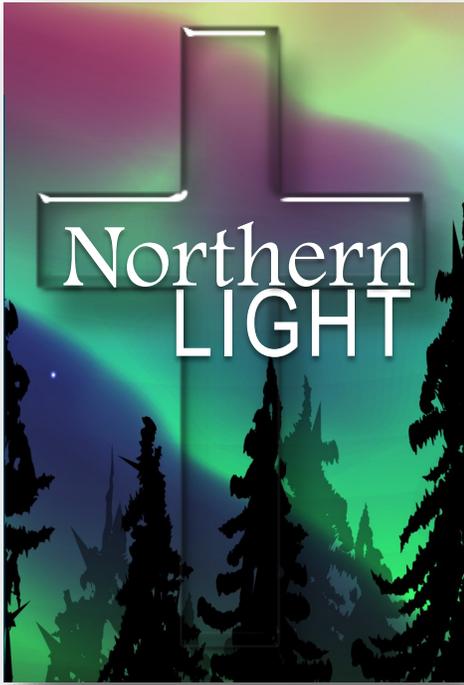


Shining with the Light of Christ in the Northern Great Lakes Synod

Volume 38, Issue 2 | March - April 2026



Northern LIGHT

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

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

Bishop Katherine Finegan
kfinegan@nglsynod.org

Pastor Sharolyn Swenson
sswenson@nglsynod.org

Dear Friends in Christ,

As you may know, I spent some time travelling during my sabbatical. My husband and I began a month-long trip beginning in Vietnam, then Cambodia, and finally Thailand to visit our former foreign exchange student. We had never been to that side of the planet before and found the food, the people, the scenery, and so much more to be unique, beautiful, and a completely new experience. We visited the Revolution Museum in Hanoi, North Vietnam, the Hoa La prison (known in the U.S. as the “Hanoi Hilton”), and learned the Vietnamese perspective on “The American War.” As you might imagine, the experience and conclusions about that war were from a different perspective, one that I had not been exposed to previously.

From Vietnam, we traveled to Cambodia. During our time there, tensions flared over disputed territory with Thailand. We heard from the Cambodians how this was Thailand’s fault. After crossing the border into Thailand, we heard from the Thai’s how the trouble was Cambodia’s fault. As peace talks continue, I wonder if anyone has the capacity to look at the situation with an unbiased lens.

Narrative matters, meaning that the lens through which we interpret things shapes our opinions and informs our actions. Also, facts can be told in such a way as to influence the hearer’s opinion. It matters how the story is told and how the facts are relayed in order to produce a desired result, and how, at its worst, facts are ignored or denied if they challenge or do not support the narrative or lies are told in order to create an illusion of truth that supports the narrative.

How are we to know what to believe is true in the face of competing narratives?

In Vietnam, I could not dismiss their narrative as invalid because first and foremost, it was their experience. And then, there were the facts that were still observable...of Agent Orange still in the soil and ongoing birth defects even to the second and third generation, of the pain and destruction caused by the conflict, of the exploitation of labor and resources by outside actors, of the deep resolve of the Vietnamese people for self-rule being underestimated by both the French and the

U.S. Fifty years later, any scholar of this conflict largely agrees on what were the missed opportunities for peace, the hubris that blinded, and the missteps that harmed, on both sides.

What we see in hindsight can be heart breaking from any perspective. And after 50 years, that there is healing and a warm joyful welcome for former enemies is a gift.

Whatever your narrative, whatever conclusions you are drawing about current events, whatever your predisposition that shapes what you hear and how you hear it, I ask you to pray; for safety, for clarity, for wisdom, for courage, and for what is lifegiving for all concerned.

In this Lenten Season we remember our baptismal promises and the threefold renouncements that precede the Apostles Creed in our baptismal liturgy.

- “Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God?
- Do you renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God?
- Do you renounce the ways of sin that draw you from God?”

As people of faith, my hope would be that our narrative would be guided by the light that Christ shines and by the cross that bears witness. Jesus calls us to lift up the lowly and have compassion for the neighbor. Whatever your narrative, your baptismal promise is to work for justice and renounce the forces that defy God. Together, we work to make a positive difference in the world and my hope is that at the very least, within the community of faith and through it, we always extend warm and joyful welcome.

Yours in Christ,
Bishop Katherine Finegan



The Mission We Share

One of my favorite moments as a church-goer (and pastor) is celebrating a baptism in our midst. Will the baby be curious or cry? Will the congregation smile and tilt their heads to see the delight? Will the young person shake the water off? Will the pastor quietly stomp at each renunciation of the forces of evil? Will the joy get stuck in our throat or come out as a tear? Will the baby be carried in procession at the Gathering Hymn? Will there be cake in the Fellowship Hall? All these moments...some silent or some paired with ancient words...weave us together across time, place, and people into this ancient rite of welcome. It is both unity and diversity...parts of the rite are shared everywhere and parts of the expressions of that rite only happen among a particular people.

Many of us don't have active memories of our own baptism, apart from a family photo album. Those who come to the font as an adult may have a memory, but still cannot recall every word spoken or promise made. This may be one of the reasons why we celebrate baptism in community, so that we can witness, welcome, and be reminded of our mission we share. It is a collective “this is what we are called to do.” I am not just talking about the baptism itself (although Jesus does tell his disciples specifically to “go, baptize”). More so it is our individual and collective promises that shape how we see the household of God and our place in it...our shared mission of living in God's household.

When a person comes to or is presented at the font for baptism, they are asked questions, and told what the responsibilities they are agreeing to, as a baptized person. This is a moment of consent. God will do the heavy lifting, but our awareness of this gift, is amplified when we pay attention to

responsibilities that we agree to. These are not always easy, convenient, or even possible, but between the help of God and accountability of our co-workers in the body of Christ, we promise:

- To live among God's faithful people;
- To hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper;
- To proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed;
- To serve all people, following the example of Jesus;
- To strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

During the season of Lent and overflowing into Easter, our ears may be tuned more ardently to preparing, remembering, and practicing the promises shared at Baptism. So, fill the font and splash a bit. Dwell in God's promise of community, justice, and love made for and through you.



Shalom
Pastor Sharolyn Swenson

Creation Care Action Opportunities

By: Chuck Thomas, NGLS Vice President

Genesis 2:15: *"The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it."*

This passage from Genesis is unambiguous. It directly tells us that God gave humankind the responsibility to care for God's wonderful gift of creation. Did you know that our ELCA Church actively supports Creation Care? To learn more, follow this link <https://lutheransrestoringcreation.org/map-of-lrc-care-for-creation-ministries/>, to find resources for creation care activities and connections.

Are there congregations or members of the Northern Great Lakes Synod interested in actively doing more to care for and preserve what God has gifted? Has your congregation already taken steps toward creation care? If you have, there is an interactive map on the Lutherans Restoring Creation website where you can add your activity. Currently, there are only two action markers representing the entire NGLS. If your congregation has a pollinator garden, an active composting project, solar panels, or has an active creation care team, I encourage you to add your effort to the map. Instructions are provided on the website.

Additionally, a network of synods in our region, including the NGLS, sponsor an annual one-day conference called the EcoFaith Summit, focused on creation care. I recently participated in the planning retreat for this year's Summit, which is scheduled for April 18 at First Lutheran Church in Duluth, Minnesota. The theme is From Fear to Fire: Igniting Community for a Planet in Peril. This conference is an excellent way to connect with others in the Upper Great Lakes region who are actively answering the call to care for God's creation.

Please consider joining me and others from the NGLS in attending the 2026 Summit. This conference can be attended in person or virtually. Follow this link <https://www.ecofaithnetwork.org/ecofaith-summit-2026> to a more detailed description of the conference along with the registration form. If you are interested please contact the NGLS office at 906-228-2300, as there is a group discount on the registration fee.

If you have questions about the Summit, would like to explore creation care ideas, or are interested in being part of a synod-wide creation care team, please contact me at nnglsynodvp@nnglsynod.org.



Synod Assembly

May 16, 2026



Synod Assembly this year will be hybrid at locations in each conference.

Voter: \$55

Visitor: \$15

Registration opens: March 3

Late Fee increases \$25 on April 6

Registration closes: April 30

Voting members, please register with your own email, not the congregation email.

SCHEDULE Central/Eastern Times

7:30 / 8:30am	Tech Check: Each host site technology connects to main base of operations.
8:00 / 9:00am	Arrival and Check – In: Host sites and conference partners provide coffee and snacks.
8:15/9:15am	Check-in closes
8:30/9:30am	Plenary 1
10:30/11:30am	Synod Wide Worship Lunch break
12:15/1:15pm	Plenary 2
3:00/4:00pm	Closing of the Assembly

*...but God gave the growth.
-Corinthians 3:6*

Host Sites:

Conference 1: Sharon in Bessemer, Michigan (Eastern time)

Conference 2: Holy Trinity in Chassell, Michigan (Eastern time)

Conference 3: Immanuel in Rhinelander, Wisconsin (Central time)

Conference 4: First in Iron River, Michigan (Central time)

Conference 5: Gethsemane in Wallace, Michigan (Central time)

Conference 6: Bethany in Escanaba, Michigan (Eastern time)

Conference 7: St. James in Rudyard, Michigan (Eastern time)

Conference 8: Bethany in Ishpeming, Michigan (Eastern time)

Northern Great Lakes Synod Youth Ministry Spotlight

Finding Purpose – a story about Charlie

Charlie Smith is eager to use her creativity and unique style to make a difference in the lives of children. Growing up as a member of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Negaunee, Charlie credits her mom and Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp as having the strongest influences in her faith life. Charlie leads an active prayer life and finds meaning in helping others. Throughout middle and high school, Charlie was able to participate in multiple trips with other youth in her congregation, including a mission trip to North Carolina and the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans. She also attended Quake (a high-energy faith conference for youth) every year that she could.

Charlie's first Quake event in Minneapolis, MN left a lasting impact on her. She wasn't quite sure what to expect and was looking forward to experiencing the sights and activities that a larger city had to offer. Charlie reluctantly went along with the group's service project of packing meals for the nonprofit, Feed My Starving Children. At the start of the day, Charlie wished that she was doing something more exciting, like visiting the Mall of America, but she soon felt a



sense of calling to help people. She still remembers the distinct scent of the protein packs and the friendly competition to see who could pack the most meals. As Charlie has grown in her faith and as a person, that experience has stayed with her. She now feels that helping kids is her purpose in life.

Charlie plans to help kids by being a counselor at Fortune Lake this summer and hopes to have an accounting career that allows her to share her gifts and resources to help less fortunate children. She dreams of being able to fulfill wishes for kids, like fulfilling requests on an angel tree at Christmastime. As a high school senior, Charlie leads a busy life, but continues to prioritize her faith and recall experiences she's had within the Northern Great Lakes Synod to make this world a better place! Charlie would like everyone to remember that being different is ok and if something makes you happy (like changing your hairstyle or color!) you should do it.

Synod Life and Ministry Transitions

- ◆ We pray God's Blessing upon Rev. Molly Hunter and her family as she has accepted a new call in the Northern Illinois Synod. Her last day at Messiah, Marquette was February 15.
- ◆ We celebrate the installation Rev. Morgan Simmons at Immanuel, Rhinelander on February 7.
- ◆ We thank God and celebrate the life and ministry of Rev. George Olson, who passed to life eternal on February 3, 2026. A funeral was held on February 9 at Zion, Marinette.
- ◆ We give thanks for the efforts of Rev. Renee MacLeod, who will retire from 38 years of ministry on March 1, 2026.

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.

Campus Ministry:

Good Shepherd, Peshtigo
Ascension, Minocqua
Immanuel, Negaunee
Calvary, Rapid River
Prince of Peace, Marquette

Skrenes Fund:

Sandee & Mike Strahan
Thrivent

Companion Synod:

Immanuel, Negaunee
St. Paul's, Mass City

Synod Ministry Fund:

Rev. Dave Van Kley

Lutheran World Relief:

Zion, Manistique
Calvary, Rapid River
St. James, Rudyard
Prince of Peace, Marquette
Bethlehem, Florence
Messiah, Marquette
Beaver American, Pound
Bethel, Menominee in
memory of Karen & Don
Nichols

Disaster Relief:

Beaver American, Pound
Bethel, Menominee

Global Refuge:

Bethel, Menominee

Seminarian Support:

Beaver American, Pound
Faith, Sault Ste. Marie
Emmanuel, Menominee

Equipping the Saints:

Rev. Elisabeth & Wes Daniels

UP Wild:

Rev. Jim & Gisele Duehring

Restricted General:

Ruth Warmanen

Mission Outreach:

Rev. Elisabeth & Wes Daniels

ELCA Good Gifts:

Mission United, Pelkie

Missionary Support:

Immanuel, Negaunee

• Synod Calendar •

March 2026

1-2: Professional Leaders Retreat
9: NGLS Staff Meeting
10: Pre-Assembly Reports Due
12: E-Notes due
14: Equipping the council for
ministry zoom 8:30am CT
19: Equipping the council for
ministry zoom 6pm CT
20-21: Transition Team Retreat
24: NGLS Staff Meeting
27-28: Synod Council
30: E-Notes Due

April 2026

6: May/June Northern Light Due
8: Endowment Committee Meeting
9: NGLS Staff Meeting
13: E-Notes Due
16: Pre-Assembly Report
uploaded to website
17-18: Eco Summit
23: NGLS Staff Meeting
29: E-Notes Due

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

Exploring Partnerships

Bethany & Faith, Ishpeming - Rev. J. Mills
 Bethel & Trinity, Ishpeming – Rev. Tim Johnston

Engaged in Transitional Process

Emmanuel, Menominee – Rev. Christine Olson
 Emanuel, Skandia & Bethany, Negaunee – Rev. Lloyd Luedeman
 Grace, Pembine – Deacon Lori Ward
 Zion, Manistique - Rev. Jim Duehring
 Calvary, Rapid River - Vicar Robert Lake
 Grace, Gwinn - Rev. David Van Kley

Not Actively in Call Process

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

*“I’ll never count all of God’s mercies, but oh, I can give God my praise
 for all of that love, my thanksgiving and love to the end of my days.” -ELW #683*

We give God our thanks and praise for the abundant blessings given to the Synod through the generous giving of our congregations in 2025. Although we ended the year with substantially lower mission support receipts than in 2024 (as anticipated), our Synod remained strong in its mission and ministry, sharing the message of Christ’s love and mercy in both new and traditional ways. In this new year, may praise fill our days as we trust God to provide for all our needs.

-Betsy Koski, Bookkeeper

As of 12/31/25	2024	2025	\$ Change	% Change
Annual Pledged Amount	729,507	695,080	-34,427	-4.7%
Amount Received Year to Date	766,879	728,230	-38,649	-5%



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Prayfaithfully

NGLS Daily Devotions Schedule March & April 2026

March 2 - 8	Phoebe Pettingell
March 9 - 15	Pastor Kari Vadis
March 16 - 22	Pastor Elise Hynek
March 23 - 29	Pastor Amanda Kossow
March 20 - April 5	Christine Ebert
April 6 - 12	Pastor Scott Ehle
April 13 - 19	Chuck Thomas
April 20 - 26	Synodical Women's Organization
April 27 - May 3	Sister Noreen Stevens