

2025-2026

Annual Report

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Northeastern
Ohio Synod, ELCA

Letter from the Bishop

Dear Saints of Northeastern Ohio;

What a year this has been for the Northeastern Ohio Synod. Over the past year, the Northeastern Ohio Synod has taken meaningful steps to clarify and articulate the direction in which we believe the Holy Spirit is leading us. Last winter we began living into the vision of the One Church Experiment (OCE) which we discerned together as a synod in 2024. In the spring we were awarded a \$500,000 Baptized Living grant through the CaSTLE Project at Wartburg Seminary. This grant recognizes the theological depth and promise of the collaborative work emerging within the synod. It affirms that the exploration of shared ministry, empowered laity, and adaptive structures contributes to a broader churchwide conversation about the future of congregational life.

Our year culminated with your synod council approving a brand new Mission Statement.

Cultivating ministry sites that equip disciples for Christ-centered living.

The full Mission - Vision - Values Statement can be found on page neos-elca.org/who-we-are. We will be looking for ways to live into this mission in faithful and challenging ways.

All of this work did not begin this year. It grows out of years of shared ministry, experimentation, collaboration, and faithful witness across our congregations and ministry sites. What has emerged in this season is not a new identity, but clearer language for who we are becoming as a synod.

I look forward to what the Holy Spirit has in store for us this coming year.

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Laura L. H. Barbins



Northeastern Ohio Synod



Bishop Barbins would love to come to your youth events, VBS, or other events as she is able. These are scheduled through the Synod Administrative Assistant at our Synod Office, who can be reached at 330-929-2022. If you would like for Bishop Barbins to preach, preside, or visit with your congregation on a Saturday night or Sunday morning, please visit her Google Scheduler by scanning the QR code on this page.

From Your Synod Vice President

Dear Northeastern Ohio Synod Congregations and Rostered Ministers:

Being and staying connected with others is essential to our well-being. Connection provides support, purpose, and resilience.

These same qualities strengthen our congregations, synod, and churchwide expression as we live out our faith together. The word synod means “on the way together” or “journeying together.” We are stronger when we walk together as one. That does not mean we always agree, but that we respect differing views while finding common ground to support one another.

This past year I was blessed, along with 11 others from our synod, to attend the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in Phoenix, Arizona. While the 112-degree heat was not my first choice for late July, it was nonetheless a meaningful experience as representatives from our 65 synods gathered to conduct the church’s business, share fellowship, and worship God.

Voting members did not always agree on the matters before the assembly, and discussions were sometimes passionate. Yet we remained united in the theme “For the Life of the World,” emphasizing the church’s mission to serve the world in the spirit of Jesus’ ministry. I came away with a deeper sense of connection with my fellow Northeastern Ohio voting members and with vice presidents from across the church.

I also experienced this sense of connection during my second and final year in the Growing in Faith program. Meeting weekly on Zoom to discuss course material and its impact on our faith created bonds deeper than I expected. My thanks to Deacon Jenny Frantz Kaplan, The Rev. Sarah Schaaf, and the many instructors who guide this program.

Over the past year I have also worked alongside fellow members of our Synod Council representing congregations across our five conferences. Together we conducted the business of the synod, including authorizing new funding initiatives for pastors and youth ministries, implementing procedures for restricted funds, and revising our Mission, Vision, and Values to bring greater clarity to our shared purpose.

We often speak of the three expressions of the ELCA—churchwide, synod, and congregations—distinct yet united in mission. This past year I had the privilege of witnessing each expression up close and experiencing the blessings of connection as we walk together in faith and the love of Christ.

My thanks to our synod officers, council members, staff, and Bishop Barbins for their dedication and leadership. We also give thanks for the many years of service of former Presiding Bishop Eaton and welcome Presiding Bishop Curry as he begins his call to lead the ELCA.

Finally, thank you to the congregations of the Northeastern Ohio Synod and to all lay and rostered leaders for your leadership, prayers, time, talents, and financial gifts as we continue to walk together sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Respectfully,



Kevin Kampfer, NEOS Vice President





Meet Your Synod Staff



Front Row (L to R): Dcn. Jenny Frantz Kaplan, Bishop Laura Barbins, Rebekah Wissler, Sue Tully
Back Row (L to R): Pr. Nathan Krause, Chris Goff, Pr. Mitch Phillips, Dcn. Erin Taylor Bodenstab

Bishop Laura Barbins

Provides overall leadership for the synod, including preaching, teaching, and administering sacraments. Oversees pastors and deacons, ordains new ministers, and guides the work of the synod.

Rev. Mitch Phillips

Assistant to the Bishop for Leadership

Supports pastors and congregations during transitions and helps leaders grow in their ministry. Contact for call processes, moving pastors, compensation questions, and finding pulpit supply.

Rev. Nathan Krause

Assistant to the Bishop for Congregational Vitality & Director for Evangelical Mission

Supports congregations and leaders in exploring new ways to grow in ministry and mission. Contact for congregational vitality, mission projects, and leadership support.

Deacon Jenny Frantz Kaplan

Director of Communication & Formation

Shares news and stories from across the synod, manages our website & social media, & oversees youth ministry, lay leader formation, & candidacy for rostered ministry. Contact for e-newsletters, website questions, Growing in Faith/Lay School, youth & young adult ministry, or exploring becoming a pastor or deacon.

Rebekah Wissler

Resource Specialist & Archivist

Manages books, resources, and archives for congregations and the synod. Contact for congregational resources, archives, record keeping, or constitution updates.

Deacon Erin Taylor Bodenstab

Deacon for Baptized Living

Assists congregations and leaders live out baptismal faith in daily life, supporting lay discipleship and faith formation. Contact for baptismal ministry, faith formation, and strengthening leadership in rural and small-town congregations.

Chris Goff

Business Manager

Keeps the office running smoothly by managing contracts, office projects, finances, and building use. Contact for building use.

Sue Tully

Administrative Assistant

Assists with office operations, answers questions, and welcomes visitors. Contact for updating your contact info, general inquiries, or donation questions.

Rooted in Faith: Deb Yandala's Ministry in Our National Park

When Deb Yandala was 13, she received her confirmation verse: "I am the vine, you are the branches. Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). She believes it was randomly assigned, but the words stayed with her.

"My confirmation verse was surprisingly moving to me as a 13-year-old," Deb recalls. "I really believe Jesus was the first environmental educator, if I could say that. That verse, and that imagery, has been an inspiration through my whole life."

Deb's life has woven together faith, creation, and leadership in ways she never expected. After serving in outdoor ministry and as a rostered leader in the ELCA, she found herself at a crossroads when she was unable to receive a call in the church. Soon after, an unexpected opportunity arose: helping to open a residential environmental education center connected to the Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park.



"It really fell in my lap," Deb said. "And I do feel that was the Holy Spirit at work. Another door opened when I least expected it, and it ended up being exactly what I wanted to do with my life. I had a graduate degree in environmental education. It was just kind of... Perfect."

Even so, the transition brought grief. "I had felt very called to being a rostered lay leader in the church," she said. "But within a few weeks of starting the work, I felt such a sense of... this is where I need to be. This is where God would have me do my work. I realized I could be probably more impactful in a secular setting than I could for the church."

For Deb, faith and work were never separate. While she didn't use religious language, she lived it in practice. "Sometimes when staff had problems or issues and came to me, I drew on my pastoral skills to help people see their worth and their value in the work they did."

When Deb became President and CEO of the Conservancy in 2002, her faith continued to shape her leadership. "My calling wasn't to convert everybody to my faith, but to connect people with nature, to love people. You can be the language of faith," she explained. Caring for creation became an essential expression of that faith. "You can't care for people and not care for creation, frankly. We are all interdependent with the earth. As a person of faith, I believe that God created creation, and that makes it holy right there."

She also carried her faith into moments of discernment. "I learned to not always try to answer or fix things right away, but to step back and let my values, my faith, inform the decisions I needed to make. When I think about Jesus going to the garden to pray, I think about how often I've needed to do that too."

Last year, Deb retired after decades of service with the Conservancy. At her farewell celebration, one of her former board chairs stood to speak. Amid stories of her accomplishments, the chair simply said: "The thing you need to know most about Deb is she values her faith and her family; and that came through in everything she did."

For Deb, that was the greatest affirmation. "It's not just going to work," she said. "It is going to your ministry site. If you view what you do as a vocation, as a calling from God and as ministry, you view your work a little differently."

Deb's story reminds us that ministry doesn't end when we leave the sanctuary. "If we put our faith on a shelf, only for Sunday mornings, we miss out on the fullness of what God calls us to do. Our work, our communities, our daily lives—that's where our faith matters."

Your Northeastern Ohio Synod is committed to supporting lay leadership and vocational discernment. Through the mission support of congregations, programs like Growing in Faith—our lay leadership school—help people explore their calling and live out their faith in meaningful ways, just as Deb has done throughout her life.

2025 Initiatives & Progress



Northeastern
Ohio Synod

The One Church Experiment continued as a space for collaborative exploration among congregations seeking new ways of being Church together. Throughout 2025, ministry sites engaged in conversation, discernment, and experimentation around shared mission, shared leadership, and shared resources.

This work deepened from concept to practice. Participating congregations began clarifying what collaboration looks like in their specific contexts, strengthening relationships across communities, and testing models of shared ministry.

This year, that work also received external affirmation through the awarding of a Baptized Living grant from the CaSTLE Project at Wartburg Seminary. This \$500,000 grant connects our local experimentation to a wider church conversation about congregational transformation and baptized life, providing both partnership and resources for the work ahead.

THE ONE CHURCH EXPERIMENT

EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES FOR ROSTERED MINISTERS

Here is a direction that fell short of where we were hoping it would go. We were able to offer support to our rostered ministers through:

- Reformation Days, a day of seminars on pertinent topics
- Professional coaching and spiritual direction subsidies for one-on-one growth with a coach or spiritual director
- Monthly Town Hall online gatherings with Bishop Barbins
- Financing and empowering the conference deans who support their colleagues

Where we did not get is helping our pastors and deacons engage adaptive leadership models for the ever-changing landscape of ministry.



2025 Initiatives & Progress

ENGAGING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS IN CONTEXTUAL FAITH

Youth and young adult engagement continued through both established and emerging initiatives. Building on the momentum of the 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans, plans advanced for collaborative, statewide youth experiences and expanded opportunities for connection.

Grant-supported young adult ministry initiatives continued to explore sustainable models for engagement and multiplication across synod conferences. These efforts seek to root faith formation deeply in the lived realities of young people while strengthening connections to congregational life.

Throughout the year, the synod continued to expand opportunities for lay education and leadership development. The partnership with the Northwestern Ohio Synod strengthened the lay school experience, offering more robust formation for participants.

In addition, conversations around ministry structures, collaborative models, and discipleship sharpened our shared understanding of the priesthood of all believers. The emphasis has increasingly moved beyond training for tasks toward cultivating confidence and clarity in lay leadership across ministry sites.

These efforts reflect a growing commitment to equipping baptized members not only to assist ministry, but to share fully in it.

LABORATORIES FOR EMPOWERING LAY LEADERSHIP

CLARIFYING OUR SHARED DIRECTION

In addition to these initiatives, 2025 marked the adoption of a renewed Mission, Vision, and Values statement. This statement names our shared **calling to cultivate ministry sites that equip disciples for Christ-centered living** and to **build every ministry site in love as we work together for the sake of the gospel**.

This renewed language reflects the discernment of recent years and provides clearer articulation of commitments already emerging across the synod. It will continue to inform conversations, partnerships, and organizational alignment in the years ahead.



Scan the QR code to read the full mission, vision, and values Statement. Or go to neos-elca.org/who-we-are.



What is baptized living?

Baptized living simply means living a life that is rooted in God’s promises and grace and framed by the promises we make in affirmation of baptism as we follow Jesus together.

What is the Baptized Living Initiative?

The Baptized Living Initiative is a new emphasis of the Northeastern Ohio Synod grounded in baptismal vocation, the priesthood of all believers, and the shared call of all Christians to live our mission and ministry to love God and our neighbors everywhere we go.

Together, we will:

- Re-center equipping God’s people as the central work of the church, especially in small town and rural settings and congregations in transition.
- Nurture relationships among and across congregations and communities.
- Deepen spiritual, theological, and practical formation through resources, training, encouragement, and support.

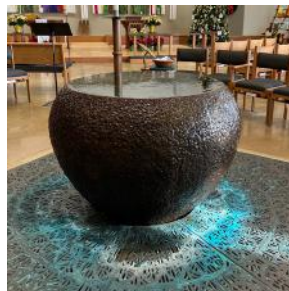
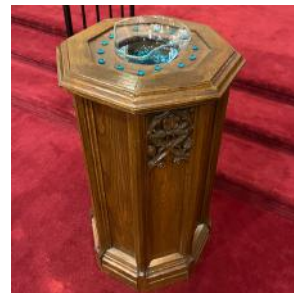
What does this mean?

Workshops! Connections! Resources you can download, share, and use! And that’s just what we have now! Baptizing Living is just beginning, and it also compliments and expands existing ministries like the One Church Experiment and Growing in Faith.

How is this possible?

By the grace of God, the movement of the Spirit, and a very generous grant from The CaSTLE Project, administered by Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, IA.

Learn more at neos-elca.org/baptized-living or scan the QR code on this page



Guess the font!
All of these baptismal fonts are found in NEOS congregations!



Following the Light: Growing in Faith



In January, leaders and learners from across the Northeastern Ohio Synod and the Northwestern Ohio Synod gathered to celebrate participants who completed the full course of the Growing in Faith program. This milestone marks the completion of twelve five-week courses, representing hours of study, reflection, conversation, and prayer.

This accomplishment reflects deep commitment. Participants balanced coursework with full lives, returning week after week with curiosity and openness. Their work strengthens not only their own faith, but the life of the church.

The journey echoes the story of the magi, who followed a star without knowing exactly where it would lead, trusting that God was at work. In the same way, those in Growing in Faith respond to God’s invitation through learning, discovering how faith reshapes the way we understand Scripture, the church, our neighbors, and ourselves. As the Gospel tells us, after encountering Christ, the magi “went home by another road.” Formation changes the direction of our lives.

As Paul writes in Ephesians, God’s wisdom is made known “through the church, in its rich variety.” The Growing in Faith program reflects this truth. Participants do not learn in isolation. Their questions, insights, and gifts strengthen congregations, ministries, and communities across our synods.

This milestone is not an ending. It marks a continuing journey of discipleship, shaped by Christ’s light and lived out in daily life. Through Growing in Faith, leaders are equipped to serve, to listen, and to respond to God’s call in their communities.

Your Northeastern Ohio Synod remains committed to supporting lay leadership and vocational discernment. Through shared investment and participation, Growing in Faith continues to form leaders who carry faith into the places they live and serve.



Learn more at growinginfaithohio.org or scan the QR code on this page!



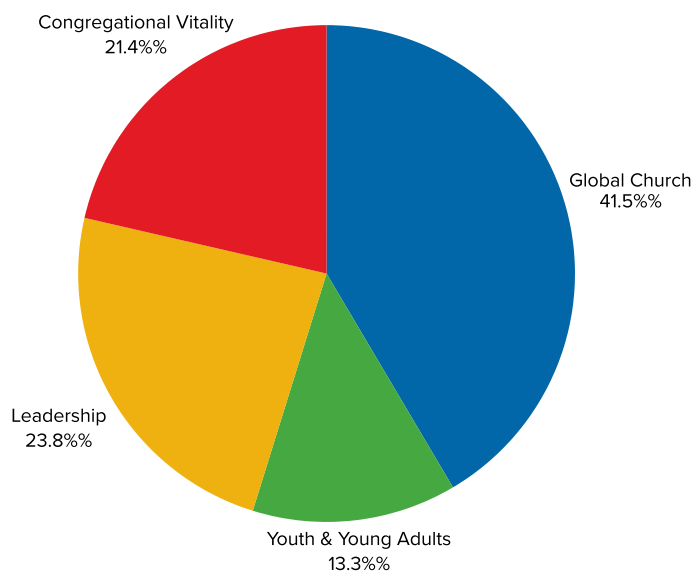


Northeastern
Ohio Synod

Ministry Budget

Investing in Mission & Ministry: How We Steward Our Shared Resources

Each year, the faithful generosity of our congregations and ministry partners allows your Northeastern Ohio Synod to support vital ministry across our region and beyond. Through Mission Support and other designated giving, we invest in four key areas: **Church in Society, Congregational Life, Leadership, and Youth & Young Adults**. These categories reflect our commitment to strengthening congregations, equipping leaders, and serving our neighbors in Christ’s name.



Congregational Vitality: Vibrant congregations are central to our mission. We support renewal efforts through our Baptized Living initiative, Congregational Vitality Grants, provide leadership and care through Conference Deans, and gather for shared discernment at Synod Assembly. Our Region 6 Archives preserve our collective story, while Growing in Faith equips lay leaders. All of this is made possible through staff leadership, communications, and infrastructure that connect and sustain these efforts.

Youth & Young Adults: We nurture young leaders through Campus Ministries, faith-forming experiences at HopeWood Outdoors, and participation in the ELCA Youth Gathering. These ministries are rooted in relationship and sustained by synod staff who coordinate, communicate, and advocate for these vital opportunities for faith formation.

Every dollar—from staffing and building upkeep to grants and programs—reflects our commitment to walk together in faith and share God’s love with the world. Thank you for being part of this shared ministry!

Leadership: Strong leaders are essential for a thriving church. We celebrate new rostered ministers, invest in continuing education, and offer care and guidance throughout every stage of ministry. We also assist congregations as they transition from one rostered minister to another. Synod staff play a key role in this work, offering pastoral care, consultation, and coordination.

Global Church: A portion of our Mission Support goes to the ELCA churchwide organization, helping fund ministry nationally and globally. We also partner with social service agencies and ecumenical organizations to care for our neighbors in need.



2025 By the Numbers



Congregations in Northeastern Ohio Synod

Ministers of Word and Sacrament

78 Active, 1 On Leave, 118 Retired



Ministers of Word and Service

4 Active, 12 Retired

New pastors and deacons to our synod



Congregations who experienced holy closure

Congregations who welcomed a new rostered minister



Students in Growing in Faith (lay school)

Entranced candidates for ministry



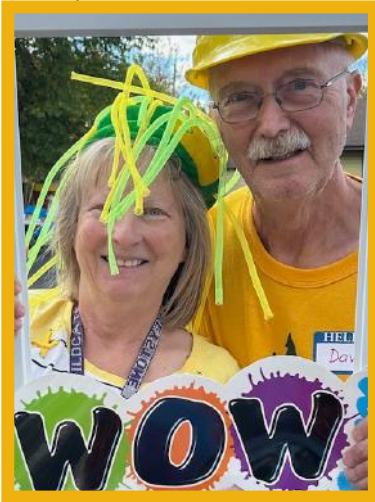
Delegates from NEOS to our Companion Synod in South Africa

Congregations visited for worship on a Sunday morning



Resources sent to congregations and pastors/deacons

A Feast of Community at Emmanuel Lutheran - Elyria, Ohio



When Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Elyria received word that they'd won a \$1,000 Feast of Abundance grant from United Lutheran Seminary, member Dave Sprague could hardly believe it. "I didn't expect to get picked," he laughed. "We were the 48th church drawn in the lottery!" Sprague sent in the application not expecting anything, but that simple step of faith sparked a joyful neighborhood celebration.

On a sunny October afternoon, Emmanuel's parking lot was transformed into a lively block party featuring the Lorain County Community College Civic Band, nearly 200 guests, and plenty of food, fun, and laughter. The event included face painting, arts and crafts, cornhole, chalk art, bubbles, pizza, and even a Blessing of the Pets. The Frosty 5-0 ice cream truck from the Lorain County Sheriff's Department joined in the festivities too.

For Dave and the congregation, the goal was simple: to show generosity and connect with their neighbors. "This church used to host 'Fun Days' when we had a preschool," Dave explained. "But we wanted to reach more than just families with kids... we wanted to meet the adults who live right around us."

To make that happen, the congregation not only posted it on social media or in the newspaper, but members printed 1,000 flyers and went door-to-door across the surrounding blocks, inviting everyone personally. That effort not only boosted attendance, it built relationships. "Even when people couldn't come, we got to meet them face-to-face," Dave said. "It helped us get to know our neighborhood again."

For Dave, the day's highlight came when the 50-member civic band struck its first notes. "The band really brought everyone together," Dave said. "You could just feel the joy in the crowd." Emmanuel Lutheran set out to show generosity and love and that's exactly what happened. Dave reflected. "God had a hand in all of it, from the grant, to the volunteers, to the sunshine that day."

While Emmanuel's Feast of Abundance Block Party was made possible through a grant, it's the kind of creative, community-centered ministry that Mission Support helps make possible across our synod. Through your congregation's Mission Support gifts, we're able to nurture and equip lay leaders, people like Dave, who put their faith into action and help their congregations live out the gospel in everyday ways. Thank you for investing in the people and ministries that bring Christ's love to life in Northeastern Ohio.

*Read more stories like Dave's at:
neos-elca.org/our-stories
or scan the QR code below!*



2026 Initiatives

With the adoption of our new Mission-Vision-Values Statement, we have been able to create a strategy towards our mission of cultivating ministry sites that are equipping disciples for Christ-centered living. While there are internal staff items that will move us toward that mission, we see three key pathways that lead to vibrant ministry sites:

Cultivating Durable Vitality:

We are not interested in flash in the pan vitality, but vitality in our congregations which is lasting, underscoring our committed values of engagement and proclamation. Specifically, we will be:

Launching a vitality survey site that congregations can utilize to assess their vitality and get direction on where to go next.

Providing vitality programs and processes, specifically through the One Church Experiment and the Baptized Living Initiative.

Evaluating the Transition Process. We are always looking for ways to evaluate, edit, and improve our processes, and it has been about five years since we redeveloped this one.

Encouraging Collaboration:

In 2024 we discerned as a synod that collaboration was a way forward for us and we launched the One Church Experiment. There are many other kinds of collaboration, and since we have stated that work as one of our values, we focus in on collaboration through:

Supporting our One Church Experiment clusters through staff time, training, and grants.

Encouraging shared ministry efforts like Young Adult Ministries with the Gather Network, campus ministries, and youth ministry efforts through grants and networking.

Promoting conference sharing. In our most recent Synodwide Update, we heard a hunger to listen and share ideas, information, and inspiration. We can help with that!

Helping to Equip Disciples:

This work primarily happens at the congregational level, but we can do some of this work on a larger scale and with greater resources. Especially since we received the \$500,000 grant for the Baptized Living Initiative, we are eager to promote our value of discipleship through:

Providing quality continuing education for our pastors and deacons. Since these are disciples who are leading disciples, we want a strong and empowered rostered ministry in our midst.

Building up lay ministry with our Growing in Faith program and helping to empower lay people through webinars and in person training with the Baptized Living Initiative.

Increasing those who are entranced into candidacy, the ELCA pathway to ordained ministry. We will be doing this critical work through increased awareness of the process and greater interaction opportunities with those who are discerning this next step in their discipleship.



Congregation Mission Support

Thank you to the following congregations for supporting us in mission and ministry.

GENEROSITY BETWEEN 7.5% - 9.9% OF GENERAL OFFERINGS

DIVINITY, PARMA HEIGHTS
 PEACE, CLEVELAND HEIGHTS
 HOLY TRINITY, NORTH CANTON
 OUR SAVIOUR, HINCKLEY
 IGLESIA LUTERANA LA TRINIDAD,
 AKRON
 ABIDING SAVIOR, ALLIANCE
 FIRST, LORAIN
 ST JOHN'S, MINERVA (NEW FRANKLIN)
 GOOD SHEPHERD, CONNEAUT
 FAITH, FAIRLAWN
 LUTH CH OF THE MASTER, BEDFORD
 EMMANUEL, ELYRIA
 ZION, WOOSTER
 TRINITY, VERMILION
 FIRST, STRONGSVILLE
 CHRIST, MASSILLON
 MESSIAH, ASHTABULA
 BETHESDA ON THE BAY, BAY VILLAGE
 ST PETER, WOOSTER (NEW PITTSBURG)
 ST STEPHEN MARTYR, CANTON

GENEROSITY BETWEEN 5% - 7.4% OF GENERAL OFFERINGS

MESSIAH, AKRON
 ST PAUL, LEETONIA
 ST JOHN, CANAL FULTON
 SHANESVILLE, SUGAR CREEK
 TRINITY, MAGNOLIA
 EMMANUEL, SALEM
 TRINITY, GIRARD
 ST JOHN, WARREN (CHAMPION)
 JERUSALEM, SEVILLE
 ZION, NEW MIDDLETOWN
 NEW HORIZONS, HOMERVILLE
 ST MARK, TALLMADGE
 AUGSBURG, ORVILLE
 ST MATTHEW, MEDINA
 PEACE, ASHLAND
 NEW COVENANT, EAST CLEVELAND
 BETHEL, MIDDLEBURG HEIGHTS
 MESSIAH, FAIRVIEW PARK
 HOLY TRINITY, AKRON
 GRACE, DOVER

GENEROSITY EXCEEDING 10% OF GENERAL OFFERINGS

ST JOHN, BALTIC
CHRIST, LORAIN
EMMANUEL, NORTH GEORGETOWN
ADVENT, UNIONTOWN
ST PAUL, RAVENNA
GOOD SOIL, ROCKY RIVER
ST PAUL, MINERVA
CHRIST THE REDEEMER,
BRECKSVILLE
ST PAUL'S, ALLIANCE
ADVENT, MENTOR
BETHANY, ASHTABULA

GENEROSITY BETWEEN 2.5% - 5% OF GENERAL OFFERINGS

ST PAUL'S, MASSILLON
 GRACE, HUBBARD
 BETHEL, YOUNGSTOWN (BOARDMAN)
 ADVENT, SOLON
 REJOICE!, HUDSON
 HOLY TRINITY, MASSILLON
 CANAAN, CRESTON
 MARTIN LUTHER, YOUNGSTOWN
 ADVENT, CLEVELAND
 FIRST, CANTON
 ST LUKE'S, CUYAHOGA FALLS
 ZION, VALLEY CITY
 GRACE, AUSTINTOWN
 TRINITY, SEBRING
 ST JOHN, LAKEVILLE (MCZENA)
 LIVING WORD, MEDINA
 ST JAMES, JEWETT
 ZION, NORTH CANTON
 TRINITY, CARROLLTON
 ST PAUL, BELLVILLE
 CHRIST, WILLOUGHBY
 ST PAUL, JEFFERSON
 MESSIAH, NEWTON FALLS
 TRINITY, KENT
 EMMANUEL, WARREN

***The percentage is based on recorded 2025 mission support to the NEOS divided by the latest regular giving reported to the ELCA in a congregational report.**

GENEROSITY LESS THAN 2.5% OF GENERAL OFFERINGS

ZION, NEW WATERFORD
 PRINCE OF PEACE, POLAND
 LORD OF LIFE, CANFIELD
 ZION, YOUNGSTOWN
 ST JACOB, MASSILLON
 CHRIST, AVON LAKE
 LORDSTOWN, WARREN (LORDSTOWN)
 ST PAUL, BERA
 ZION, DOYLESTOWN
 TRINITY, NILES
 CHRIST, STRUTHERS
 PEACE, CANTON
 BETHANY ENGLISH, CLEVELAND
 MT MORIAH, BERLIN CENTER
 PLEASANT VALLEY, LUCAS
 ST JAMES, TUSCARAWAS
 MESSIAH, LYNDHURST
 JERUSALEM, COLUMBIANA
 TRINITY, MADISON
 HOPE, MANSFIELD
 ST PAUL'S, WARREN
 GRACE, WADSWORTH
 ST STEPHEN, STOW
 HOLY TRINITY, BRUNSWICK
 ST JOHN, PERRYSVILLE
 EMMANUEL, NEW PHILADELPHIA
 LORD OF LIFE, CHAGRIN FALLS
 ST JACOB'S, NORTH CANTON
 ST PAUL, LUCAS
 LUTH CH OF THE COVENANT, MAPLE HEIGHTS
 GOOD SHEPHERD, CANTON
 ST JOHN, EAST LIVERPOOL
 PRINCE OF PEACE, WESTLAKE
 ST PAUL, SMITHVILLE
 HOLY TRINITY, SALEM
 SALEM, WOOSTER
 ST MARK, WARREN
 ST PAUL, SHARON CENTER
 ZION, LOUDONVILLE
 TRIUNE, BROADVIEW HTS
 REDEEMER, BROOK PARK
 ST JOHN, PETERSBURG (NEW SPRINGFIELD)
 CELEBRATION, CHARDON
 CHRIST THE KING, TWINSBURG
 PARMA, PARMA
 BETHEL, BATH
 PRINCE OF PEACE, CORTLAND
 GRACE, STEUBENVILLE
 GOOD HOPE, NORTH LIMA
 ST MICHAEL, MARSHALLVILLE





Northeastern
Ohio Synod

Journeying Together: Accompaniment in South Africa



Last December, Bishop Laura Barbins was joined by Lankika (Kika) Mendis, Pastor Angela Freeman, and Ron Jantz Jr. as a delegation from the Northeastern Ohio Synod traveled to South Africa to accompany siblings in Christ in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) as it marked its 50th anniversary.

Joining other ELCA synods in companion relationships with ELCSA, the delegation entered a time of shared learning, theological conversation, and relationship-building. The focus was clear: not teaching, but walking together.

Throughout the visit, the delegation was welcomed into the life of ELCSA's Northern Diocese—gathering with bishops and leaders, meeting with seminarians, and sharing in daily life. Conversations revealed both differences and deep common ground, especially around leadership, formation, and the realities facing the church in each context.

A central focus was listening to seminarians discerning calls to ministry. Many are studying remotely while serving locally, balancing formation and leadership. Their stories highlighted both challenge and commitment, inviting reflection on how we support leaders and care for the whole person in ministry.

Worship shaped the journey. In congregations and gatherings, the delegation experienced vibrant music, deep joy, and the fullness of sacramental life—baptisms, confirmations, and Holy Communion—offering a glimpse of a church alive in faith.

The visit culminated in ELCSA's 50th Golden Jubilee near Rustenburg. Thousands gathered in a soccer stadium for a service marked by gratitude and hope. A global procession of clergy and bishops opened worship, followed by preaching, singing, and the sharing of Holy Communion in a powerful witness to God's abundance.



The celebration also included a visit to the room where ELCSA was formed 50 years ago. A candle was lit in thanksgiving for the faith and courage of those who came before.

Across every moment, one theme remained: accompaniment begins with presence. This partnership continues to grow through shared faith, mutual learning, and relationships rooted in Christ.

Your Northeastern Ohio Synod gives thanks for this companion relationship and the opportunity to witness God's work beyond our own context. We continue this journey trusting that Christ is present as we walk together.



Companion Synod Relationships

Walking Together in Faith

As part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), we believe that God calls us to engage the world together. Through **Companion Synod Relationships**, ELCA synods and congregations connect with Lutheran churches around the globe, forming bonds of faith, friendship, and shared ministry. These relationships are expressions of our communion with the more than 140 Lutheran member churches of The Lutheran World Federation.

Rooted in the practice of **accompaniment**, these relationships embrace **mutuality, inclusivity, vulnerability, empowerment, and sustainability**. Together, we strengthen one another for life and ministry through prayer, study, communication, exchange of visitors, and sharing of resources. Companion relationships deepen our faith and broaden our understanding of God's work in the world.

The **Northeastern Ohio Synod** is blessed to walk alongside two companion synods:

- **Global Companion:** The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA)
- **Domestic Companion:** The Western North Dakota Synod

We invite you to learn more about these relationships and how we continue to grow together in faith!

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