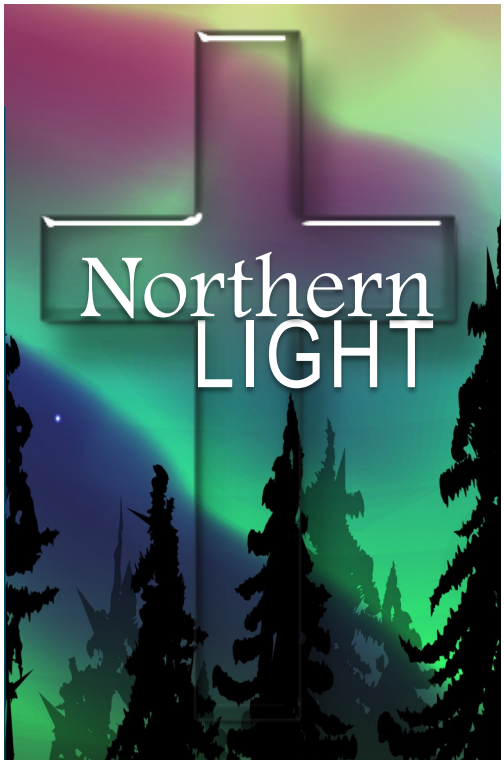


Shining with the Light of Christ in the Northern Great Lakes Synod

Volume 38, Issue 6| November - December 2026

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"Very truly, I tell you,
unless a grain of wheat
falls into the earth and dies,
it remains just a single grain,
but if it dies it bears much fruit."

~John 12:24

Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod,

From August 2 – October 3, four of our congregations experienced their final worship service. Tears were shed, histories were celebrated, thanks were given for years of grace and ministry shared. People gathered in sanctuary space that was cherished and sacred and I have no doubt the memories came flooding in: where the Christmas tree stood, how the wedding party was crammed into the chancel, how the Easter lilies were arranged, where the casket was placed to celebrate the life of a beloved, how the family, sponsors, and child encircled the font.

Our sanctuaries hold sacred memory that evokes an emotional response. We feel the grief again, we experience the love we felt as the water was poured, the hand held, the peace shared, the supportive feel of the bonds and presence of beloved community that embraced us in sorrow and rejoiced at our good news. Experiencing the end of a church's life is hard. Loosening the ties to a building that sheltered so many rites of faith and meaningful moments makes the end even harder.

But even in death, especially in death, we are Easter people. We have heard proclaimed again and again and again that the shape of the Christian life is one of dying and rising. Good Friday precedes Easter, it must come first. Easter is not Easter without Good Friday. Resurrection cannot come unless there is death and loss first.

This is true of our individual lives. This is true of anything that we experience as loss. And this is true of all that God is up to as the church as we know it becomes something new.

Of course, not every community of faith will end….at least not in our time and not all at the same time. But all will experience transformation or change of some kind in the coming years, if they have not already. We are discovering

new ways of doing ministry, new ways of equipping the saints for ministry, breaking new ground for ministry partnerships, leadership, liturgy, music, and institutional structures of support. We are both privileged and burdened to live in this "season of becoming" as we see beloved ways of doing things end but the new is not quite here yet. It is a time of both uncertainty and opportunity.

Consider the Israelites and their wandering in the wilderness. They were transitioning from being a people enslaved to becoming a chosen people. The transformation took 40 years, or as some might calculate it, two generations. Reading Exodus, we can see that when their days were most uncertain, God was nearest – literally in the pillar of smoke and fire and in the tent of meeting. The Israelites were never more intimately connected to God nor as dependent on God as when they were in the wilderness, relying on God for guidance, for support, even for their daily food of manna and occasional quail.

It seems to me that we could think of our current season as a wilderness time. We are blessed to rely on the presence and guidance of God more completely. The Holy Spirit of Christ stands ready to be intimately connected to inspire our current efforts and offers the resilience we need to remain in this place of tension, uncertain outcomes, and grief over loss. Our faithful response may mean discernment towards closure, or the end of some ministry effort, or the loss of some cherished tradition, or some courageous step toward an unknown…but Easter will come. New life awaits. All in good time.

Yours in Christ,
Bishop Katherine Finegan



The Power of "WITH"

Long before I became a pastor, when I was still in college, a wise pastor made a tiny request of folks gathered at a meeting. He asked that they refer to him as the "Pastor *with* Trinity Lutheran Church" instead of the "Pastor *to* or *of* Trinity Lutheran Church." The agenda was full of important items, however this tiny, firm, and definitive request changed everything. He clarified we all belong to one another in Christ, but the congregation did not possess him nor did he report to them or *vice-versa*. He wanted us to better understand the nature of *call.* He was joining with us in our work of the church, as the body of Christ, expressed in that congregation, for a temporary time. He was walking with us temporarily, as we all journey on our mission together. His work was *with*.

In Holy Baptism we welcome one another into the body of Christ and into the mission we share, joining together in giving thanks and praise to God and bearing God's creative and redeeming word to all the world. The body of Christ belongs so deeply to all of us, that we are able to welcome others into it. The privilege and responsibility does not fall onto any one of us with greater magnitude, only different expressions of our own talents, gifts, and abilities. The work of all of us is *with.*

I was listening, with this in my mind, to a Zoom presentation by Dr. Carlos Perkins on "Busting Stewardship Myths: White Stewardship Models Work Everywhere." The presenter pointed out the stewardship model we have inherited from predominant voices is that we often imagine our gifts and offerings go away from us…that we give to the other, as if the church is other to us. We give to the church, parsing out our dollar votes of support of

various ministries. Dominant culture has inherited a system that imagines a binary world of haves and have-nots, us and them, me and you. That is not how all cultures think about stewardship and generosity. It is not how the early church imagined generosity. The work of stewardship is *with*.

When we place back the gifts of God we have received, gathered *with* the whole church, we are placing our trust in God AND one another that our daily bread will be not only provided for, but transformed into holy manna, body and blood, a family meal in the Great World House that brings abundant life for all. We are not giving our own possessions away to another, but instead gathering with one another to celebrate what God will do with it. We give trusting that we belong with…and in, through, around, and because of the body of Christ. We are not volunteers for a nice charitable organization, we are co-workers in the body of Christ. We are not valued donors, but instead owners and stewards *with* one another in the body of Christ.

Rev. Sharolyn Swenson





Talking Across our Differences – Having Healthy Conversations

By: Chuck Thomas NGLS Vice President

The Northern Great Lakes Synod offers many opportunities for learning through the Lifelong Faith Formation classes each fall and winter. I have taken advantage of this learning opportunity and attended many classes over the last few years. This fall I have been participating in a class focused on seeing God in the Middle East, and along the way, the topic of political polarization has naturally come up. It seems that everywhere we turn these days, we hear about how divided and polarized our world has become. Political disagreements, and conversations with family members, friends, neighbors, or even fellow church members can sometimes feel difficult to navigate. How do we talk with one another when we see things very differently?

The 1997 ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted seven "Initiatives to Prepare for a New Century." The third initiative, "Witness to God's Action in the World," is intended to encourage congregations to "model life in community as they address pressing social issues, ethical questions, and community renewal." Part of this includes congregations developing and exercising their skills in faith-based deliberation about tough social issues. A guide, "**Talking Together as Christians About Tough Social Issues** (https://resources.elca.org/ministries-of-diverse-cultures-and-communities/talking-together-as-christians-tough-social-issues/) was created to help congregations. Its central message is simple: respectful conversations begin with listening. The resource encourages us to follow the Golden Rule, listen carefully and respectfully, speak honestly about

our own experiences and beliefs, and use "I" statements rather than assuming we can speak for an entire group. It also reminds us that people who disagree with us are not necessarily our enemies.

Perhaps most importantly, the resource suggests we enter difficult conversations with an open mind and heart. We don't have to give up our convictions or pretend that differences don't matter. Instead, we can try to understand how another person arrived at their perspective. Listening does not mean agreeing; it means recognizing the dignity of the person with whom we disagree.

This is a particularly timely reminder for us as Christians. The ELCA's work on polarization encourages us to create spaces where people can acknowledge differences, listen deeply, and look for common ground without expecting everyone to reach the same conclusions. Maybe the goal isn't to eliminate our differences, but to learn how to live faithfully with them.

Abundance, Grace, and the Power of Enough: Lynn's Story of Legacy and Faith

For Lynn DeRoche, generosity is not rooted in having everything; it is rooted in knowing she has always had enough. Reflecting on Robin Wall Kimmerer's *The Serviceberry: An Economy of Gifts and Abundance*, Lynn notes that the cultural push to "have it all" can be a dangerous trap. It is okay to take enough without needing to take everything – a quiet, countercultural wisdom that shapes how she approaches both her daily life and her vision for the future.

Lynn built her career using numbers, logic, and steady analysis. Holding an MBA from the Florida Institute of Technology, she served for more than 30 years as a civilian procurement officer for the U.S. Army. While work took Lynn and her late husband, Bernie, to Rock Island, Illinois, and Wharton, New Jersey, their hearts were always set on retiring to Michigan's Upper Peninsula, where Bernie grew up in Marquette.

When Bernie died unexpectedly in 2019, Lynn made the decision to stay rooted in the U.P. community they chose together. Navigating life on her own also meant facing the abrupt reality of a single-person tax bracket. Combining her comfort with numbers and a lifelong commitment to giving, Lynn began looking at tax-wise planning in 2021 - both for the present and for the long horizon of legacy stewardship.



That clarity led her to designate eight beneficiaries for one of her IRAs. Alongside others, Lynn's beneficiaries include her home congregation of Eden Lutheran Church, Fortune Lake Bible Camp, Lutheran World Relief, and the Northern Great Lakes Synod.

"I am supporting Lutheran ministries for

the same reason as I support my church currently," Lynn explains. "God's grace is for everyone, and this is an important message to continue getting out there. I feel that my church relies a lot more on my generosity than my nieces and nephews will rely on future gifts."

Her ties to ministry are hands-on. At Eden, Lynn serves on the Church Council, Finance Committee, and Altar Guild, volunteers with the Free Store, and runs Sunday's online Facebook worship. She is an active member of the Munising Bay Quilt Guild, crafting beautiful quilts donated to community organizations and to the annual Fortune Lake Fall Fest Quilt Auction.

Through seasons of pastoral transition at Eden, Lynn came to see the Northern Great Lakes Synod as an indispensable partner. "What we've gone through at Eden, we couldn't have done without the synod," she says. From Pastor Jim's steady reassurance after Pastor Anne accepted another call, to keeping Synod Bookkeeper Betsy "on speed dial" for guidance, the synod proved to be an anchor. Today, synod scholarship support helps fund Vicar Elaine's theological training through the Wartburg TEEM program as she grows into pastoral leadership.

By weaving her congregation, synod, and cherished outdoor and relief ministries into her estate plans, Lynn is ensuring that the message of grace she treasures today will continue to bless neighbors across the northern woods and around the world for generations to come.

By: Rev. Terry Frankenstein, Synod Gift Planner

Announcements

- Rev. Catie Ford has accepted a call to Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Rockford, Illinois. Her last day at Faith, Three Lakes will be October 18. Our prayers are with Pastor Catie and her family as they make this transition.
- John Srutowski passed to life eternal on September 30. Please keep Rev. Diane and family in your prayers.

REGION 5 COLLABORATIVE

Boundaries Education

Thursday, November 5

This is an annual required training for all active and retired Rostered Ministers, and Synod Authorized Ministers serving in our synod terrain. The registration cost is $25, along with mileage reimbursement, is expected to be paid by the congregation(s) the minister relates through call, or contract. If you are an actively retired Rostered Minister, serving with the synod through pulpit supply across many congregations, please contact Rev. Sharolyn Swenson for sponsorship.

If you are a leader in a congregation actively served by many pulpit supply pastors who are retired, you are encouraged to sponsor the attendance of one of the retired pastors serving among us, out of thanksgiving for our shared work together.

REGISTER BY OCTOBER 22nd!

For more info and registration, go to https://nglsynod.org/boundaries-education/

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, Minocqua
First, Ewen
St. James, Rudyard
Prince of Peace, Marquette
Salem, Ironwood
Zion, Manistique

Companion Synod:
Immanuel, Negaunee
St. Paul, Ironwood
St. Paul's, Mass City

Mission Outreach:
Immanuel, Escanaba
Rev. Elisabeth & Wes Daniels

ELCA Disaster Relief:
Ascension, Minocqua
Zion, Marinette
St. James, Rudyard
Messiah, Marquette
Zion, Manistique

Missionary Support:
Mission United, Pelkie

Equipping the Saints:
Salem, Ironwood
St. Paul, Ironwood
Zion, Ironwood
Rev. Elisabeth & Wes Daniels

Lutheran Social Services:
Emanuel, Skandia

Seminarian Support:
Bethany, Amasa
Faith, Sault Ste Marie

Campus Ministry:
Good Shepherd, Peshtigo
Prince of Peace, Marquette
First, Gladstone

Answer the Call:
Zion, Manistique

Synod Ministry Fund:
Church & Lynn Thomas
First, Gladstone

Habitat For Humanity:
Community, Palmer

Mkuzu Girls School:
First, Gladstone

• Synod Calendar •

November 2026

4: Conference 2 Meeting
5: Boundaries Education
7-8: Transition Team Retreat
9: Constitution Committee Meeting
12: NGLS Staff Meeting
12: E-Notes Due
15-17: First Call Theological
17-20: Women's Wonderment & Wellness Retreat
24: NGLS Staff Meeting
24: E-Notes Due
26-27: NGLS Office Closed

December 2026

1: Synod Council
3: Synod Council
7: Finance Committee Meeting
7: Northern Light Due
9: Campus Ministry Meeting
10: NGLS Staff Meeting
10: Equipping the Council Workshop
14: Candidacy Committee Meeting
14: E-Notes Due
18: NGLS Office Closed
24-25: NGLS Office closed
30: 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
Grace, Pembine – Rev. David Johnson
Zion, Manistique - Rev. Jim Duehring
Grace, Gwinn - Rev. Alex LaChapelle

Engaged in Transitional Process

Emanuel, Skandia & Bethany, Negaunee – Rev. Lloyd Luedeman
Faith, Sault Ste. Marie - Rev. Elise Hynek
Messiah, Marquette - Rev. Steve Solberg
Gloria Dei, Hancock - Rev. Peter Vorhes
Good Shepherd, Houghton - Rev. Bucky Beach

Not Actively in Call Process

Porterfield, Porterfield & Beaver American, Pound – Student Vicar Dan Moschea
Eden, Munising – Student Vicar Elaine Robbins
Calvary, Rapid River - Student Vicar Robert Lake

In Discernment

Mission United, Pelkie - Rev. Soren Schmit
Grace, South Range - Rev. Bonny Kinnunen
Siloa, Ontonagon & St. Paul, Mass City - Rev. Bill Jacobson
Zion, Allenville & Bethel, Cedarville - Rev. Paul Raappana

Exploring Partnerships

Bethany & Faith, Ishpeming - Rev. J. Mills



As we complete three quarters of the calendar year, mission support giving has declined by 6% over 2025. While not totally unexpected because of fewer congregations remitting gifts, it presents an opportunity for our congregations to come together as the true partnership we are to fully support the work of the Synod and the wider Church – the work of sharing in the mission we are called to as children of God. We do this work joyfully; we support this work sacrificially; we are blessed by God abundantly! Trust that this same Jesus who went to the cross for us will provide for all our needs.

- Betsy Koski, Bookkeeper

As of 9/30/26	2025	2026	$ Change	% Change
Annual Pledged Amount	695,080	709,773	+14,693	+2%
Amount Received Year to Date	510,159	479,007	-31,152	-6%

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Prayfaithfully

NGLS Daily Devotions Schedule
November - December 2026

October 26 - November 1	Rev. Christine Olson
November 2 - 8	Melzee Jacobson
November 9 - 15	Virginia Paulson
November 16 - 22	Dorrene O'Donnell
November 23 - 29	Rev. Sharolyn Swenson
November 30 - December 6	Christine Ebert
December 7 - 13	Rev. Kelly Ylitalo
December 14 - 20	Ken Raisanen
December 21 - 27	Rev. Elisabeth Daniels