

2021 Walking Together



Central States Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

From Our Presiding Bishop Eaton



*“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord,
plans for your welfare And not for harm,
to give you future with hope”
(Jeremiah 29:11)*

We've learned over the past year how resilient we are as church and as people of God. It's been a time of pain, loss, injustice and uncertainty. It has also been a time of learning, listening and trying new things — stepping out of our comfort zones and into a more digital world. This church persevered in so many ways.

The churchwide organization has been working alongside all expressions and ministries of the ELCA and our partners to provide resources, share stories, engage members and keep our programs alive as we've shifted our focus to responding to the pandemic.

For the generosity of this church through its COVID-19 Response Fund, for the remarkable ways in which we connected to one another, and for the innovative approaches so many of you took to engaging your communities in the gospel, I want to say thank you. Thank you for your ingenuity, and for knowing that God has a plan for us and it's one filled with hope.

As we look to the future, I invite you to dream with me for a moment.

Imagine more people knowing Jesus. Imagine creating communities of love and justice online and in real life. Imagine our online communities and pews filled with new, young and diverse members. Imagine spending more of your time collaborating with others to have a bigger impact in our neighborhoods and in the world.

That is the future I want to build with you. We've all experienced God's ability to see us through challenging times and through new seasons of life. This is an invitation to be part of something that God is doing with and through us. There's never been a better moment to share the way of Jesus and introduce more people to community, justice and love.

In peace,

Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop



In March of 2020, I wrote a letter to the congregations of this synod recommending that we “pause” in person gatherings as we began to deal with the reality of the Covid19 pandemic that has lasted much longer than a “pause” and is still very much a reality of our lives. In response to the pandemic as a synod we (myself and my staff):

- Provided resources, guidance and support for congregations and ministries to navigate through the challenges of moving much of their ministry online.
- Shared the gospel and invited people into theological reflections through weekday Facebook live “pause and pray,” sermons from myself and bishop’s associate, Dave Whetter, and special synod worship experiences during Christmas.
- Held our Fall Theological Conference and Boundary Workshops online.
- Continued to work with congregations in the call process, as well as assist them in planning and visioning.
- Connected with rostered ministers, SAMs and other congregational leaders to care and offer support.
- Created a new part-time position on the staff, Director of Lay Ministries, to work with our Parish Ministry Associate Program. Adam Wutka took on these responsibilities on November 1, 2020.

In other words, we continued to be the **church together for the sake of the world** - 160 congregations and worshipping communities, three campus ministries, two outdoor ministries, and numerous ministry partners across two states.

But we did more than “respond” to the pandemic. We discovered and learned new ways of being church together for the sake of the world by:

- Using technology to gather across the synod to connect with one another and continue to do the business of the church. Our synod council, endowment, candidacy committee meetings all take place on zoom. We provided bi-weekly and then monthly times for rostered ministers to gather around a variety of topics.
- Proclaiming the gospel beyond the confines of those gathered in our buildings, creatively providing online worship experiences to reach more people. Even while returning to their buildings, many have continued to live-stream or video their worship services.
- Giving generously to support the work of local congregations and ministries, as well as the wider church. **Mission support from congregations was more than in the previous year!**
- Recognizing and wrestling with the inequities and fractures in our communities, particularly around racial justice.

While there is a deep longing to return to the ways things were (before the pandemic), these months have been an **apocalyptic experience**; not in terms of the “end of the world” but as a pulling back of the veil and revealing the “under belly of reality.” (Richard Rohr). As challenging as these times months have been, as much grief and loss people have experienced in so many ways, this is an invitation **not to return to what was normal**, but to move forward to God’s new creation, a way that is more loving and just.

Seeing this an apocalyptic time, paying attention to what has been revealed, the realities of our world, I have worked with and supported the following initiatives:

- Faithful Innovations – training key leaders who will work with congregations to engage in faithful experiments that will connect people with God, one another, and their communities. (Our Directors for Evangelical Mission have taken the lead on this and along with three other individuals gone through the training.)
- Leadership Development – trained key leaders who will work directly with congregational councils, including during times of transition, to discern their purpose and goals as a community of faith. (Bishop’s Associate, Dave Whetter has recruited two other individuals who have completed more extensive leadership training and plans to recruit more individuals.)
- Earth Charter – a team who will help engage congregations in actions for a thriving earth. (Ben Perrin, a synod staff position supported by a grant from Lutheran Disaster Response, is working with the team from Lutherans Restoring Creation.)
- Racial Justice Team – sponsored educational opportunities and worked on resolution that calls the whole synod into more intentional work and actions.
- Partnering with other judicatory leaders to advocate for justice through local initiatives as well as Kansas Interfaith Action and Missouri Faith Voices.
- Developing and adopting a new mission statement for the synod – **United with Christ in Baptism. Traveling the way of Jesus. Joining in God’s reign of justice and radical love.**

I will be saying more about the new mission statement in my oral report to the assembly and providing resources for congregations and other ministry settings to engage in deeper study and conversation regarding the different components of the mission statement. While this past year has been challenging and exhausting in many ways requiring changes from the way we “normally” do things, it has also given us the opportunity and freedom to engage in new practices. Congregations have been resilient and creative, generous and caring for one another and for those in their communities. In the midst of deep divisions, people have continued to gather, in a variety of ways, to be the church and been supportive and appreciative of the ministry we do together. I appreciate the opportunity to serve in this call and the help and leadership of my staff and the synod council as I continue to listen to where God is in the midst of our synod.



Bishop Susan Candea



From Our Synod and Churchwide' s Candidacy Committee

“Candidacy” is the term by which the ELCA refers to its work of accompaniment and formation with people who are preparing to serve as rostered ministry leaders, pastors and deacons, in the ELCA. Each synod has a candidacy committee that carries out that work on behalf of the ELCA in relation to the men and women who discern a vocation to prepare for public ministry leadership in this church. Candidacy committees work with synod staff and other synod leaders to carry out their work.

- Three new candidates were approved for **Entrance** into Candidacy;
- Two candidates met with Candidacy committee representatives, their seminary advisor and a seminary professor for **Endorsement** of their candidacy journey;
- Three candidates met with the Candidacy committee for **Approval**. One candidate received approval for Reinstatement to the Roster of the ELCA. Four will remain within the Central States Synod.

The candidates are scattered among five seminaries: Wartburg Seminary, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Luther Seminary, United Lutheran Seminary, and Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary.

Currently, CSS has four seminarians on internship **servng** at

- Augusta Lutheran, Omaha, NE
- Falun - Salemsborg Lutheran, Falun, KS & Smolen, KS
- Atonement Lutheran, Missoula, MT & Emmaus Campus Ministry
- Gloria Dei Lutheran, Lucas, KS & Immanuel Lutheran, Wilson, KS

The Candidacy committee consists of 10 members from within the Synod.

Candidacy committee request:

Consider the people you know in your congregation or other ministry setting who demonstrate interest and gifts relevant to public ministry leadership, and encourage them to consider a vocation to serve as deacons or pastors in the ELCA.

Also, then, assist them in connecting with your synod's Candidacy committee so that they might begin their journey of formation and preparation.



From Our Synod's Mission Endowment Committee

Mission Endowment Fund – What it does!

The Central States Synod Mission Endowment Fund was established in 1999 to enhance the mission outreach of the synod and is managed by the Mission Endowment Fund Committee which meets as needed to act on grant requests and administer the fund. Grants are awarded to provide funding for:

- **Seminary Scholarships** for approved candidates for ministry currently attending seminary.

\$22,500 was awarded this past year for five candidates

- **Seminary Debt Retirement** to assist first call pastors and other rostered leaders to pay down the principle on the debt which they incurred during the course of their seminary education.

\$11,886 was awarded this past year for six rostered ministers

- **Continuing education for rostered leaders** to provide additional financial resources for rostered persons to pursue further study, attend conferences, and enhance their ministry skills.

\$1,610 was awarded this past year for two rostered ministers

- **Continuing education for lay leaders** to provide assistance for lay leaders to participate in educational programs such as the Parish Ministry Associate Program or to attend workshops or other educational opportunities. Most congregations have limited funds to assist lay leaders who are vital partners in the mission of being the church in our communities.

- **Outreach projects and initiatives** to support grants requested by the Synod Mission Table to support new ministries in the synod a congregation or ministry may request a grant for a variety of purposes to enhance and revitalize their ministries.

\$27,500 was awarded to the Synod Mission Table for six SAWCs

\$14,371 for technology and evangelism efforts was awarded to 31 congregations

(these funds were from reserves from the synod budget and dispersed by the Mission Endowment Committee)

Members of the Endowment Committee are:

Scott Schulte (chair)

Barbara Jones

Bishop Susan Candea

Dennis Allerheiligen

Ralph Donald

Nancy Nagel (vice-president)

Callista Isabelle

Stephen Phelps (Regional Gift Planner)

From Our Synod's Hunger Team

In 2020, a Synod Hunger Team was formed. This team began as a group to evaluate and make recommendations about hunger ministries in the Synod applying for an ELCA Domestic Hunger Grant. From that work, we began to discuss ways we could support both the ministries that received grants, as well as those that did not. We know that hunger and alleviating food insecurity are issues that affect all our communities – urban, rural, small town, suburban. Ninety-six percent of ELCA congregations participate in some form of anti-hunger from community meals to food pantries and more – truly providing daily bread. We became curious about the hunger and feeding ministries of our congregations! We need your help! Please take a moment and fill out our questionnaire and let us know how your congregation helps to feed neighbors, near and far!



Creatively and courageously working toward a just world where all are fed

Paul Jeffrey, ACT

Currently, there are three hunger ministries within the synod that receive an ELCA Domestic Hunger Grant:

1. **Gathering Table, Kansas City, MO**
- to provide breakfast and lunch to persons living with homelessness
2. **Washington Presbyterian Church, Washington, MO.**
- for a weekend Meals on Wheels program that brings free hot lunches to people & families in need
3. **God's Helping Hand/Unity Lutheran Church, St. Louis, MO**
- for the development of a commissary kitchen and community garden



*Kitchen at Antioch Baptist/
God's Helping Hand*



*Worship & Food at
Gathering Table*

Seven congregations received Daily Bread Matching Grants of \$500. As part of our church's response to COVID-19, this grant program enabled congregations to raise funds that were then matched by \$500 grants. Congregations receiving grants in Central States included: Gathering Table (Kansas City, MO), Good Shepherd (Washington, KS), St. Paul Lutheran (Wichita, KS), Reformation Lutheran (Wichita, KS), St. James Lutheran (Kansas City), and God's Helping Hand/Unity Lutheran (St. Louis, MO).

Pastor Kendra Nolde and Pastor Ann Rundquist attended the (Virtual) ELCA World Hunger Leadership Gathering in January. This Gathering brings together the national network of ELCA World Hunger leaders, congregations, and ministry partners for a time of networking, idea sharing, and planning for our shared work.

Thank you to the congregations and disciples of Central States Synod for your gifts of \$46,964.46 that came through the Synod for World Hunger ministries. Also \$2,519.16 came through the Synod for ELCA Good Gifts. These amounts are in addition to all of the individual congregational giving of your generosity.

Thanks to those serving on this newly formed team: Cindy Kraft, Kendra Nolde, Ann Rundquist, Peggy Schaefer, and Donna Simon. Also thanks to Cheri Jestmore for serving on the grant evaluation team.

From Our Synod's Mission Table

Vision: A world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation.

Purpose: Activate each of us so more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice, and love.

Goal: Share the story of Jesus and the ELCA by engaging with 1 million new people as we grow the church together.

Central States Synod Mission Table: to boldly go where no one has gone before, exploring diverse intersections where all God's people are welcome and find a place. To explore new opportunities, launch experiments, and seek out new life.

Our Mission Congregations (Synod Authorized Worshiping Communities):

The Mission Table receives reports, makes grant and authorization recommendations, and seeks to support our mission developers. Currently, we relate with 8 mission sites:

- Iglesia Sagrado Corazon, Garden City, KS, Pastor Odir Flores
- El Divino Nino, Dodge City, KS, Pastor Odir Flores
- South Sudanese Congregation @ First Lutheran, St. Joseph, MO, Pastor Philip Deng
- Immanuel Oromo Lutheran Church @ Gloria Dei, Kansas City, MO, Pastor Melaku Tizazu
- Gathering Table, Kansas City, MO, Pastor Ann Rundquist
- Mision San Juan de Dios (Partners), Wichita, KS, Pastor Ivan Gonzalez
- Holy Cross South Site, Overland Park, KS, Pastor Joel Hinck
- A local site of the Lutheran Church of Hope, Des Moines, IA worships in Shawnee, KS.

During the past year, The Bridge Market and Faith Community in New Town, St. Charles, MO discerned that they would continue as a Mission Partner of the Central States Synod, but no longer be designated as a Synod Authorized Worshiping Community. They continue to live out their mission of fostering life-giving relationships with God and neighbor by doing church differently, through coffee, community and Fair Trade.

We celebrate with Pastor Philip Deng (South Sudanese Congregation) upon his ordination on Sunday, March 14, 2021. On August 14, 2020, Pastor Ivan Gonzalez received a call to Mision San Juan de Dios in Wichita and was received onto the ELCA Roster.



Our Call: to look for movements of the Spirit across the territory of the Central States Synod...to develop and support missional leaders – lay and rostered... to boldly go where no one has gone before, exploring diverse intersections where all God's people are welcome and find a place. To explore new opportunities, launch experiments, and seek out new life.

Our Team: Roy Christell, Scott Musselman, Kendra Nolde, Alix Pridgen, Tina Reyes, Jill Seagle, Donna Simon, Jacob Spilker, and **YOU!**

From Our Parish Ministry Associate Program



Over the past year, our Parish Ministry Associate program has seen a few changes, between our Covid-19 adaptations and furthering our efforts to introduce greater accountability and consistency into the program. This past year also saw the creation of the new part-time staff position in which I am now serving as the director of lay ministry for the synod.

While we have all adjusted to a variety of changes in our lives and ministry due to the pandemic, our PMA program has adapted fairly easily. Both our PMA Team and our students taking courses in the program were used to the Zoom platform, so it was a natural transition to use it full time. We hosted a PMA Conference over Zoom on July 31 and August 1, and I also joined Bishop Candea to host a couple online conversations in early December with our PMA and SAM supervising pastors. A few of the educational programs we rely on for our PMA students had already been schooling online, such as ELCA Select Learning and the Bishop Kemper School for Ministry. But now our in-synod programs, Bethany House of Studies and the Lutheran School of Theology at St. Louis, have made the adjustment online as well.

It has been an ongoing objective of our PMA Team to refine the systems of accountability that are built into the PMA program. We have been working to bring the process for students working toward their PMA certification more closely in line with the candidacy process for rostered ministry. Likewise, we have worked to lift our certified PMAs closer to the standard to which we hold our rostered ministers. In both cases, we are not holding our lay ministers to the same rigorous standards as our rostered ministers, but to parallel standards becoming of responsible Christian lay ministry.

One of the ways you may have noticed these efforts is through our more consistent use of the term SAM, which stands for Synod Authorized Minister. The constitution of the ELCA exclusively uses the designation of synod authorized minister to refer to those non-rostered laypersons who have received the authorization of their synod bishop to preside over a service of Holy Communion in a specific time and place where an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament is not available. Sometimes, this authorization may be for one or a series of Sundays, but in other cases, a layperson may enter into a year-long covenant between the congregation and synod, under the same authorization of the bishop. In the Central States Synod, SAMs have become an integral part of our many-faceted approach to addressing the shortage of ordained clergy within our synod. While a few of our covenanted SAMs are experienced assisting ministers in their congregations, candidates for rostered ministry, or ordained ministers in other traditions, the majority of our currently covenanted SAMs (15 out of 26) are certified PMAs.

While the work that some of our PMAs are doing in service as synod authorized ministers is vital to keep Word and Sacrament ministry active in our worshipping communities, the work of PMAs as a whole is quite broad. In addition to those covenanted as SAMs, we have nearly 30 more PMAs assisting as ministry leaders in their congregations, working on their congregation's administrative staff, or even serving in the wider community in chaplaincy, nursing, or hospice care.

Personally, I have been passionate about lay ministry and about our PMA program in particular for most of my sixteen years in the Central States Synod. Several of the people I know as friends and colleagues in the Western Kansas Conference are PMAs, and their ministry has shown me the invaluable role this program has played in our synod, particularly in our small town and rural areas. I began serving on the synod's PMA Team in late 2017. Last year, Bishop Candea called me up to serve in this new position as the Director of Lay Ministry, handing over the work she had taken charge of over the last seven years. I started working in this quarter-time position in November 2020.

My work includes: overseeing and administering the PMA program and serving as the synod liaison for all of our lay ministers; working with our students and educational programs to coordinate schedules and advise our students in their academic plan; maintaining our lay ministry database of students, PMAs, and SAMs; communicating with lay ministry leaders from other synods; and working with the Central States Synod PMA Team as we continue to develop the program, conduct interviews, and plan programming. I also work with Bishop Candea and the synod staff to identify ministry situations which might best be served by a Synod Authorized Minister.

If you have any questions about the PMA program, our educational offerings (which are open to all – you don't have to be enrolled in the PMA program), or generally about lay ministry in the Central States Synod, please feel free to contact me. If you know someone else who might be interested, send them my way. Thank you for the opportunity to serve the synod in this capacity. My first six months have been a joy and blessing. TLbwy!

Peace,

Pastor Adam Wutka

Director of Lay Ministry, Central States Synod, ELCA

pastoradamtlbwy@gmail.com

From Our Campus Ministries

Grace and peace to you from One God, Creator, Redeemer & Sustainer. Amen.

Prior to my arrival in St. Louis, the LCM Board voted to change the name of Lutheran Campus Ministry to LuMin, following the lead of the national network. We are leaning into the name change as a goal for the school year, as many folks in the area are used to calling it LCM.

I began my call as Campus Pastor on July 1, 2020. The board and I were not sure what the fall would bring as the students had all been sent home in March and definitive plans were not set by our main universities. Personally, I knew there was a learning curve as I transitioned from parish pastor to campus pastor. This would be a challenge even before the added limitations of COVID were factored in. Our hopes were (and came to fruition) that students would return to campus and each university implemented strategies to keep outbreaks of COVID minimal.

campus ministry this fall means imagining relational ministry in a variety of ways, with enough movement to shift as the public health needs required. And following a year of waiting, the ministry in St. Louis would need reimagining and revitalizing and yet, right now the most important thing, in my mind, was (and is) being present for the students who call LuMin their ministry home.

Many of our ministry events are now 'online' or using some form of social media application. As campus pastors are considered 'non-essential' by St. Louis University and Washington University, I am not able to have on site office/drop-in hours. By the middle of each semester, interest waned for online gatherings as the students very much had Zoom fatigue (and let's face it, so did I). We continued to keep things open and fluid, always letting the students know that I was available for conversation.



I am working with the board to formalize our financial development strategy so that we have measurable goals and objectives for FY 2021. The nature of our fiscal health resembles a non-profit organization with all the 'outside' donors and grants. Apart from the grant we receive from the ELCA, we are tasked with fundraising \$65,000 a year to keep the ministry functioning. We are blessed in St. Louis to have a covenant partner of Bethel Lutheran, which provided ministry space and support. The current funding pattern is evenly split between congregations of the Eastern Missouri Conference, individual donors, and yearly fundraisers. This will be a time of evaluation and imagination as we look to the next three to five years of ministry here in St. Louis.



I discovered GroupMe, an app for colleges/universities that allows group chats and individual conversations. As most students do not read their email - it's great for reminders, calendar events, and chats. (And for more tech savvy churches, this would be a great addition if a similar app were available.)



LuMin St. Louis / Rev. Tina Reyes
www.lcmstl.org / admin@lcmstl.org / 314-863-8140
7019 Forsyth Blvd (@Big Bend) St Louis, MO 63105

LuMin St. Louis is one of three campus ministries in the Central States Synod. These ministries are possible in part due to the Mission Support of the congregations of the Central States Synod.

From Our Campus Ministries

2020 was the first full year that Lutheran Campus Ministry at Kansas State University was moved in and using its newly renovated facility at 1810 Todd Road in Manhattan. Little did we know, when the year started, that we would not be able to use our new building to its best potential because of the upcoming pandemic!



The positive highlight of the year for LCM at KSU was our Spring Break Service Retreat at Camp Tomah Shinga. We wanted an opportunity to help students develop leadership skills, and to offer ourselves in service to our neighbor. We also wanted to build a stronger connection with Camp Tomah Shinga. We were excited when a group of five LCM students were able to commit to a Spring Break Service Retreat at the camp, and are grateful for Thrivent Action Team funds, which helped make the retreat more affordable!

The retreat took place over the first 3 days of Spring Break, and camp staff assigned us the job of cleaning up “The Bus”. LCM students removed debris from the bus and the surrounding area, which includes a campfire ring. We also built bench seating to provide a little comfort for visitors, since the original seats had all been removed. Our students enjoyed providing a service which would be used by campers for years to come!

Along the way, our students took turns leading our group in prayer, devotions, and worship! For some of our students, this was the first time that they had taken a spiritual leadership role, but it was made easier by the fact that they were in a relaxed setting with a small group of friends.



We also had the opportunity to try our hands at bow shooting, knife throwing, and lower ropes elements. We enjoyed hanging out with the great Tomah Shinga camp staff and with youth and adult leaders from around our Synod who were gathered on the same weekend for a Youth Retreat! Last, but not least, we delighted in some delicious meals, campfires and S'mores! Our students are looking forward to making the Spring Break Service Retreat an annual tradition!

Just days after our retreat, K-State announced that the return to campus would be delayed because of the pandemic. Then, what seemed at first to be a temporary adjustment turned into a much longer lasting issue! As we did our best to keep from spreading COVID-19, we also had to ask, how can we effectively minister to students? How can we support students and proclaim the love of Christ during a pandemic?

As I visited with students and our LCM Board, we decided, like most universities, to take a hybrid approach. Our events would either be held online or outdoors with social distancing. We held a Bible/Book Study weekly over Zoom. We held meals and worship each Sunday

Signs of the Times...



evening in person, but outdoors with six foot social distancing. We also added an hour-long “Social Distancing Hike” to our schedule each week. During the Winter months, we went from in person, outdoor meals to “Meals to Go”, following Sunday worship. For our Community Service event, we went outdoors and cleaned up a local park.

Some students were comfortable with in person events, others only participated online, and others chose not to participate this semester. The interesting thing is how we adapted and innovated. Our need to adapt and innovate shook us out of old habits and led us to try new things, which we likely would not have tried had the situation been “normal”. Having worship outdoors in cold weather forced us to come up with a solution—a camp-fire! The students enjoyed this experience, and the s’mores we had afterwards, of course! When the current health crisis allows us to return to “normal”, perhaps our new normal will be enhanced by some of the innovations we have discovered as a result of the pandemic. I know that campfire worship will definitely be on our “new normal” list!



The pandemic also caused a huge challenge for our recruitment of new students. K-State’s Orientation and Enrollment Expo, which is normally held for three weeks each June, was cancelled for 2020 and 2021. This is normally our number one way to reach out to incoming Freshmen, so we especially need your referrals for incoming students who may be interested in LCM!

2020 was also the first full year that we were able to offer the Pastor Shelby Bailey Scholarship to K-State students. The scholarship is awarded each semester to full time students enrolled at K-State. Incoming students can also apply for the scholarship once they have enrolled at K-State. Applicants must be students at Kansas State University, Manhattan Campus, be a member of an ELCA

congregation, and have a recommendation from their pastor. Active participation in LCM is also preferred. Application forms will be e-mailed to Synod Congregations, and will be available on our website, KSULCM.ORG.

2021 is already looking up, and we look forward to welcoming many new students to campus and to Lutheran Campus Ministry IN PERSON events starting this Fall Semester, 2021!

THANK YOU, Central States Synod, for your support and partnership in ministry!

Pastor Kevin Clark, Lutheran Campus Ministry at Kansas State University

**Lutheran Campus Ministry at Kansas State University / Rev. Kevin Clark
www.ksulcm.org / therevkev@att.net / 785-539-4451
1810 Todd Road, Manhattan, KS 66502**

Lutheran Campus Ministries at Kansas State University is one of three campus ministries in the Central States Synod. These ministries are possible in part due to the Mission Support of the congregations of the Central States Synod.

From Our Synod's Lutherans Restoring Creation Mission Table



Synod Assembly Report from Lutherans Restoring Creation Mission Table

The Lutherans Restoring Creation (LRC) Mission Table promotes Creation Care in the Central States Synod through “cultivating a community of dedicated stewards of earth and neighbor who proclaim God’s promise of hope and healing for all.” (LRC Mission Statement)

Our Synod sponsored a grant request for a SOLI (Stewardship of Life) grant from United Lutheran Seminary to implement the **Earth Charter** (as endorsed by the ELCA at its 2019 Assembly), in partnership with the Delaware Maryland, New England, and Metro NY Synods, with training provided by the ELCA Organizing for Mission Network. Congregations and ministry sites have joined this initiative so far, and more are welcome as this collaborative effort across the ELCA unfolds. <https://lutherans-embracing-the-earth-charter.webflow.io/>

Most of our educational events before COVID-19 were in-person workshops and events throughout the Synod. Those were no longer possible in 2020, so we took the opportunity to move to different modes of delivery, particularly online opportunities. We focused on sharing information for action and education events that were sponsored by our own Mission Table members, the Synod, the ELCA, and other organizations involved in Creation Care. Some of these include:

1. Carbon Fast Calendar for Lent
2. Post-Easter devotions for the Synod based on Dakota Road’s liturgy on Earthkeeping
3. 50th Anniversary of Earth Day on April 22, Climate Action Week through IPL, and Earth Day EcoChallenge
4. ELCA and Blessed Tomorrow Creation Care Ambassador Training – Gary Anderson
5. Climate Reality Project Global Leadership training – Gary Anderson
6. EF20 online recordings and interviews from Climate Council of Greater Kansas City, including our member Josh Thede
7. National LRC video on Introduction of LRC to Congregations
8. Festival of Homiletics with the theme, “Preaching a New Earth: Climate and Creation”
9. Dialog on Sustainability at Kansas State University in July, organized by our member, Larry Erickson, and attended by others
10. Larry Erickson and Christyn Koschmann now serve on the LRC national board
11. Season of Creation devotions from national Bishops and a special service created by LRC
12. National LRC calls
13. Viewing of various films and sharing articles related to climate change, indigenous populations, anti-racism, pollution in the oceans, and other topics
14. Encouraging people to vote
15. Joint webinar by Bishop Eaton and Bishop Curry on Advocacy
16. Living Lutheran magazine on Care for Creation
17. Author Larry Erickson will make his book, *Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Improving Air Quality*, available for congregations.
18. PLTS has a new concentration in Climate Justice, with our CSS Kaylie Ines participating
19. EcoAmerica’s American Climate Leadership Summit
20. Drawdown of the Heartland and The Resilient Activist hosted discussions about the movie, “2040,” with positive actions for the future

Congregations in action:

The Creation Keepers Ministry team at St. Andrew's Lutheran, Columbia, MO, planted native shrubs in a project to restore and supplement the original landscape design for the front of the church building. We received a Thrivent Action Team grant to mulch the new plantings. Volunteers wore masks and worked in a variety of separate areas around the church for both spring and fall spruce-up days. Volunteers also served on a weekly watering schedule from the first of April through the end of October.



Lutheran Church of the Atonement, Florissant, Missouri - In spring of 2020, we realized that many of our rose bushes in two large beds in front of our church did not survive the winter. The experts we consulted told us many were infected with rose rosette disease and that soon the remaining roses would be infected. They advised removing them and advised us not to re-plant roses in that space for 2-3 years. Instead, we planted mostly native plants. Our re-planted space attracted many bees, butterflies, and birds. The picture shows a monarch visiting our milkweed.



From Our Synod's Companion Synod



The Central States Synod is a Companion Synod (sort of a “Sister Synod”) to the Kote District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea and to the Evangelical Synod of the Urals, Siberia and the Far East (ESUSFE), essentially, the Lutheran Church in Asian Russia. For a more extensive history and explanation of the Companion Synod ministry you may go to the Synod website. In the dropdown under “Ministries” you will find the Companion Synod page and you can click on the link found on the first page entitled, “[Companion Synod Ministry, CSS-ELCA](#)” for more information. You will also find a

number of video clips on the page that provide a lot of information about visitations and projects both past and ongoing.

The Companion Synod plans and projects for 2020 were very seriously impacted by the Corona Virus pandemic. Plans for young adults from Papua New Guinea to come to our Synod and work as camp counselors at Camp Tomah Shinga had to be cancelled. Plans for an exchange of visitors between the women’s group in PNG and the Women of the ELCA-CSS had to be put on hold. Plans for a pastor from our Synod to travel to Russia and do Lay Ministry training in several locations in Russia had to be cancelled.

However, our companion synod relationships continue just as the relationships among congregational members continue even though you may have had to stop in-person worship and turn to the internet for Christian education and meetings. We have kept in touch with our companion churches by means of the internet and are aware of important developments with both of our companion synods.



In Papua New Guinea the district president of our companion district, Pastor Jonati Metu died suddenly and tragically of a suspected heart attack late last year. He had only recently been elected to that position and a delegation from our Synod had met him for the first time while visiting Papua New Guinea in late 2019. His death was obviously a shock to the district and indeed, the entire ELCPNG and to those of us who had recently met him.

Also, it appears that the Covid 19 pandemic is just now surging in Papua New Guinea. Because it is somewhat “off the beaten path” the pandemic was delayed in reaching Papua New Guinea. However, it is flaring up there now and with only 500 doctors for the 9 million people, and only 14 ventilators in the country, the pandemic threatens to be particularly dangerous and deadly.



One project that has not been interrupted by the pandemic is our Sunday School project. During a visit to PNG in late 2019, the Kote District requested that we help them purchase new Sunday School curriculum for the children of the district to replace the 20+ year old materials that they were currently using. We agreed to do that and tried to enlist the help of the Sunday Schools in our synod to raise the \$10,000.00 needed for the materials. At last report, we had not yet reached our goal. Therefore, we are appealing to the congregations and the people of the synod to continue to help raise the needed funds for this project.

In Russia there have also been some significant developments. Pastor Manfred Brockmann who was the pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Vladivostok and Dean of the Russian Far East deanery since 1992 has stepped down and there is a new Pastor in Vladivostok named Vitali Mohr. Pastor Mohr was just installed in January of this year. Since Pastor Brockmann was the leader of the Russian Far East for almost 30 years, the transition to new leadership has been difficult. In addition, the Russian Far East has also been hit with Covid 19 which has sickened and killed numerous people both in the churches and communities. We invite the prayers for our Russian partners as they deal with the transition of leadership and the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic.



Although there have been no visits to or from Russia since the pandemic began, members of the Companion Synod Team have begun having Zoom meetings with Bishop Alexander Scheiermann and other leaders of the ELSUSFE to work toward a better understanding of how our walking together can strengthen both of our ministries. One thing we have already learned is that our engagement with and support of the Russian Far East is very important.

As many of you know, for several years now our Synod has provided financial support for the ministry of Pastor Alexander Lapochenko. It is clear that our financial support for Pastor Lapochenko and the congregations of the Russian Far East is very important to the church there and so we appeal to the congregations of the Central States Synod to continue to give regularly for the support of Pastor Lapochenko, the Russian Far East and the overall work of the Companion Synod ministry.

We look forward to resuming visits to and from our companion churches as the pandemic eases and travel restrictions are lowered. For more information, please consult the Companion Synod Page of the Synod website or contact one of the members of the Companion Synod Team.

Companion Synod Team of the Central States Synod.

Rebecca Blocksome
 Rev. Keith Holste
 Rev. Penny Holste
 Daniel Lilienkamp
 Rev. Jon Brudvig

Peggy Schaefer
 Jim Cooper
 Gary Kallansrud
 Emily Greble

Alex Lang
 Doug Reed
 Bishop Susan Candea
 Rev. Gary Teske (Chair).

From Our Synod's Mission Congregations

Committed to the mission

A closed congregation finds a new way to serve

By [Diane Stafford](#) September 30, 2020



Ann Rundquist, pastor of the Gathering Table in Kansas City, Mo., stands with community members as they share a meal. Gathering Table is a synod-authorized worshipping community that provides meals, showers, worship opportunities and more to the community. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, meals and worship have moved outdoors.

Once part of a thriving middle-class community located near an area of heavy industry and commerce, Children's Memorial Lutheran Church in Kansas City, Mo., began to see a gradual loss of membership in the 1970s.

"The downsizing really began with problems in the Kansas City school system," said lifelong member Deborah Taylor. "So many families moved out. We used to have hundreds of members, two services every Sunday, and were very involved in the community and synod. Ultimately, it got to where we just had maybe 20 or 25 at services. By about 2011 to 2013, the handwriting was on the wall."

After years of soul-searching and meetings, the Central States Synod closed Children's Memorial on Dec. 31, 2017. The synod "accepted the reality of what had been the case for several years," said Bishop Susan Candea. "It became the synod's responsibility, as the property owner, to manage the property and decide what to do going forward."

The death of Children's Memorial led to the birth of Gathering Table, a synod-authorized worshipping community, which opened Jan. 1, 2018. The new ministry has continued the congregation's mission in the community, allowing for the preservation and extension of services to people in need and those experiencing homelessness.

With grants from the ELCA, the synod and others, Gathering Table opens the doors of the old church's red brick building three days a week to provide people with meals, showers, clothing and worship opportunities. The building also houses a nonprofit that teaches sewing and job training skills to refugees, a small tamale business operating out of the kitchen and worship space for a Congolese congregation.

"This is a very important ministry of the church," Candea said. "Jesus was very clear: Whatever you do for the least of these you do it for me. This transition lives out that reality."

Gathering Table is on a busy commercial thoroughfare in an area of Kansas City with significant poverty, crime and homelessness. "It breaks my heart because I know a lot of these people sleep outside at night," said Ann Rundquist, part-time pastor of Gathering Table. "This is a unique opportunity to help without a congregation that directly supports us."

A new church home

Seventy-five percent of Gathering Table's annual budget is dedicated to program expenses. Rundquist, who entered the ministry after a career in social services, is Gathering Table's janitor, secretary, cook, house musician and fundraiser. She also works part-time at Immanuel Lutheran Church on the city's west side.



As people file in the back door of Gathering Table for the regular Saturday noon meal, Rundquist is a whirlwind of hugs and conversations with the many diners she has come to know.



One person who has become part of Gathering Table's community is Bruce Huffman, who also volunteers to mow the grass on the ministry's property. "I quit church after high school and now, in my middle age, I found a perfect church home," he said. "This gives me purpose to have

responsibilities and help out. Plus, I have new friends and help out when things get a little crazy. I never thought of my pastor as a friend, but she is, and my faith continues to grow because I understand what she preaches."

In what some might consider a dangerous environment, Rundquist focuses on the positive. When a man she knew stole her cellphone, other men from the Gathering Table community asked her for several weeks if it had been recovered or if there had been an arrest. When she answered "no" to both, an impromptu discussion unfolded between a hymn sing and communion, with individuals sharing stories of bad things that had happened to them and how they'd chosen good responses.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Gathering Table couldn't turn to technology to continue its ministry because many of its patrons are experiencing homelessness and have no communication device. While it closed for one weekend, it quickly became "obvious our ministry was important for the well-being of the neighborhood: food, clothing, water and some kind of fellowship," Rundquist said.

Partner congregations and agencies provided hundreds of sack lunches and other food. Rundquist said Candea agreed to let Gathering Table start worshiping outside, and the ministry shifted to serve five nutritious meals outdoors weekly, often sending sack lunches and protein drinks to go.

In recent months, most of the Saturday lunches at Gathering Table, which draw about 70 people, have been donated and served by volunteers. Many are provided by other ELCA congregations in the Kansas City area.

Candea and Rundquist agree that the biggest challenge is increasing awareness of Gathering Table to help improve fundraising and volunteer support.



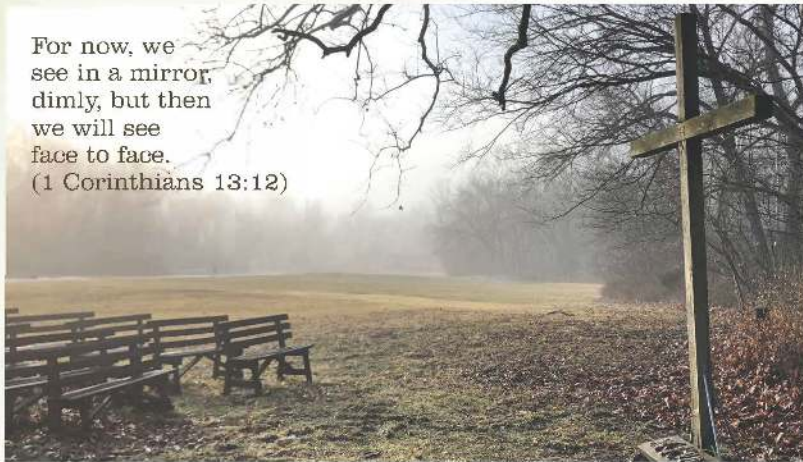
For Dan Glamann, whose family joined Children's Memorial in 1957, the resurrection of the building is a long-hoped-for success. "Over the years, I've seen overwhelming change in the northeast area and the church," said Glamann, who now belongs to Gathering Table's leadership team. "But a constant has been the mission to the neighborhood. I continue to see the corner of Independence Avenue and Brighton as a beacon of hope."

Ann Rundquist, pastor of the Gathering Table in Kansas City, Mo., stands with community members as they share a meal. Gathering Table is a synod-authorized worshiping community that provides meals, showers, worship opportunities and more to the community. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, meals and worship have moved outdoors.

THE STATE OF HOLLIS

FEBRUARY 2021 - NEWSLETTER

For now, we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face.
(1 Corinthians 13:12)



Finding hope this past year was like looking through a grimy window or through a fog-shrouded valley. You could catch glimpses, but the light only got through dimly.

While we did not have the best year ever at Hollis, I am happy to report, that with your help we managed to retain all our staff, finish the Tiny Cabin Project and still welcome small groups to Hollis for hiking, camping and personal/family retreats.

Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!

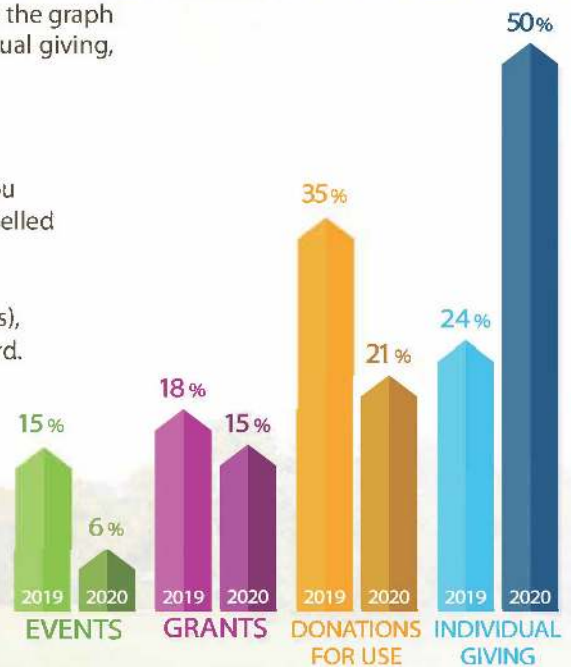
You kept this ministry afloat during a difficult year. As you can see in the graph below our income was divided between donations for use, Individual giving, grants and events. In 2019, those percentages were typical.

2019 & 2020 GIVING

In 2020, the huge increase through individual giving shows that you responded to our appeals for help when our events had to be cancelled and guests could not use our facilities due to the pandemic.

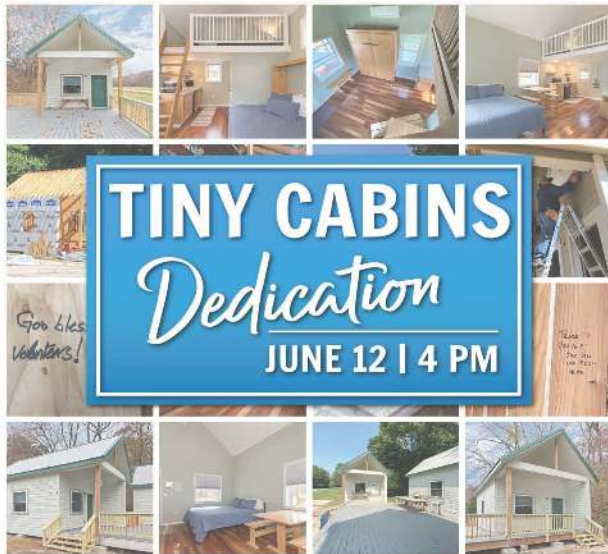
While we plan to resume some events in 2021 (see inside for details), we will still need your support and gifts to continue moving forward.

Thank you again for your part in keeping this ministry of hospitality strong for our community.



EVENTS 2021

After cancelling the vast majority of our events in 2020, we are excited to gather the Hollis community in person once again. We look forward to welcoming you back soon.



Join us as we celebrate the efforts of many and dedicate our new Tiny Cabins. Dedication will take place on the same day as our Summer Art Fair. Come early or stay late to shop the works of local artisans.



Originally scheduled for December 5, our reimagined Summer Art Fair features the works of local artisans and is hosted on the grounds Hollis to ensure safety for all involved. A portion of all sales, support the mission and ministry of Hollis. Complimentary Wine & Cheese provided for "of age" guests.



Presented by **HOLLIS** In Partnership with **The Giving Brick**

10 AM-12 PM

BrickWorks is a family friendly service program, hosted in partnership with THE GIVING BRICK.

SAVE THE DATE
BLESSINGS ABOUND
RENEPIT
GOLF TOURNAMENT
SEPTEMBER 20

SAVE THE DATE
CHILI COOK-OFF
& LIVE AUCTION
OCTOBER 10

SAVE THE DATE
18TH ANNUAL
HOLLIS WINTER
ART FAIR
DECEMBER 4



Hollis Crossings Summer Day Camp is hosted in partnership with Camp Tomah Shinga at Hollis Center. Stay tuned for details.

Registration opens Spring 2021.

[HollisRenewalCenter](#) | [holliscenter](#)

From Our Education Partners

BISHOP KEMPER SCHOOL FOR MINISTRY

Bishop Kemper School for Ministry (BKSM), an Episcopal institution based in Topeka, Kansas, has since 2015 partnered with the ELCA Central States Synod to provide students a significant portion of the theological education needed to become a Parish Ministry Associate (PMA). In the last year 4 fine ELCA students participated in our classes, enriching everyone's learning experience. We are pleased that three outstanding members of our faculty come from the ELCA.



During the pandemic all of our activities have been conducted via Zoom. It has been a blessing to study and worship together and to meet to foster community and one another's spiritual growth. We have learned much during this time. We've realized that we don't need to cram all of our activities into our once-a-month weekend sessions (when possible held face to face in Topeka). Persons at a considerable distance from our physical campus now find it convenient to learn with us. We've added participants from Iowa and points even further away, such as Navajoland. When we reopen for the 2021-22 academic year we will continue to simultaneously make all of our classes available via Zoom. We are completing the technology upgrades needed to have state of the art equipment for distance learning.

We have also squarely faced the demands for change after the tragic killing of George Floyd. BKSM is an official signer and sponsor of the Anti-Racist Covenant also endorsed by Bishop Susan Candeia (<https://antiracismcovenant.org>). This is now our official school policy. In the fall of 2020, we had many special meetings to discuss racism and how we can effectively address it at BKSM. We continue to review all of our curriculum. We have redoubled our efforts to recruit diverse staff, faculty, and students. BKSM has been blessed by generous donations that allow us to offer many scholarships. Our already low tuition cost (\$130 per course plus, if needed, room and board) should not be a barrier to anyone's participation. We invite all to apply for grants from our abundant resources for financial aid.

The quality of our course work has been recognized by the renowned Claremont School of Theology, which awards 1.5 credit hours of transfer credit towards one of their degrees for each class completed at BKSM.

We encourage all to learn more about us at www.bishopkemperschool.org. If you'd like to sit in on one of our classes, you are most welcome, just let us know!

Our warm relationship with the Central States Synod of the ELCA is a great blessing. We look forward to growing together!



Yours in Christ,
The Very Rev. Dr. Don H. Compier
Dean, BKSM

From Our Education Partners



BETHANY HOUSE OF STUDIES

Rev. Richard Monson, Director

The Bethany House of Studies is an educational ministry of the church that is supported by individuals, congregations, and conferences in the Central States Synod.

The mission of the Bethany House of Studies is **“equipping the saints through education.”** As such it continues **“to raise up leaders of all ages for the church and to inspire and equip people to be part of what God is up to in their everyday lives.”** Secured in the Lutheran faith and based in the foundation of Lutheran education, the Bethany House of Studies serves as the provider of educational and spiritual renewal for:

- Congregational leaders and teachers
- Professional church workers
- Students in the Parish Ministry Associate program
- Parish Ministry Associates and Pastors

Programs are available to individuals and congregations in four types of educational offerings:

- Weekend Workshops
- Congregational Events
- Professional Coaching
- Internet Distance Learning

The Bethany House of Studies is charged with the responsibility to offer courses consistent with the prescribed Parish Ministry Associate program course of study. Therefore, the Bethany House of Studies offers classes for those interested in pursuing recognition as Parish Ministry Associates. This past year the Bethany House of Studies sponsored two distance learning classes for PMA Students. In person contact was limited, but hopefully that will change in 2021.



Lutheran School of Theology

An Educational Ministry of Metro St. Louis Congregations—ELCA

Check out the website: <https://lststl.org>
[Upcoming Classes](#)

Email for more information: LSTstlInfo@gmail.com
Rev. Stephanie Doeschot, Executive Director

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

What does it mean to be “Public Church”?

Through and in Christ, we have been freed and called to live in the world, “to attend to the world through the lens of our relationship to God and to one another.

As a public church, we have a responsibility to step outside our comfort zones and challenge ourselves to address issues that affect families, communities and neighbors throughout the world.

As a church body, the ELCA uses its prophetic voice boldly to address important political, social and economic issues that affect local and global communities. This work grows out of our theological understanding of God at work in the world and is articulated in the social statements of this church, which you can find at on the Web:

<https://elca.org/socialstatements>

and

[https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/
Publicly-Engaged-Church](https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church)

Other full-communion partners, denominations, and faiths have issued similar statements, yet we find

congregations struggling with “what does this mean?”

Over the coming year(s), LST will be offering classes to help us engage in what it means to be “Public Church.” LST is committed to study and dialogue, encounter and conversation as to how we can be more faithful in our endeavors to witness to the love of God through Jesus Christ in the world. We began in January with two Biblical Studies classes taught by Dr. Clint McCann (Eden Seminary, St. Louis) on Caring for Creation as a Christian Calling, and “I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food” (Matthew 25:35): Addressing Hunger and Food Insecurity in the USA and the World.

In April, Dr. Linda Thomas (Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago) introduced us to Womanist theology, racism and the theology of the cross. The next class in this series about growing in awareness of being Public Church is the Intersectionality class being offered on July 17. In the fall, Dr. Thomas will offer a follow-up class on how our theology compels us to face specific issues of being Public Church.

Lutheran School of Theology St. Louis

Teachers and life-long learners in theological study together at a high level of excellence rooted in the Word of God.



Upcoming Classes

This Summer: **Intersectionality**

Dr. Linda Thomas, Instructor

Full Professor of Theology and Anthropology at Lutheran School of Theology Chicago.

Saturday, July 17, 9:00-10:30 am CDT
via zoom. Registration: \$15 at <https://lststl.org>
or [Here](#)

The concept of Intersectionality considers overlapping oppressions, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ableism, and many other things, as they are experienced and suffered by marginalized persons. This concept is a vital tool to name multiple, intersecting oppressions for the systemic violence they cause and to propose solutions for a more just society. An example of applied Intersectionality would be naming the triple oppressions faced by a poor transgender woman of color. This woman would face discrimination based on her race, gender identity, and class from being exposed to the conditions of poverty. Thus, this session will explore Intersectionality to critique the ongoing oppressions of marginalized persons in the United States today. Special attention will be paid to Intersectionality's relationship to Womanist theology, that is, reflections about God done from the lived experiences of Black women.

This Fall: **Lutheran Confessions**

Dr. Chris Repp, Instructor

Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church in Champaign, IL

Saturdays, September 18, October 2, 16, 30,
November 20, December 4, 9:00 am - 12:00
pm via Zoom. Registration (by August 25): \$75
to audit, \$150 to meet PMA or SAM
requirements at <https://lststl.org> or [Here](#)

What we believe about God affects how we talk about God. How we talk about God determines whether we proclaim the gospel or some other message that is not faithful to who God is and

what God is up to in Jesus Christ. This realization is what set Martin Luther and his colleagues down the path of reform 500 years ago. It is the enduring legacy of the Lutheran movement and a gift to the ecumenical church. This class will highlight how these texts continue to be vitally important to the mission of the church today.

Womanist Biblical Interpretation

Dr. Wil Gafney, Instructor

Sam B. Hulse Professor of Hebrew Bible, Brite Divinity School, Fort Worth, TX

Wednesdays, September 22, 29, and October 6,
7:00 - 8:30 pm Via Zoom
Registration: \$70 at <https://lststl.org> or [Here](#)

Faith in Public Life

Dr. Linda Thomas, Instructor

Full Professor of Theology and Anthropology at Lutheran School of Theology Chicago.

Saturdays, Oct 23, Nov 6 and 13, 9:00-10:30 am
Via Zoom.
Registration: \$30 at <https://lststl.org> or [Here](#)

Gospel of Luke

Dates to be determined. Details (when available)
at <https://lststl.org>

Scholarships

Scholarships are available. Those who wish to apply may find information and an application on the LSTSTL website <https://lststl.org/scholarships-for-lst-classes/> or [Here](#)



**Join Our Email List
For the Latest Class Updates
[Subscribe Here](#)**

From Our Partners in Ministry - Once We Were Refugees



Refugee work staggered in unexpected directions in the first quarter of 2020, directions that called for adaptive decisions if we were going to continue our serving. There were two causes for our challenges. The first, not unexpected, was the severe reduction in authorization for refugee resettlements into the United States by the federal administration. Numbers of arrivals were diminished in the two years leading up to 2019, and then crashed hard. Resettlement agencies around the country had to make devastating cuts to staffing and facilities and many failed. The second cause was completely unexpected, the arrival of a world-wide pandemic that forced the cessation of all normal inter-personal activities. The effects of the pandemic continue to direct our society into new practices and habits in ways that lead us all into a future that remains unclear. None of this will be news to assembly attendees but must be our starting point for what follows.

OWWR's last regular sewing class at the Della Lamb Community Center, in which we had operated since 2016, graduated in December of 2019. Arrangements had been made for a move into classrooms at the Gathering Table, once known as Children's Memorial Lutheran Church. We were also completing arrangements to open a new site for teaching sewing at the Bethel Neighborhood Center in Kansas City, Kansas. Classes in both locations began in January of 2020. The year opened with OWWR expanding to becoming a two state service!

By the time those two classes were graduated in March of 2020, all bets for the future were off. Plans to begin the next classes, scheduled for May, had to be scrapped. Disappointed students had to be informed that the pause would likely be lengthy and that we would notify them when we were able to restart. Donors had to be asked to hold materials for a time while we evaluated interim possibilities. We shifted our volunteers and some graduates to the making of face masks that were becoming necessary for healthy involvements. Over the course of the summer and fall several thousand fabric masks were assembled and delivered to individuals and organizations whose need was immediate and resources limited.

A second effort then grabbed our attention. The final project assigned to each sewing student has been the creation of a quilt for Lutheran World Relief as a way to pay the benefits of their new skills forward. For many this assignment was a joy, to send something back to camps as an encouragement to those who would follow. Far fewer graduates meant that the flow of quilts to LWR would slow to a trickle. Volunteers and graduates bent their efforts to fill that gap. So thirty plus quilts were delivered to the LWR ingathering in Topeka in October.

Beginning in the summer we were able to continue teaching sewing to some refugees. These were people who have been in America for longer than had been the earlier case. By splitting classes between available spaces, masking, and social distancing, teaching was conducted at the Bethel Center, largely individually.

We are pleased to get to share that as of January, 2021, we have graduated 154 students from our sewing classes. It is especially exciting to share that three of our students from the most recent class at the Bethel site went right to work following graduation!

Thanks to the generosity of our partners we continue to be able to provide, tuition free, nine weeks of lessons. Each student learns to maintain and sew on a machine provided by generous donors. Each receives all of the fabric, thread, and notions needed to accomplish their assignments. Each receives instruction from volunteers who work with them for the love of what they are doing and the people with whom they are gifted to work. And, at graduation, each takes home with them the machine they learned on, a new iron and ironing board, new scissors, notions, and about ten yards of fabric of their choosing—enough to get started sewing at home for their families! All is provided by folks like you who have a heart for helping folks get a new start in a whole new environment.

The next classes at the Bethel Neighborhood Center will begin on May 17 and 18! We had also hoped to announce that classes at the Gathering Table would resume later this month. However, life has intervened for some of our volunteer teachers, leaving us short of staff. We do expect to open these classrooms fully in August of 2021. So, more to come.

With our return to full activity in August we will have some needs. **The first, and most urgent, is for volunteers to assist with various tasks, primarily teaching sewing.** We will provide training for any who are interested, so we ask that any who might join that effort please let us know soon. In addition the need for machines, fabrics, tools, and notions is ramping up as this is being written.



Teachers and students in the new classroom at the Gathering Table. Kansas City, MO

Many, many thanks for all that you have done, and all that you will do going forward.

Once We Were Refugees has a recently rebuilt web site at www.oncewewererefugees.org. We hope you will take a moment to check us out.



From Our Partners in Ministry - Women of the ELCA



The CSS Women of the ELCA continue to conduct business via Zoom and conference calls. Individual units have been meeting virtually for Bible Studies. Recently, many counties have changed policies allowing for in person meetings. A few units and clusters have begun meeting in person following the guidelines of social distancing and wearing of masks.

Plans are underway for a virtual gathering via ZOOM September 10 & 11. The theme, verse and song of the postponed 2020 convention is being carried over: **“My Story, Your Story, Our Story”**; Bible verse **Psalm 51:15**; and song **“Blessed Assurance.”**

The business convention is pending awaiting a decision from church wide regarding the change of the constitution to allow for a virtual business meeting. Our business will include elections, report of Triennial convention and a report from an executive board member.

In February 5 board members of CSS participated in “Pivot Don’t Panic”, a leadership event, presented by Churchwide WELCA. The event featured greetings from Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, a Bible Study by Rev. Dr. Wyvetta Bullock, assistant to the bishop, worship led by Deacon Patricia Caley and reports from Linda Post Bushkofsky, executive director, and Lisa Plorin, President of the Women of the ELCA. Region 4 presidents and interested board members met via ZOOM for conversation and fellowship before the event.

The Eleventh Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA, originally scheduled for July 14-16, 2020, was postponed and rescheduled for August 3-5, 2021, due to the global coronavirus pandemic. The rescheduled convention will be held digitally and CSS Women of the ELCA will be represented by the president and 8 voting members that were elected at the 2019 convention.

It was with sadness that we accepted the resignations of two board members, Wendy Hoops and Ann Hoover. They resigned their positions due to change of memberships from ELCA congregations to other denominations. Our board members are president, Alice Burnett; vice president, Beth Rockelman; secretary, Annalee Crotinger; treasurer, Vickie Donnell; board members: Loretta Holmes, Kara Jecha, and Kathy Steinke. The newsletter, Walking in the Word, is published quarterly. Mary Liby acts as editor of news and articles from board members.

We continue to live out our purpose statement:

As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world.

Respectfully submitted

Alice Burnett

President of Central States Synod Women of the ELCA

From Our Partners in Ministry - Lutheran Senior Services

Spiritual Care in the Time of COVID-19

Practicing our faith for many of us is about coming together. But what does a chaplain do to continue the ministry when people can't come together?



In early 2020, it became evident that COVID-19 was spreading and that Lutheran Senior Services (LSS) communities would need to take serious precautions fast to protect the population of older adults served by LSS. Visitor restrictions and a pause on gatherings and group activities were two such measures that made LSS chaplains rethink how they offered spiritual support.

"It was even more important that we provided spiritual support during a very difficult time," explained Chaplain Gerhard Kraus, a chaplain at an LSS community. "You find the ways to provide that."

One of those ways that became a lifeline was the in-house television channel that broadcasts to all resident homes.

While weekly services have been regularly broadcast on this channel, the pandemic brought an opportunity for LSS chaplains to expand the spiritual offerings on the in-house TV channel.

"Using the in-house channel was new for me and it took a while to get to know, but it was one way we could reach the most people," added Chaplain Kraus.

In addition to broadcasting regular services, chaplains across the organization added a variety of spiritual programming such as prayers and bible study. For example, Chaplain Kraus started Daily Devotions on the in-house channel. This show gave time for reflection by sharing music and scripture with residents. Through the in-house channel, Chaplain Kraus realized he was reaching more people. Even though small, safe group gatherings and activities are allowed now, he has continued the Daily Devotion broadcast three days a week.

These new ways to reach people allowed LSS chaplains to reach even more than they had before. Many chaplains are continuing the use of these alternative methods in addition to resuming in-person activities safely.

"During that challenging time, everyone stepped up and did what was needed to love and care for the residents and each other," said Chaplain Kraus. "There is a tremendous feeling of relief to be able to open up and come together."

To learn more about LSS and our Christian mission of *Older Adults Living Life to the Fullest* (based on John 10:10), visit www.LSSLiving.org.

Lutheran Senior Services (LSS) is a mission-driven, not-for-profit network that specializes in housing, care, and supportive services for older adults 62+. With 21 locations in Missouri and Illinois, LSS serves more than 13,000 seniors a year through options that include Senior Living Communities offering all levels of living, Affordable Housing for those with limited incomes, and Home & Community Based Services. LSS builds upon more than 160 years of excellence in living out its Christian mission of *Older Adults Living Life to the Fullest*.



From Our Partners in Ministry - Bethany Village/Bethany Home

BETHANY +VILLAGE



What was it like to be a pastor at nursing home during the pandemic?

I was listening to the radio, NPR to be exact, and I heard the most amazing quote about writing. I wish I could remember who said it so I can give that person proper credit. I also wish I could remember who said it so that I can read what that author has written. I am sure it is amazing. I am going to hang this quote up on the largest, blankest wall I can find.

Most of writing is just sitting and staring at the wall.

If this is true, then I should have volumes and volumes of books, logged somewhere in the recesses of my mind. Tucked away between songs lyrics of 90s era rock and grunge and worthless movie quotes, there is a treasure trove of words ready to break forth. Words that can only be brought to life by sitting and staring at the wall.

In my sitting and staring, I cannot help but reflect on this pandemic year. This collective year of pain, trauma, and struggle. How do I put into words what we have experienced this year? How do I put into words what ministry has been like in a nursing home, in a pandemic? How do I put into the words the death and life, the sorrow and joy, the isolation and reunion? How do I put into words sleepless nights, crying in the hallways, and the ever constant fear that I would be the next to get sick or worse yet, the one to bring the illness into the building? How do I put into words the strange dichotomy that through it all, there was life, there was laughter, and there was hope?

As I sit and stare at the wall, reflecting on this year, I am remembering a conversation I had with a resident. (It is not hard to remember because it happened this morning.) After over a year of not stepping outside, the resident was finally able to leave the building a couple of days ago. It was her birthday and she was able to celebrate with a whole bunch of her family. She was over the moon happy. She said her great-grandchildren had grown up so much over the year that she didn't even recognize them. Keep in mind, this woman is as lucid as you or I. But imagine what a year does in the life of a growing child. But then she said though many smiles that she didn't care how big they were. She hugged them and kissed them and didn't want to let go.

My friend made it through the pandemic. The hope of seeing her family again was the hope that she held on to and that got her through. She made it, but so many of our friends did not. One more chance to see their loved ones, one more chance to touch their living legacy in the flesh, denied.

We lost 5 residents directly to the virus, 2 of which I had their funerals. We lost others I know because of isolation and depression, they are the undiagnosed causalities of the virus. As I write these words, I remember their names, their faces, their smiles. As I write these words, I take a long pause, and wipe the tears that drip on my keyboard.

Time to sit and stare at the wall and remember.

Here is the thing, the take away from this nursing home pastor, there is no other place I would have wanted to be during this pandemic. No other ministry. I give thanks for the opportunity that God has placed in my path. I believe with every part of my being that I have received more from the people at Bethany Village, than I ever gave in return. Hope, life, laughter, friendship, faith.

It is through our faith in Jesus Christ that this virus, this pandemic, this isolation, does not and will not have the last word. It is through our faith in Jesus Christ that we know where I hope lies and our foundation is assured. It is through faith that we trust and believe in the Gospel promise. It is the promise that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. As it says in Romans chapter 8,

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am humbled by the faith of our residents. In their darkest times, they did not give up. Their inspiration will be the guiding light in my life for the rest of my days. When those moments come, and they will, when I am worried about tomorrow, when I am sitting and staring at the wall in fear, I will remember the faith of the saints in my life. These Covid saints who embody the meaning of faith, and who rejoice in the eternal promise of Christ Jesus our Lord.

I will end in a story from the darkest days of Covid. I was visiting with one of our residents, my dear friend. He was trapped in the unit ravaged by Covid. So, I was standing outside of his window in the snow, talking to him by phone. We shared in Holy Communion. One of the brave staff on the inside handed him the elements as I stood on the outside. This was common practice for the Covid unit. As we shared in the sacrament of Communion, he confided in me his fear of contracting the virus. His neighbors around him were getting sick and he knew he might very well be next. There was nothing that he or anyone else could do. He said he was not afraid to die because his faith in Christ Jesus was solid, a beautiful and humbling reminder to this nursing home pastor. No, he just didn't want to bring sadness to his family. In our prayer together, over the phone, in the depths of the Winter pandemic, he prayed not for himself but for his family and even for me. Once again, a beautiful and humbling reminder from a beautiful and humbling man.

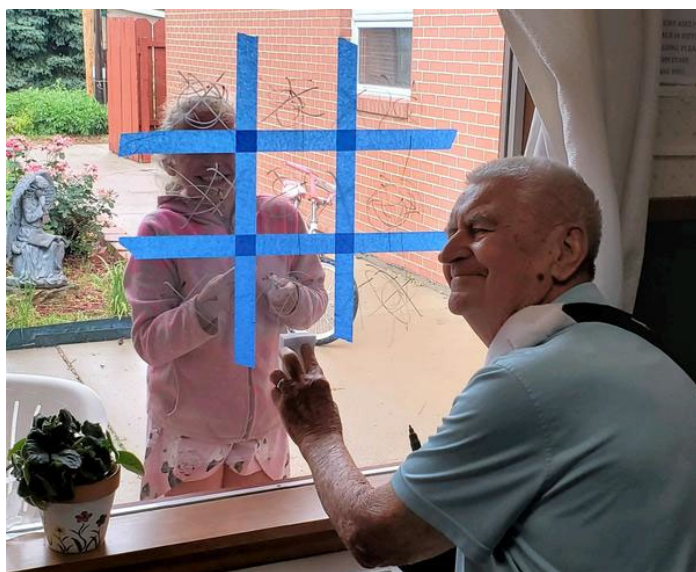
This was our last conversation before he contracted Covid a few days later and before he passed. Through tears of my own, I shared this conversation with his family at his service. His love for them was unconditional and his faith in Christ Jesus, unshakable.

So, what was it like to be in ministry at a nursing home, in the middle of the pandemic? Life giving and sorrowful, heart breaking and hopeful, tragic and even sometimes mundane. But, always, always, always, never a step or a breath or even a heartbeat away from the complete and total love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Because nothing, not even Covid 19, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There is nowhere else I would have rather been.

Thank you for your support, thank you for your love, and thank you always for keeping our ministry in your prayers.

Pastor Phillip Hett



From Our Partners in Ministry - Kansas Interfaith Action

KANSAS
INTER
FAITH
ACTION

Annual Report 2021



Advocacy—Despite the limitations on our advocacy and lobbying efforts due to the pandemic, we still made a strong showing in Topeka, testifying on over 10 bills and sponsoring action alerts for 5. We are part of coalitions on payday loan reform, voting rights protections, and of course Medicaid Expansion. Our efforts against SB 172, a bill to criminalize protests at fossil fuel infrastructure, received national attention.

Our annual advocacy day turned into a week-long advocacy week, with speakers, issue workshops, and online meetings with legislators. Over 200 people attended, and it became a model for what other public interest groups could do with “virtual” lobbying.

Overview—Like everyone, our work was heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We moved our programming and organizing efforts online—and found that to some degree it was more effective!

We supported efforts to effectively address the pandemic, including by temporarily limiting in-person gatherings in houses of worship. We worked to make sure that Federal relief (CARES) money was used to keep people in their homes, and in our 2021 Advocacy priorities encouraged focusing on addressing the inequalities—in housing, employment and healthcare—that were exposed or exacerbated by the pandemic.

We are grateful that our fundraising remained stable and that we have been able to continue our important work.



Racial Justice—We established KIFA’s Racial Justice Working Group, to help discern advocacy priorities and facilitate outreach and connection in communities of color. The RJWG sponsored a series of voter-outreach events before the election.

KIFA held a 6-session seminar for predominantly white churches, on the history of racial inequities in the US and in Kansas, and actions we can take, both in our faith communities and in the public square. Over 70 attended the well-received series.

KIFA Advocacy Week culminated with a statewide vigil to lift up the history of racial violence in Kansas, bringing needed attention to this under-told story.

Outreach— We initiated monthly meetings of local KIFA chapters based on Kansas’ congressional districts, engaging people in KIFA’s outreach and advocacy efforts and building community with other local faith-based advocates. Our monthly and quarterly calls for Kansas clergy continue—please join us!

Last fall’s “Faith and Public Policy” Forum took place on Facebook Live with over 1000 views. We anticipate turning this into a issues series this fall.

We plan to resume travel and in-person outreach soon, so please invite us to talk about faith-based advocacy at your church!



Partnerships —As part of our partnership with the ELCA Central States Synod, Executive Director Rabbi Moti Rieber participates in *monthly calls with other State Public Policy offices*, and we work closely with Bishop Candea and Synod staff. We established a partnership with the Mercy & Justice Team of the Great Plains Conference of the UMC, to join our ongoing partnerships with the CSS, the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference of the UCC, and the Episcopal Diocese.

Putting faith into action ...

Kansas Interfaith Action
PO Box 654, Lawrence 66044
(913) 232-2336
<https://KansasInterfaithAction.org>
Facebook and IG: *kansasinterfaithaction*
Twitter: *ks_interfaith* and *KIFA_climate*
Email: KIFA@KansasInterfaithAction.org

From Our Partners in Ministry - Lutheran Family and Children's Services



Lutheran Family and
Children's Services of Missouri

One Promise. One Family.

OUR MISSION

Through Christ's love, we empower children and families to overcome challenges today so they can build a better tomorrow.

OUR VISION

Generations of children and families across Missouri are safer and stronger together.



Building Better Tomorrows for Missouri's Children and Families

Lutheran Family and Children's Services creates measurable change by providing quality services that offer solutions for Missouri's children and their families. We establish and preserve safety by ensuring parents and caregivers have the skills, knowledge, and resources to maintain healthy relationships. We work with children and adults to establish social, emotional, and financial stability. To promote sustained well-being, we ensure children have the skills, knowledge, and resources to successfully progress through school. Our holistic approach includes:



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Addresses depression and anxiety, reduces harmful behaviors, and prevents suicide through professional mental health counseling.



ADOPTION

Creates loving, forever families and provides support for birth mothers who have made an adoption plan.



PARENTING

Equips parents with education and resources to create safe and stable homes for their children.



FOSTER CARE

Ensures safety, stability, and well-being for children living in foster care through case management, foster parent recruitment, training, and licensing.



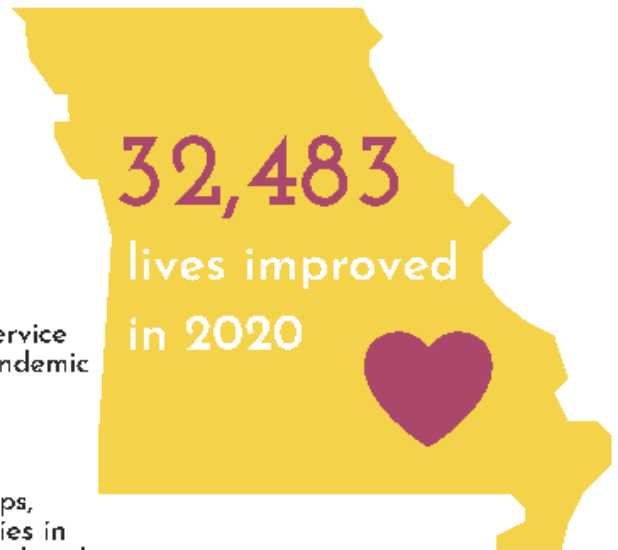
HILLTOP

Increases kindergarten readiness and provides families with wrap-around services to establish and maintain healthy homes.

2020 LFCS IMPACT REPORT

OUR MISSION

Through Christ's love, we empower children and families to overcome challenges today so they can build a better tomorrow.



1593
CALLS FOR HELP
an increase of **91%**
across all service areas

154,561
DOLLARS
distributed across the
community for emergency
needs such as rent,
utilities, or groceries

80%
OF PROGRAMS
implemented virtual service
delivery due to the pandemic

126
DEVICES
(phones, tablets, laptops,
etc.) provided to families in
order to maintain school and
work from home

86% OF INDIVIDUALS
seeking behavioral health services (**3,006**
total) demonstrated fewer symptoms of
anxiety, depression, other mental health
concerns, or psycho-social impairments



73
NEW FAMILIES
permanently formed through
reunification, guardianship, or
adoption



61
FOSTER HOMES
newly licensed and ready to
provide safe, loving homes
for children in care



729
YOUNG MOMS
taught parenting and stress
management skills, and supported to
maintain stable living conditions



1,639
INDIVIDUALS
received education in
prevention strategies



126,015
SERVICE UNITS
dedicated to supporting
children and families



11M
DOLLARS
invested in the safety, stability and
well-being of Missouri families



MAKING GENERATIONS OF CHILDREN AND
FAMILIES SAFER AND STRONGER TOGETHER.



From Our Partners in Ministry - Mosaic

HOPE BEYOND MEASURE

To our friends and partners in the **Central States Synod**, where Mosaic provides services out of Coffeyville, Ellsworth, Garden City, Liberal, Kansas City, Pittsburg and Winfield:

During the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, we at Mosaic shared a consistent message with those we support, our workforce, donors and volunteers: Hope Beyond Measure.

As a faith-based organization and affiliated social-ministry of the ELCA, that message is core to who Mosaic is. In our 108-year history, no matter what challenges we faced, God ensured that Mosaic endured and thrived.

That was true in 2020 as well.

Hope beyond measure sustained the people we support to learn new things, even while staying physically isolated for their safety. One young man we support learned how to bake the chocolate cakes he has always loved to eat. A young woman we support learned how to read, and is proud to have now read more than 200 books.

Hope beyond measure sustained our workforce to power through really difficult situations. All of our staff members spend their shifts wearing masks, and many have gowned up, gloved up, goggled up, and worn N-95 masks to continue serving people who contracted the virus.

Hope beyond measure sustained our donors, even when they too were facing challenges. Mosaic is in the middle of a five-year comprehensive campaign and our faithful donors helped us meet our fundraising goals – even in the midst of a pandemic.

Hope beyond measure gave Mosaic the conviction to grow, and we've acquired services in four New England states that operate under the name Living Innovations. We know that for the long-term success of Mosaic, we must grow and expand our mission.

So, 2020 presented challenges like none other in my memory. But the year also reaffirmed God's faithfulness to this important work.



We are grateful to call you partners.

Sincerely,



Linda Timmons, President and CEO, Mosaic



From Our Partners in Ministry - Mission Investment Fund



Mission Investment Fund
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Partnering in faith

The Mission Investment Fund, a financial services ministry of the ELCA, provides a strong, stable, faith-based way for individuals, congregations and ministries to achieve their financial goals.

MIF provides a range of investments for individuals, congregations and ministries. We put those investments to work to fund building and renovation loans for congregations and ministries.

The result? Impact investments, with a transformative impact on our communities: Expanded worship spaces ... new space for education and youth ministry ... much-needed day care centers for working families ... industrial- grade kitchens and fellowship halls for community meals.



During the year-long pandemic, MIF provided assistance to investors who needed immediate access to their funds and to borrowers who needed flexibility with their loan payments. We collaborated with our ministry partner, the ELCA Federal Credit Union, to offer expedited loans for congregations, ministries and individuals, as well as Paycheck Protection Program loans for congregations and ministries to keep employees on the payroll and continue operations.

Our capabilities and capacity have never been stronger. At year-end 2020, MIF had 883 loans outstanding, totaling \$596.4 million. Investment obligations totaled \$543.1 million. With total assets of \$773.8 million and net assets of \$218.2 million at year-end 2020, MIF maintains a capital ratio of 28.20 percent—positioning MIF in the top tier of well-capitalized church extension funds.

Our steadfast support continues for the members, congregations and ministries of the ELCA and the many ways you care for a world in need. We are honored and humbled to walk alongside you as a trusted partner.

For more information about MIF capabilities, please visit our website, mif.elca.org.



MIF at work in the Central States Synod (as of December 31, 2020):

- 15 Mission Investment Fund loans, with a balance of \$6,093,932
- \$10,589,549 in Mission Investment Fund investment obligations

MIF representative The Rev. Janice Kibler, Regional Manager, Tel: 773-326-7856; email: janice.kibler@elca.org

Mission Investment Fund | 8765 West Higgins Road | Chicago, Illinois 60631 | Tel: 877-886-3522 | Web: mif.elca.org

From Our Lutheran Planned Giving Partnership/ELCA Foundation Central States /Arkansas-Oklahoma Synods



ELCA Foundation Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Kathy F. Summers, President and CEO

It is important to begin this report by thanking ELCA synod bishops for your incredible leadership during a year of unprecedented events, the pandemic, racial tension, wildfires, floods and political divisiveness. When everything seemed to go wrong, your ability to direct the work of the church was one of the things that was right about 2020. Through it all, this church body supported the work of this denomination in ministering to the world with the love of Jesus Christ.

As of December 31, 2020, the Foundation crossed a major milestone and now oversees more than \$1 billion in gifts, endowments and other investments for this denomination. This landmark accomplishment was achieved primarily because Foundation staff understood the need for increased communication during a year of unparalleled difficulties.

As a separately incorporated ministry, with a network of 23 regional gift planners, working in 21 partnerships, across the United States, Foundation staff recognized early on that communication was critical. Throughout the year, despite limited travel and in-person meetings, gift planners engaged with nearly 900 congregations, synods and ELCA related organizations. They spent time with over 1500 individuals working on gift plans, logged over 5500 interactions and continued to maintain partnership relationships with over 150 ELCA related entities, including 54 synods. Gift levels remained high throughout the year.

The Gift Administration and Financial Services (accounting and investment administration) teams continued to support donors, beneficiaries and Fund A investors. Despite limited access to the building, no distributions were changed or eliminated and withdrawals from Fund A did not increase.

The Foundation staff continued to work with donors and beneficiaries to create individual gift plans, administer life income and endowment gifts, distribute terminated gifts and facilitate the sale of marketable assets such as land, homes, and other assets.

- Regional Gift Planners remained available to:
 - Guide individuals in discerning how to be faithful stewards of their estates and invite them to support ministries, congregations, and synods through charitable estate gifts.
 - Help synods, congregations and related entities invest endowment funds and other assets in the Endowment Fund Pooled Trust (Fund A) which is structured to provide distributions to support ministry today and into the future utilizing investments that adhere to the ELCA's social purpose guidelines.
 - Advise church leaders in the development of gift acceptance policies for congregations, which often include gifts to synods.
- The Gift Administration team worked with individuals to initially establish and ultimately distribute proceeds from charitable gift annuities, charitable trusts and named endowment funds. Financial Services handled operations and administration for all life-income gifts, endowments and investments in Fund A.
- The gift planning network, including affiliates, posted solid results during throughout 2020, with \$118.2 million in total gifts and endowment assets. Of that, \$78.5 million was written in future planned gifts, \$20.3 million in current gifts (including funded trusts, gift annuities and individual endowments) and \$19.4 million in new outside investor assets.

- New gift plans written during the year totaled 249. In addition, gift planners stewarded over \$60.2 million in previously written plans, in some cases increasing the estimated gift to ministry.
- As of December 31, 2020, the value of participant accounts invested in Fund A was \$904.2 million, compared to \$817.6 million on December 31, 2019. There are 1,155 investing participants in Fund A, including 938 congregations and 54 synods. Throughout the year, 53 new endowment accounts were opened, totaling \$7.1 million, and 14 accounts were closed, totaling \$3.0 million. Contributions from outside participants to new and existing endowment accounts totaled \$31.1 million; withdrawals totaled \$18.6 million.
- Throughout the year, approximately \$62.4 million was distributed to ministry.

Thank you for your continued partnership with the ELCA Foundation.

Contact your gift planner today for more information on working with the ELCA Foundation, investing in Fund A, promoting gift planning in your congregation, or writing our own gift plan.

Stephen E. Phelps, MA, CFRE
 Regional Gift Planner
stephen.phelps@elca.org
 314-703-6949



ELCA Foundation Regional Partners

ELCA Churchwide	Lutheran Children and Family Services	Central States Synod	Arkansas -Oklahoma Synod
Metro Lutheran Ministries	Lutheran Campus Ministries	Hollis Retreat Center	Camp Tomah Shinga
Oaks Indian Mission	Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago	Wartburg Seminary	Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services

From Our Partners in Ministry - ELCA Federal Credit Union



ELCA Federal Credit Union
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Celebrating our fifth anniversary as a financial ministry of the ELCA

The ELCA Federal Credit Union was founded in 2016 to provide a fuller suite of financial products and services to the members, congregations and ministries of the ELCA. The Credit Union offers a rich variety of products—from savings and checking accounts and CDs ... to loans, lines of credit and credit cards. The Credit Union is the first of the ELCA’s financial ministries to offer loans to individuals. Because we exist solely to serve our members, we can offer better rates and lower fees than many traditional banks, and we have demonstrated success in providing significant savings to our borrowers. Our strong online presence allows members to access their funds anytime, anywhere—as consumers expect today.

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, as congregations and ministries closed their doors, the Credit Union responded swiftly to growing needs for financial assistance. We took the step to become certified by the Small Business Administration to provide loans through the Paycheck Protection Program, a federal program of the CARES Act. These PPP loans— continuing compensation for pastors and staff and covering other operating expenses during the pandemic—have proved to be a lifeline for congregations and ministries experiencing diminished revenue during this unprecedented time. Cooperating with our financial partner, the Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA, we have already provided more than 350 PPP loans totaling almost \$14 million to congregations and ministries across the church. We continue working together to help PPP loan recipients file applications for loan forgiveness.

In 2021, we ushered in the third cohort of participants in the ELCA’s Resourceful Servants program, designed to improve financial wellness and assist rostered leaders in building emergency savings funds. In this matching program, ELCA rostered leaders make ongoing deposits to their Credit Union emergency savings accounts, and our partner MIF matches those funds up to an established amount. Together, we already have served more than 400 rostered ministers who, collectively, have made emergency savings deposits of more than \$1 million.

Membership is open to every ELCA member, synod, congregation and ministry—and their employees.

elcafcu.org

From Our Partners in Ministry - Portico Supporting Those Who Serve

PORTICO[®]
Benefit Services | A Ministry of the ELCA

Now More Than Ever

Portico Benefit Services is a holistic benefits ministry serving those who serve — from rostered ministers and their families to staff at social ministry organizations. We strive to help our members grow their overall well-being.

We could not have predicted this pandemic. But the virtual benefits we've introduced before and after its arrival, the benefit adjustments we've made since, our successful navigation of volatile financial markets, and the consistency of our customer service have made a powerful difference.

During this pandemic, ELCA benefits are helping to lower stress levels, create safer access to health care, and increase financial flexibility — all to strengthen the resilience of those who serve and, by extension, the resilience of this church.



The Rev. Jeff Thiemann
President & CEO

Building Resilience in 2020

26%

More Calls to Our Financial Planners

During last year's market volatility and our introduction of target date funds.

559

Took a Penalty-Free Distribution

Thanks to quick modification of our retirement plan rules for 2020.

49

Sought Student Loan Help

Through no-cost counseling via our partner, LSS of Minnesota Financial Counseling.

3,230

Medical Visits Via Text

Through 98point6, our new virtual 24/7 primary health care service — with \$0 copay.

98%

Satisfaction With New Mental Health Option

Our self-directed online program, Learn to Live.

10%

Of Members Streamed a Course

On topics like resilience, mindfulness, and beating burnout via Being, our new wellness video platform.

90%

Very Satisfied

With our Customer Care service — delivered by Portico employees working remotely.

22

Target Date Funds Introduced

To help members maintain an age-appropriate asset mix over time — and better weather volatility.

3.1%

Annuity Payment Increase

Received, in these difficult times, by ELCA annuitants during 2021.

Data as of Dec. 31, 2020; sources available upon request. Availability of and eligibility for benefits will vary.

60-302 (2/2021)

From Our Partners in Ministry - Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service



Lutheran Immigration
and Refugee Service

Greetings siblings in Christ of the Central States Synod,

It has been a difficult year for all of us. Despite restrictive policy changes and the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, LIRS has remained committed to our biblical mandate to welcome the stranger.

In the last year:

- 2,782 refugees were welcomed through LIRS affiliates in 23 states.
- 440 unaccompanied migrant children were served through our foster care services and placed in loving homes during and after legal proceedings.
- 9,500 asylum seekers received Safe Release and Post Release services at our Southern border.

Even in these darkest of days, thousands of people from across the country partnered with LIRS to express their support for migrants and refugees through our annual programs and advocacy efforts. The compassion of our neighbors gives us hope, and we are proud to report that in the last year:

- 16,000 holiday cards and 500 gifts were sent to migrant children and families in detention through our annual Hope for the Holidays program.
- More than 600 ELCA clergy and lay leaders signed a letter drafted by the ELCA and LIRS urging Congress to work collaboratively to advance comprehensive immigration legislation.
- LIRS' work was featured on national platforms like *NPR*, the *Washington Post*, *Center for American Progress*, *Religion News Service*, *The Christian Century*, and *Sojourners*.

We are especially grateful for the congregations and communities in the Central States Synod who have continued their generous and prayerful support. We could not do this work without you.

Now, that work is expanding. In the coming year, the U.S. expects to welcome 125,000 refugees to our shores. LIRS is actively looking to congregations and faith leaders to partner with us in ways big and small, including donations, volunteer work, and participation in our annual programming. **Emmaus: Congregational Discernment Network** launches this spring for congregations to discern how they can best walk alongside refugees and migrants in their community, and **Stand Up Speak Up**, coming in Pentecost, is a new interfaith prayer vigil focused on advocacy. We encourage you to stay up to date on opportunities for individual and congregational engagement at the **LIRS Action Center**, found at www.lirsconnect.org/get_involved

With your support, we will continue to live our mission: witnessing to God's love for all people, standing with and advocating for migrants and refugees, and transforming communities through ministries of service and justice. Thank you for accompanying LIRS and our migrant and refugee siblings through 2021 and beyond. God bless you.

In peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristin Witte".

Dr. Kristin Witte
Director for Outreach

National Headquarters: 700 Light Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21230 | Phone: 410-230-2700 | Fax: 410-230-2890 | www.LIRS.org
Advocacy Office: 110 Maryland Avenue NE, Suite 506/507, Washington, DC 20002 | Phone: 202-381-1030 | Fax: 202-330-5807



The 2022 ELCA Youth Gathering will be held July 24-28, 2022, in Minneapolis, with the two pre-events. . .

- the Multicultural Youth Leadership Event (MYLE)
- the tAble

. . .scheduled for July 21-24, 2022.

We give thanks for your prayers and patience as we have worked through the details with our partners in Minneapolis and across the country. We hope that by postponing the Gathering for a year, individuals and congregations will feel more comfortable and prepared to attend the Gathering in 2022.

For more information about the 2022 Gathering, please visit elca.org/YouthGathering/COVID19.

We will be updating our website and social media as more details become available.

We look forward to seeing you and experiencing the boundlessness of God in Minneapolis in 2022!

Note: Congregations in our synod, Central States, will NOT be able to apply for financial assistance through the ELCA Youth Gathering website.

We are piloting a new financial assistance program. The application process will be open in July.