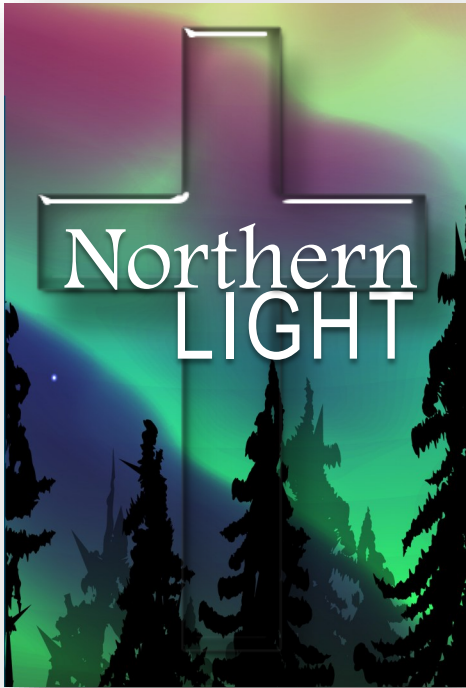


Shining with the Light of Christ in the Northern Great Lakes Synod

Volume 38, Issue 3 | May - June 2026



Northern LIGHT

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*Now the green blade rises
from the buried grain.*

*Wheat that in dark earth many days has lain.
Laid in the earth, like grain that sleeps unseen.
Love is come again like wheat arising green.*

Dear People of the Northern Great Lakes Synod,

At the end of this month, I look forward to preparing soil, turning and mulching it, and then creating orderly rows in which to plant bean seeds, in addition to sugar snaps, carrots, tomatoes, and more.

I continue to be astounded how such a small seed can break open and lose itself in the growth of a small tendril shoot that grows into a vine that grows leaves, eventually budding with flowers, and bearing the fruit of vegetables. It is amazing. I prepare the soil, plant the seed, water it, and one day, lo and behold, green shoots reach out of the soil. God gives the growth.

Also this month of May, we gather in assembly under the theme, “God gives the growth.” In the previous two years, we have focused on “I planted,” and “Apollos Watered.” These first two themes invite our action, our participation. It is the task of the congregation and the person of faith to plant and water seeds of faith. And we are all blessed to recognize and give thanks for the seeds of faith that have been planted and watered by previous generations, the fruit of which we now enjoy.

The challenge of “God gives the growth” to anyone who is a doer, and I think most congregations have a core team of doers, is that God giving the growth is completely outside our action, our direction, our influence. We can totally participate in the first two actions. We can plant seeds of faith – offer welcome, prayers at meals and bedtime, devotions at home, baptism education, send kids to camp,

engage people in God conversations.... We can nurture those seeds...Lifelong Faith Formation, Bible study, gathering for worship, being Christ in the community, trips for youth and adults, listening to God, community, and each other. But what do we do about growth?

As a gardener, I can only wait and watch, hope and pray. Keep watering? Weeding? But I cannot reach into the earth, break open the seed with a dirty fingernail, and pull out the tender shoot of new growth. Growth is God's job, the miracle of creation packed into a little seed.

I would LOVE for us to have power over growth. Any person who loves their church would be happy to will into existence the growth of their beloved congregation.

But that is not in our power. I like to think that if we are faithful in the first two actions, then we will be blessed with growth. But the world has changed, and church has changed, some of our communities have changed, and congregations devoted to planting and nourishing may well find that their most faithful next step is to plant seeds for future generations, seeds for the next generation to nourish, and the generation after that to enjoy the growth.

The arc of the life of the Church began before us, will extend after us, and encompasses the global Church community, of which your community of faith is a part. Our role is to be faithful in the time we are given.

In that time, some congregations are awakening to the reality that the mission for which God created their congregation has been accomplished. Their most faithful next step is

to apply their assets to the work of Christ in ministries not their own, ministries that will plant and nourish seeds that will bear fruit for future generations that may or may not be in their community.

As we focus on "God gives the growth," hear both a word of promise and of grace. If your congregation is experiencing growth (and churches grow in a variety of ways) ...in numbers, in discipleship, in deepening understanding of our relationship to God and each other, in generosity, in awareness of community and energy for ministry efforts... then give thanks to God for it, for it is God's doing through the work of the Holy Spirit of Christ and to God be the glory.

And hold in prayer those congregations doing the hard work and faithful stewardship of ending well. Together, we celebrate their years of ministry. Together, we remember all that God has accomplished through them. And together we embrace them in their grief with the comfort and hope of new life, new growth, and the new beginnings that will come from their ending.

Our God is the God of new life, who brings Easter from Good Friday, green shoots from buried grain...death does not have the final word. New life will come in God's time and in surprising, unexpected ways.

Peace be with you.

Bishop Katherine Finegan



The heavy snow of this season, has kept me homebound more than once this early spring. One of my favorite activities is to binge a few seasons of a television series over a weekend, so that the plot unwinds before me quickly enough to not forget minor characters or subtle clues. I often find myself in the midst of such a show, wondering why in the world I'm watching THIS... this level of suspense or even violence? (I find myself grateful for the sound-muffling power of the falling snow, when every creak will make me jump, in the midst of the jump-scares on the television.) Why is this storytelling helpful to me? Or anyone?

I have had the chance to ponder a similar "why" in seminary, reviewing the syllabus for the class "Fostering Narratives of Hope" with Rev. Dr. Kadie Billman. Both title and professor would have me expect a "nicer" class... more happy endings, hopeful middles, and butterflies. But no. The syllabus was filled with stories and films about zombies and Artificial Intelligence. I watched *World War Z* in the middle of the day, with the blinds wide-open, on my feet to avoid the hoards of zombies about to jump through the television. Our class was invited to de-brief the harder stories of internship or Clinical Pastoral Education, the ones with no closure, still keeping us up at night. Dr. Billman, pastorally and gently, helped us discover for ourselves a truth that *storytelling* is both vaccine and elixir for navigating being human. It is why the gospel fills our souls, when we believe and when we doubt...when we are hopeful or despairing. The co-creator of Godly Play (a form of faith nurture and spiritual guidance with children), Jerome W. Berryman, captures the tools of existential psychotherapy, with simple

children's stories about God. He describes four things all humans wrestle with (no matter their age or context): aloneness, meaning of life (purpose), threat of freedom (too much or too little), and death. *Story* helps us act and play-out these challenging human limits, through meaning-making, hopefully before we are faced with the hard stuff "in real life." Story is like an emotional "hive-mind." If we are not telling them or hearing them, we are cut off from the hive. We tell the story to help us make meaning with the life we are living and be ready for the next unfolding part around the bend.

And so it is, through the stories of and about Jesus. We do not skip the hard parts of the story...the parts we do not understand or want to turn our face from. We do not skip the terror of the cross, the confusion of Mary, or the struggle of Thomas, or the walk back from Emmaus with renewed purpose. The Word became flesh and dwelled among us...so we are not alone in the face of our own human struggles, but we are companioned by Christ and the Church. Christ's story and our stories belong to one another, for the sake of one another. Christ's story, and the ones who tell it, companion me, in the hearing and living of every other story. This is "evangelism". Sharing the good news, and also wrestling, wondering, and challenging our own assumptions. It is not a fixed goal of a happy ending, but how the story and its tellers move together through a life of community, purpose, justice, and new life in Christ.

Shalom +
Pastor Sharolyn



At the Crossroads: Faith in Uncertain Times

By: Chuck Thomas, NGLS Vice President

In the Easter message video by ELCA Presiding Bishop Curry, a country church and cemetery sit at the corner of two rural roads, surrounded by open fields. As I watched, the image of a crossroads stayed with me. It feels as though we, individually, as a Church, and as a nation, are standing at a significant moment of decision. I find myself reflecting more deeply: Which way do we turn? Which path do we choose? What actions do we take? I have more questions than answers.

Since we are not blessed with foreknowledge, how do we choose which road to travel? Maybe the answer resides in our faith. Whenever we encounter decision points or crossroads in our lives, we often feel uncertain about which direction to take. As Bishop Curry says in his Easter message, "We are in an in-between time and do not know what tomorrow may bring." As we witness the unrest in the world and in our communities he says, "we are a Lenten Church living in a time of uncertainty and are experiencing the very human feeling of being not in control." Which road do we travel? Consider the words found in Matthew 7:13-14:

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life; and there are few who find it."

Our journey, as we make choices, becomes an opportunity to build faith and deepen our relationship with God. When we arrive at a crossroads, the anxiety of making the right choice can be daunting. Sometimes the harder road may be the one that leads to growth and a stronger faith. By deliberately seeking

God's direction and wisdom, we can trust we are not wandering aimlessly. Every choice becomes an act of faith as we lean into God's grace, and trust that the answer will be given.

As Bishop Curry says "We are Easter people. We will not grow weary as Jesus is our foundation who gives us courage to live."

Transitions

- We pray God's blessings upon Pastor Kelly Ylitalo as she has accepted a call to serve in Franksville, WI. Her last Sunday at Mission United, Pelkie was Easter, April 5. Blessings to her and the people of Mission United during this time of transition.
- We pray God's blessings upon Pastor Andrew Plocher as his last day at Messiah, Marquette was Sunday April 12. We hold Pastor Andrew and his family, and the people of Messiah, in prayer during this transitional time
- We rejoice with Pastor Lance Crevier and wife Rylee as they welcome baby Hattie Jo into the world! She was born on March 19, at 6lb 8oz.
- We rejoice with Trinity, Brevort as they begin a new partnership with Linda Stoetzer as a Synod Authorized Minister. May God bless their efforts together.
- We rejoice with Trinity, Iron River as they begin a new partnership with Donna Ahlberg as a Synod Authorized minister. We pray God's blessings on their time of discernment.
- Pastor Doug Buck passed to life eternal on June 3, 2025. A celebration of life was held for him on June 15 at Jefferson Park in Chattanooga, TN. Peace to his memory.
- On September 20, 2026, Our Saviour, Paynesville will hold their final worship

service. We give thanks for their many years of ministry.

- Pauline Kiltinen passed to life eternal on March 24. Pauline served as Vice President of the Northern Great Lakes Synod for eight years. A funeral service was held for her at Messiah, Marquette on April 10. Peace to her memory.

Northern Great Lakes Synod Youth Ministry Spotlight

More Than Just a Game

a story about Lukas

Making connections and solving problems is something that Lukas Barron, a high school sophomore from Negaunee, enjoys about the Northern Great Lakes Synod's Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) Club. Lukas was familiar with D&D prior to the launch of the Synod's club in February 2025, but since joining the Synod's campaign, he has made new friends and further developed his skills and knowledge of one of the most popular table-top games in the world.

Lukas likes that not every D&D campaign is the same and appreciates how faith can connect to a game that many associate only with fantasy, magic, and defeating monsters. Pastor Jack Busche serves as the Dungeon Master and provides guidance and leadership. He begins each session with a devotion and wraps up game time by giving participants a chance to share their highs, lows, and shout-outs with each other. Pastor Jack encourages the players to work together to figure out challenges, while developing their communication, story-telling, and problem-solving skills. Lukas recalls a recent devotion which high-

lighted that the connections we make with each other help us build stronger connections to our faith in Christ.

Growing up at Bethel Lutheran Church in Ishpeming, Lukas remem-



bers regularly attending worship with his family. After his mom was diagnosed with cancer last year, Lukas's faith was shaken. "Faith has come up a lot over the past year," he said. Not only did his family rely on faith to get them through a challenging time, but they also grew in their faith together.

Challenges abound in games and in life. The skills we learn and practice the most will help us get through the tough times. Lukas is thankful for the connections and relationships he continues to build by playing D&D and invites anyone who thinks they might want to try it, to give it a chance! Lukas describes the group as "just a bunch of fun people" who are very supportive of each other. Doesn't that sound like a worthwhile game to play?

2026 Synod Assembly

Theme:

"God gives the growth."

ELCA Representative:

Alison Richard

Voting Members:

Be at your Assembly host site
8am CT/9am ET for check-in

For more info go to
<https://nglsynod.org/synod-assembly/>

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.

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Trinity, Stonington
Faith, Sault Ste. Marie
Prince of Peace, Marquette
Zion, Marinette

Seminarian Support

Faith, Sault Ste. Marie
Thrivent Choice- Joanne
Schutt

Campus Ministry

Good Shepherd, Peshtigo
Prince of Peace, Marquette
Immanuel, Negaunee

Global Refuge

First, Ewen

Disaster Relief

First, Iron River
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Pauline Kiltinen
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Restricted General

Thrivent Choice- Dawn
Vincent

Equipping the Saints

Rev. Elisabeth & Wes
Daniels

*Please contact the Synod
Office if you have made a
donation through your
financial advisor

• Synod Calendar •

May 2025

- 6 - Lay Ministry Support Committee
- 7 - NGLS Staff Meeting
- 14 - Synod Council
- 16 - Synod Assembly
- 19 - Candidacy Committee
- 21 - NGLS Staff Meeting
- 25 - NGLS Office Closed
- 27 - Worship Committee
- 28 - Finance Committee
- 28 - E-Notes Content Due

June 2025

- 3 - NGLS Staff Meeting
- 5-6 - Synod Council Retreat
- 8 - Northern Light Content Due
- 11 - Walking with Our Indigenous
Neighbors
- 11 - E-Notes Content Due
- 17 - NGLS Staff Meeting
- 18 - Equipping the Congregation
Council for Ministry
- 26 - Youth Team Retreat
- 29 - E-Notes Content Due
- 30 - Endowment Committee

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
 Grace, Gwinn - Rev. David Van Kley
 Messiah, Marquette - Rev. Steve Solberg

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
 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. Bonnie Kinnunen
 Northern Lights Parish - Rev. Bill Jacobson
 Zion, Allenville & Bethel, Cedarville -
 Rev. Paul Raappana

*“We thank you, our creator, for all things right and good,
 the seedtime and the harvest, our life, our health, our food.
 No gifts have we to offer for all your love imparts
 but what you most would treasure – our humble, thankful hearts.”* ELW #680

We are grateful for the increase in pledged mission support in 2026, knowing that it comes from the thankful hearts of our congregational members. The timely remittance of these pledges helps the Synod meet its obligations when due. Through the first quarter of the year, mission support receipts are down slightly from 2025. May our gratitude for all God’s blessings help us trust and lead us to joyful giving.

-Betsy Koski, Bookkeep

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	156,692	153,513	-3,179	-2%



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Prayfaithfully

NGLS Daily Devotions Schedule May & June 2026

April 27 - May 3	Pastor Catie Ford
May 4 - 10	Pastor Lance Crevier
May 11 - 17	Assembly Week Writers
May 18 - 24	Pastor Morgan Simmons
May 25 - 31	Pastor Melissa Salminen
June 1 - 7	Pastor Jim Duehring
June 8 - 14	Pastor Dave Johnson
June 15 - 21	Pastor John Kuziej
June 22 - 28	Roland Jacobson