunday School rooms or “grow

the future church”? Children and youth are messy. They run in the hallways, and leave goldfish crumbs in the pews. Youth want to sleep-in on Sunday, after a busy week, and question everything ever mentioned in VBS. What does grandparent grace look like? Is it filling backpacks or reading at the library for school children? Is it sponsoring children to go to camp, even if they live in another town? Is it forming child-care centers in under-sourced communities? Is it delighting in the mess and noise now, because it is gift? Is it sharing your story and how God is at work...and listening to their story and how God is at work?

Our generative grandparenting is different because the church is different...it is bigger than just the pew we sit in on Sunday. God is not done acting in the church and world. The good news is children and youth still are active and growing members of the body of Christ across the church and our synod. Vacation Bible School and Fortune Lake Camp season has arrived! Youth are getting ready for mission trips this summer, and planning toward the Youth Gathering next summer. Stefanie Ehle, the Missioner with Youth Ministry, and the Synod Youth Ministry Team is active and meeting soon this summer, and all are invited to the “Jesus Story for All Ages” retreat for adults who want to be more intentional about how to nurture children and youth in our midst.

Activating young and old to a way of Jesus so more may discover community, justice, and love is still happening!

Shalom+  
Pastor Sharolyn Swenson



## Creation in Peril?

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

As I sit considering what to write, hearing the birds outside, feeling the cool morning breezes coming off the lake, and watching the bumblebees flit from flower to flower, it is easy to believe that all is good in God's creation. But is it? As someone with a science background, it is easy to answer with a resounding no!

Our Church understands and affirms that God calls us to care for all creation. The foundation for the 1993 ELCA social statement, "Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice" is rooted in scripture. The social statement's study guide points to the scriptural context. Human beings are to be loving caretakers of all that God called good (Genesis 1:31, Genesis 2:15, and Philippians 2:7). We are to live according to Wisdom (Proverbs 8), and within the covenant that God makes with every living thing (Genesis 9:12-17). God continues to be active in creation today (Psalm 104:30).

Why do I say no to the question; is all okay with God's creation? Scientific evidence from real data, not just conjecture, affirms that global warming and a resultant climate change is happening. Yet, in the last year and a half our government has chosen to roll back previously established environmental protection standards that reduced the greenhouse gas output leading to global warming. In addition to this reduction of air quality protection, our government's recent redefinition of what is a protected waterway, has also reduced overall water quality protections. And most recently, there was a decision to revoke or make less strict previously established drinking water standards that strived to protect consumers from PFAS chemicals, otherwise known as "forever

chemicals."

As people of God, how can we respond and answer the call to protect creation? With our government choosing to not lead in environmental protection, maybe creation needs a preponderance of grassroot efforts by God's people. Are you willing to initiate action within your congregation and start a creation care team? Has your congregation considered starting a pollinator garden? Does your congregation recycle paper, cardboard, metal, and plastics that meet recycling standards, and/or use compostable single-use utensils instead of plastic ones? Are you willing to contact your legislative representatives to let them know your concern? Acting on any or all the questions will be a step towards answering God's call to care for creation.

If you or your congregation want to learn more about pollinator gardens, visit the synod's website and sign up for the Lifelong Faith Formation class about pollinator gardens being offered during the fall 2026 semester.

If you are interested in learning more about establishing a creation care team at your congregation or throughout the Northern Great Lakes Synod, please contact me at [nnglsynodvp@nnglsynod.org](mailto:nnglsynodvp@nnglsynod.org). To follow more news about creation care, subscribe to the "Green Blades Rising" monthly newsletter at <https://www.ecofaithnetwork.org/green-blades>.

## Ministry Updates

- We rejoice with Christ the King, Escanaba & Faith, Rock as they have voted to call Vicar Sarah Sleeter to partnership with them as their pastor. Vicar Sarah will be ordained at Calvary, Quinnesec on July 25 and she will be installed on August 9.
- On May 3, 2026, Trinity, Ishpeming voted

to faithfully bring their ministry to a close. Their last worship service will be February 7, 2027.

- Our Redeemer, Newberry has voted to sell their building. Their congregation, already in partnership with the PCUSA in Newberry, will continue together in ministry with the PCUSA congregation.
- We rejoice with Emmanuel, Menominee as they have called Rev. Christine Olson to partnership with them as their pastor. She was installed on May 7, 2026.



### Looking Beyond the Surface

– a story about Tavia

Tavia Hult is just a few weeks away from completing 8th grade and already has an impressive list of accomplishments. She is a Student Council officer, member of the National Jr. Honor Society, volleyball player, equestrian, choir member, softball player - the list could go on, but you get the point. What you may not see from her many accolades and smiling exterior is that she was diagnosed with depression and anxiety last year. Through one of the roughest patches in her life, Tavia leaned on her faith and continues to go through life with God's help.

Tavia learned to let faith guide her way, even when the world around her feels like an abyss of negativity. She acknowledges that when she talks to God and asks for guidance, she is in a happier place with herself and with her surroundings.

Tavia's faith was nurtured at Bethel

Lutheran Church in Menominee, where she was baptized, attended Sunday School, and will soon be confirmed. Tavia serves joyfully as a greeter and acolyte at Bethel and when she enters a room there, some of the younger members enthusiastically call her name and rush to give her hugs. She has also made connections with her larger family in Christ through volunteering with the Lutheran World Relief Boxcar loading and participating in Conference-Wide Youth Events. Tavia met some of her best friends through the church, despite them going to different schools.



Tavia has a daily practice of providing a boost of positivity to at least three people every day. She makes an intentional effort to offer a kind gesture, words of affirmation, or a compliment to people she interacts with. She wants us to remember that everyone is fighting their own battles, and we can't always tell what is going on from the outside, but when we lean on God, we can all make the world a better place!

# Thank You

FOR YOUR SUPPORT

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

## Lutheran World Relief

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

## ELCA Disaster Relief

Salem, Ironwood  
Trinity, Ishpeming  
Zion, St. Ignace

## Campus Ministry

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

## Companion Synod Support

Salem, Ironwood  
St. Paul's, Mass City  
First, Gladstone

## Answer the Call

Zion, Manistique

## Synod Ministry Fund

First, Gladstone

## Kisarawe Staff Gift

Laura & Marvin Kantola  
Tracy & David Rowe  
Mary Lou & David Blomquist  
B & M Johnson  
Kathryn & Albert Sundine  
Luanne & Rev. Tom Skrenes  
Rev. Jim Duehring  
Judy Quirk  
James Hayward

## Youth Ministries

First, Gladstone

## Seminarian Support

Trinity, Ishpeming

## Equipping the Saints

Zion, St. Ignace  
Rev. Elisabeth & Wes Daniels

## Restricted General

First, Gladstone

## Missionary Support

Mission United, Pelkie

## Skogman Fund

Jo Skogman

## Global Refuge

Messiah, Marquette

## Mission Outreach

Rev. Eliabeth & Wes Daniels

## • Synod Calendar •

### July 2026

- 1: NGLS Staff Meeting
- 3: Office Closed
- 6-9: Rostered Minister's Gathering,  
Indianapolis, IN
- 13: Constitution Committee
- 14: NGLS Staff Meeting
- 18: Godly Play - Intro
- 25: Sarah Sleeter Ordination at  
Calvary, Quinnesec
- 28: Retired Clergy, Spouse, & Widows  
Lunch at Grace, Pembine
- 30: NGLS Staff Meeting

### August 2026

- 1: Godly Play - Core Training Pt. 1
- 8: Godly Play - Core Training Pt. 2
- 9: Rev. Sarah Sleeter Installation
- 10: Finance Committee
- 11: Candidacy Committee
- 12: NGLS Staff Meeting
- 13-15: "Jesus Story For All Ages"  
Youth Leader Retreat
- 18: Bishop Finegan & Pastor Swenson  
leave for Tanzania

## Pastoral Vacancies and Interims

### Ready to Receive Potential Candidates

Bethlehem, Florence - Rev. David Johnson  
 Pioneer Lake, Conover – Rev. Kari Vadis  
 United, L’Anse – Rev. Julie Belew  
 Grace, Pembine – Deacon Lori Ward  
 Zion, Manistique - Rev. Jim Duehring  
 Grace, Gwinn - Rev. David Van Kley

### Exploring Partnerships

Bethany & Faith, Ishpeming - Rev. J. Mills

### Engaged in Transitional Process

Emanuel, Skandia & Bethany, Negaunee –  
 Rev. Lloyd Luedeman  
 Messiah, Marquette - Rev. Steve Solberg

### Not Actively in Call Process

Porterfield, Porterfield & Beaver American, Pound –  
 Student Vicar Dan Moschea  
 Eden, Munising – Student Vicar Elaine Robbins  
 Faith, Sault Ste. Marie - Rev. Elise Hynek  
 Calvary, Rapid River - Student Vicar Robert Lake

### In Discernment

Mission United, Pelkie - Rev. Soren Schmit  
 Grace, South Range - Rev. Bonny Kinnunen  
 Northern Lights Parish - Rev. Bill Jacobson  
 Zion, Allenville & Bethel, Cedarville -  
 Rev. Paul Raappana

Webster defines generosity using words and phrases such as liberal in giving or sharing, free from smallness of mind, bountiful, lavish. Using those last two words, we can see God’s generosity toward us shown in the bountiful blessings that God lavishes upon us and in the love shown to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We are so very grateful for the people of the Synod who continue to share those blessings so that the work of Christ may be done. Thank you for your generosity!

- Betsy Koski, Bookkeeper

As of 3/31/26	2025	2026	\$ Change	% Change
Annual Pledged Amount	695,080	709,773	+14,693	+2.1%
Amount Received Year to Date	257,235	273,387	+16,152	+6.3%



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# Prayfaithfully

## NGLS Daily Devotions Schedule July - August 2026

<b>June 29 - July 5</b>	<b>Pastor Kelly Ylitalo</b>
<b>July 6 - 12</b>	<b>Pastor Nicole Hanson-Lynn</b>
<b>July 13 - 19</b>	<b>Bishop Katherine Finegan</b>
<b>July 20 - 26</b>	<b>Pastor Sharolyn Swenson</b>
<b>July 27 - August 2</b>	<b>Sister Noreen Stevens</b>
<b>August 3 - 9</b>	<b>Pastor Brittany Barkus</b>
<b>August 10 - 16</b>	<b>Pastor Terry Frankenstein</b>
<b>August 17 - 23</b>	<b>Fortune Lake Staff</b>
<b>August 24 - 30</b>	<b>Synodical Women's Organization</b>