

2024-2025 Annual Report



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Northeastern Ohio Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Letter from the Bishop

Dear Saints of Northeastern Ohio;

Welcome to our new Annual Report: a way for your synod office to remind you – our stakeholders – what we are doing for you and how we are doing it with you. We are excited about this new format and hope that you might give us your feedback by scanning the QR code on the last page.

In this edition, you will find:

- a letter from our Vice President, Kevin Kampfer;
- a summary of our spending for last year;
- a “progress report” on our initiatives from last year;
- and much, much more.

We hope that this Annual Report will be one of the ways in which we keep you informed of our stewardship of not just your mission support dollars, but also the mission we share as ELCA Lutherans in Northeast Ohio.

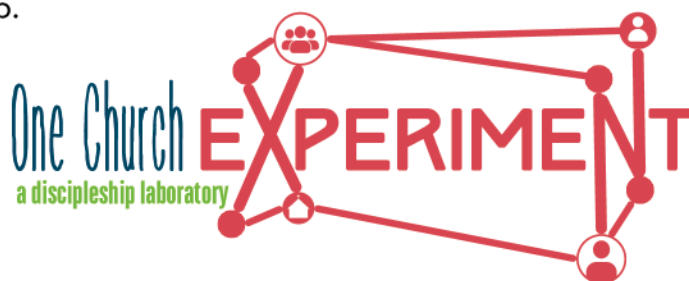
Last year’s greatest accomplishment was the work we did together in Project Isaiah 43. This 6-month project had hundreds of lay people from around the synod talking about what God has in store for the Northeastern Ohio Synod. We talked, laughed, and prayed together at conference meetings and at Synod Assembly. The outcome was the One Church Experiment. As of now, congregations are looking at this Experiment, talking within their congregations, reaching out to neighboring congregations, and looking at how this Spirit-led concept might take root in the coming years.

I continue to be honored to be your bishop.

Peace,



Rev. Dr. Laura L. H. Barbins



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.



Northeastern
Ohio Synod

From Your Synod Vice President

At the outset of each synod council orientation session, we are reminded of the meaning of the word synod, "on the way together."

Your synod council worked diligently this past year to work together with our bishop and synod staff, in the words of the initial rewrite of our Mission Statement during the synod council's October retreat, to "raise up courageous disciples."

To that end, the synod council authorized guidelines for two new restricted funds, "Youth and Young Adult Ministries" and "Practical Pastor/Deacon Fund". Monies given to these funds were used to defray costs for the ELCA Youth Gathering and training for our pastors/deacons, both endeavors to promote future disciples for our member congregations. We look forward to the new and creative opportunities in which future support can be used to promote ministry with our young members and within our congregations.

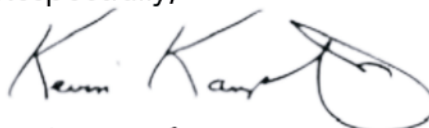
Likewise, the council revised the synod's human resource policy on continuing education and authorized funding for staff education to enhance their discipleship to our Synod.

To further enhance discipleship within our congregations, your synod continues to partner with our brothers and sisters in the Northwestern Ohio Synod in offering classes for lay persons in the diakonia program, "Growing in Faith". I and two other members of our synod council are currently enrolled in the second year of this joint educational opportunity. This program has opened the door to new friendships with fellow lay persons and rostered leaders alike as well as strengthened our personal faith walk. Participants in the diakonia program are from a wide range of ages, backgrounds, and level of interest. Flexibility is given for students to take a class or two as time permits or to work towards completion of the full two-year program. Growing in Faith class offerings can be found in our synod's weekly e-news, "Walking Together".

Much work has been accomplished to write guidelines and procedures to ensure continuity in the work of synod committees, compensation deliberations, use of restricted funds, and the financial operations of the synod. While this work was neither flashy nor flamboyant it was essential nonetheless to ensure the ongoing success of our synod's ability to effectively meet our charge to "cultivate faith networks".

My thanks to our bishop, synod officers, synod council, and synod staff for their diligence and unwavering support to our mission in "raising up courageous disciples" this past year. Additionally, thank you to our pastors, deacons, lay Leaders, and member congregations for your continued support that enables our synod to share the good news of The Gospel to all in Northeast Ohio.

Respectfully,



Kevin Kampfer, NEOS Vice President



Northeastern
Ohio Synod

Meet Your Synod Staff

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REV. DR. LAURA BARBINS

BISHOP

Responsible for preaching, teaching, and administering sacraments according to the church's Confession of Faith, providing pastoral care and leadership for the synod, ordaining approved candidates for ministry, installing ministers, disciplining ministers as per the synod constitution, presiding over the Synod Assembly, representing as a voting member of the Churchwide Assembly, and overseeing the synod's work.



REV. MITCH PHILLIPS

ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP FOR LEADERSHIP

Oversees the transition process for congregations and rostered ministers, encourages the vitality of rostered ministers (rostered ministers gathering, continuing education, boundaries training, compensation standards, etc); serve as the bishop's chief of staff.

Contact for: Call Process, Mobility, Compensation Standards, Pulpit Supply



DEACON JENNY FRANTZ

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATION & FORMATION

Manages Walking Together and synod announcements, oversees content for the synod's website and social media, shares synod stories across platforms, collaborates with ELCA Youth Ministry Network and churchwide youth ministry/gathering office, and oversees the Candidacy processes for our Synod.

Contact for: E-news, Website, Growing in Faith/Lay School, Youth & Young Adult Ministry, Becoming a Pastor or Deacon



REBEKAH WISSLER

RESOURCE SPECIALIST & ARCHIVIST

Purchases, organizes and supervises resources for congregations within the Kaufman Resource Center. Oversees the transition to digital record keeping, the archiving of our synod records, and helps closing congregations with the perpetual care of their history. Maintains rostered minister and congregation files. Liaison to Constitution Review Committee and Region 6 Archives Advisory Board.

Contact for: Congregational Resources, Archives, Record Management, Constitution Updates



CHRIS GOFF

BUSINESS MANAGER

Oversees office contracts, supplies, building maintenance, calendar management, and office space usage. Manages office projects, payroll, and financials.

Contact for: Building Use



SUE TULLY

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Responds to official correspondence to the Bishop's office, assists in database management, provides support to ensure efficient operation of the office, welcomes and directs visitors.

Contact for: Update Contact Info, General Inquiries, Donation Questions



Northeastern
Ohio Synod

2024 By the Numbers

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144

Congregations in Northeastern Ohio Synod

Ministers of Word and Sacrament

89 Active, 3 On Leave from Call, 111 Retired

16

Ministers of Word and Service

3 Active, 1 On Leave from Call, 12 Retired

New pastors and deacons to our synod

2

**Congregations who experienced
holy closure**

**Congregations who welcomed a
new rostered minister**

11

**Students in Growing in Faith
(lay school)**

Entranced candidates for ministry

9

**Congregations worked with on
vitality indicators**

**Congregations visited for worship
on a Sunday morning**

144

**Resources sent to congregations and
pastors/deacons**

203

2

10

7

86



Northeastern
Ohio Synod

Gather Together:

Building Community and Deepening Faith on Cleveland's West Side

Sometimes, the best ministries begin with a simple invitation. For Mary Washburn, that invitation came from Pastoral Intern Mariah Mills during her time at Bethany English Lutheran Church. Mariah saw potential in starting something new—a space for young adults to gather in faith, reflection, and community. With a little inspiration from the ELCA's Gather Network and a lot of grassroots energy, Gather Together was born.

Today, Gather Together is a joint ministry of Good Soil Lutheran Ministries and Bethany English Lutheran Church, rooted in the west side of Cleveland and coordinated by and for young adults. What began as a few "low effort" weekend gatherings quickly became something more: a growing, intentional community of people in similar life stages seeking spiritual connection.

Mary, one of the group's founding leaders, was in the middle of her own life transitions when Gather Together began. "It reminded me of campus ministry," she said, "but for this stage of life." She knew she needed community—and quickly realized she wasn't alone.

One of the most meaningful experiences so far was the fall 2024 retreat at HopeWood Shores. The retreat offered a full day of connection and renewal: from morning community-building to a digital detox and reflection on what it means to follow Jesus. The group shared in worship and communion, enjoyed time for journaling and prayer, and closed the day around a campfire with s'mores and song. "It filled me up," Mary said, "it was a full day of deep connection."



Holy Communion is a core part of the Gather Together experience. "It recenters us," Mary shared. "It reminds us not to focus on ourselves, but on the gifts we receive in baptism and in Christ." The ritual of passing the bread and cup among one another underscores the community's shared faith and mutual care.

Gather Together now engages about two dozen fairly regular participants. Mary dreams of a future where the ministry continues to thrive—even if she's no longer the one coordinating it all. "I want this in my life," she said. "And it seems like others do too. I've read more theology. I've asked more questions. I've reflected more deeply on what we say we believe," Mary's hope is simple: that in three years, the group is still gathering, still growing, still walking together in faith.

Gather Together is more than an event or a program. It's a community built on the desire to walk together in faith and friendship—a space where young adults are not just welcomed, but centered.

Gather Together is currently supported by a \$1,600 grant from the St. John/St. Paul Endowment Fund, as well as through the Youth and Young Adult Ministry Fund of the Northeastern Ohio Synod, which was strengthened by a gift from the holy closure of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Elyria. Events are often also funded directly by participants. This fund supports ministries like Gather Together that reach those not often engaged by traditional congregational models.



Northeastern
Ohio Synod

2024 Initiatives & Progress

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MORE ENRICHMENT & EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES FOR CONGREGATIONS & LEADERS.

After launching Growing in Faith in 2023, 2024 saw a new partnership with Northwestern Ohio Synod for a more robust lay school. Our Synod Vice President talks about the richness of this program in his letter/report. We were also able to offer online conversation and in person continuing education opportunities for our pastors and deacons. All of these deepen the confidence and competence of our leaders.

CONTINUED STORYTELLING OF HOW GOD IS ACTIVE IN OUR MIDST.

We have continued to tell the story of faith active in love. You can read more about standout faith in action on pages 5 and 9.

DISCERNMENT OF WHAT GOD HAS IN MIND FOR OUR FUTURE TOGETHER.

This was by far our most robust conversation in 2024. From the conference and assembly conversations around Project Isaiah 43 to the unveiling of the One Church Experiment, lay people and rostered ministers alike were part of the discussion. The Holy Spirit was evident in the conversation, discernment, and roll out and the Holy Spirit continues to be with the congregations that are exploring what the One Church Experiment might mean for their faith community.

OUTREACH TO AND ENRICHMENT OF NEW AND EXISTING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT MINISTRIES IN OUR SYNOD.

Deacon Frantz and Bishop Barbins went to New Orleans with 175 of our younger members for the ELCA Youth Gathering last summer; plans are underway for an all-Ohio youth week at HopeWood Pines this summer; and after being awarded a grant, a young adult ministry in the Northwest Conference is looking to multiply its ministry throughout the synod.



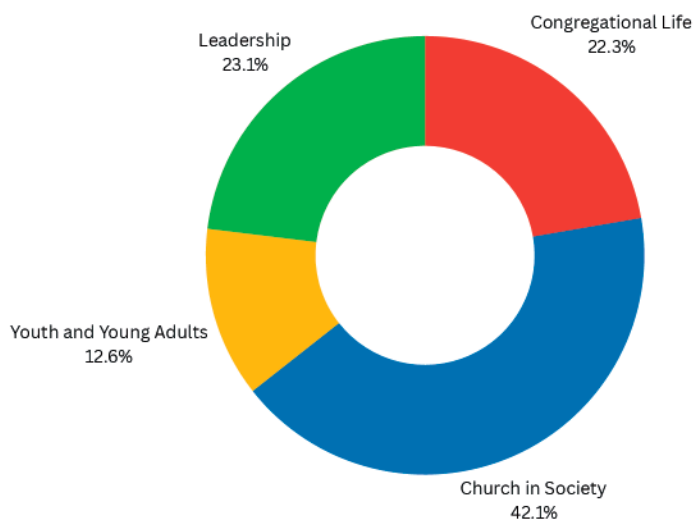
Northeastern
Ohio Synod

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.

2024 Actual Allocation of Expenses



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.

Church in Society: 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.

Congregational Life: Vibrant congregations are central to our mission. We support renewal efforts through 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!



Northeastern
Ohio Synod

2025 Initiatives

In 2025, we are focusing your synod staff efforts in these four key initiatives:

THE ONE CHURCH EXPERIMENT

A bold initiative that invites our congregations to explore new ways of being the Church united in mission while adapting to the changing needs of our communities.

EMPOWERING LAY LEADERSHIP

We are reinvigorating and/or rebooting Working Groups in our synod from Ecumenism to Young Adults in Global Mission, Immigration to Intersectionality. We are leaning into the gifts and passions of all our stakeholders so that we might be ignited for mission in the world.

EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES FOR ROSTERED MINISTERS

Pastors and deacons will participate in learning experiences to reimagine their ministry leadership, sharing new strategies for empowering others in their faith journeys.

ENGAGING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS IN CONTEXTUAL FAITH

Our focus will include creative ways to engage younger generations in a faith that is deeply rooted in the context of their lives and the world around them.



Northeastern
Ohio Synod

Ecumenical Worship Brings Witness of Unity in a Divided World

Christians from across denominations gathered on Thursday, January 23, 2025, at Christ the Redeemer Lutheran Church in Brecksville, Ohio, for an Ecumenical Prayer Service during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The service served as a powerful reminder of the unity shared in Christ, even in a world often marked by division.

Observed annually from January 18-25, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is a global invitation for Christians to come together in worship, reflection, and shared mission.



This year's gathering also marked the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, a historic milestone that shaped the Christian faith by establishing the Nicene Creed. The service provided an opportunity to reflect on this shared heritage and celebrate the deep connections that unite Christians across traditions.

Through prayer, scripture, and music, those in attendance embodied Jesus' prayer in John 17:21, "that they may all be one so that the world may believe." Held during the same week as the Presidential Inauguration, the service stood as a sign of hope, reconciliation, and collaboration in challenging times.

As the service concluded, those present were reminded that Christian unity is not just an annual observance but a lifelong calling. The spirit of the evening continues to resonate, inspiring deeper relationships, shared ministry, and a commitment to unity in the midst of diversity.



Thank you to all of the worship leaders and the people of Christ the Redeemer, Brecksville for hosting our unity service.

Participating Jurisdictions:

- Ohio Episcopal Area of the United Methodist Church
- Living Water Association, Ohio Northeast Conference, UCC
- The Episcopal Diocese of Ohio
- Western Reserve Presbytery, PC(USA)
- Eastminster Presbytery, PC(USA)
- The Catholic Diocese of Cleveland
- The Catholic Diocese of Youngstown
- Northeastern Ohio Synod, ELCA



Northeastern
Ohio Synod

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

TRINITY, SEBRING
ADVENT, UNIONTOWN
DIVINITY, PARMA HEIGHTS
CHRIST THE REDEEMER, BRECKSVILLE
ADVENT, MENTOR
HOLY TRINITY, NORTH CANTON
FIRST, LORAIN
GOOD SHEPHERD, CONNEAUT
PEACE, CLEVELAND HEIGHTS
ZION, VALLEY CITY
GOOD SOIL, ROCKY RIVER
ST JOHN, CANAL FULTON
BETHANY, ASHTABULA
ADVENT, CLEVELAND
TRINITY, VERMILION
ST PETER, WOOSTER (NEW PITTSBURG)
FIRST, STRONGSVILLE
MESSIAH, ASHTABULA
FAITH, FAIRLAWN
ST PAUL, LEETONIA
OUR SAVIOUR, HINCKLEY

GENEROSITY BETWEEN 5% - 7.4% OF GENERAL OFFERINGS

ST STEPHEN MARTYR, BELDEN CAMPUS
NEW HORIZONS, HOMERVILLE
GRACE, HUBBARD
EMMANUEL, SALEM
ST PAUL, SHARON CENTER
ST JOHN, WARREN (CHAMPION)
ZION, WOOSTER
BETHESDA ON THE BAY, BAY VILLAGE
TRINITY, GIRARD
MESSIAH, AKRON
ST MATTHEW, MEDINA
JERUSALEM, SEVILLE
IGLESIA LUTERANA LA TRINIDAD,
AKRON
BETHEL, MIDDLEBURG HEIGHTS
ADVENT, SOLON
REJOICE!, HUDSON
TRINITY, MAGNOLIA
ZION, NEW MIDDLETOWN

GENEROSITY EXCEEDING 10% OF GENERAL OFFERINGS

ST JOHN, BALTIC
LUTH CH OF THE MASTER, BEDFORD
EMMANUEL, NORTH GEORGETOWN
ST PAUL'S, ALLIANCE
ABIDING SAVIOR, ALLIANCE
ST JAMES, JEWETT
ST PAUL, RAVENNA
ZION, NORTH CANTON

GENEROSITY BETWEEN 2.5% - 5% OF GENERAL OFFERINGS

MESSIAH, FAIRVIEW PARK
ST LUKE'S, CUYAHOGA FALLS
NEW COVENANT, EAST CLEVELAND
EMMANUEL, ELYRIA
HOLY TRINITY, AKRON
CALVARY, EAST CLEVELAND
ST PAUL, JEFFERSON
SALEM, WOOSTER
ST PAUL'S, MASSILLON
LIVING WORD, MEDINA
SHANESVILLE, SUGAR CREEK
MARTIN LUTHER, YOUNGSTOWN
CANAAN, CRESTON
FIRST, CANTON
PEACE, ASHLAND
ST PAUL, BELLVILLE
ST PAUL, LUCAS
ST JOHN, LAKEVILLE (MCZENA)
BETHEL, YOUNGSTOWN (BOARDMAN)
ST JOHN'S, MINERVA (NEW FRANKLIN)
TRINITY, CARROLLTON
HOLY TRINITY, MASSILLON
BETHANY ENGLISH, CLEVELAND
ST PAUL'S, WARREN
CHRIST, WILLOUGHBY
ZION, DOYLESTOWN
CHRIST, AVON LAKE
ST JOHN, PERRYSVILLE
HOPE, MANSFIELD
LORDSTOWN, WARREN (LORDSTOWN)
ST JAMES, TUSCARAWAS
ST PAUL, BERA
LORD OF LIFE, CANFIELD
TRINITY, KENT
GRACE, WADSWORTH

GENEROSITY LESS THAN 2.5% OF GENERAL OFFERINGS

GRACE, DOVER
ZION, NEW WATERFORD
ST JACOB, MASSILLON
PRINCE OF PEACE, POLAND
EMMANUEL, WARREN
MESSIAH, NEWTON FALLS
CHRIST, STRUTHERS
PARMA, PARMA
MT MORIAH, BERLIN CENTER
TRINITY, MADISON
GRACE, STEUBENVILLE
PLEASANT VALLEY, LUCAS
ZION, YOUNGSTOWN
ST JACOB'S, NORTH CANTON
ST MICHAEL, MARSHALLVILLE
LORD OF LIFE, CHAGRIN FALLS
ST STEPHEN, STOW
ZION, LOUDONVILLE
PRINCE OF PEACE, WESTLAKE
HOLY TRINITY, BRUNSWICK
ST JOHN, PETERSBURG (NEW SPRINGFIELD)
TRINITY, CLINTON
CELEBRATION, CHARDON
ST PAUL, SMITHVILLE
REDEEMER, BROOK PARK
TRIUNE, BROADVIEW HEIGHTS
PEACE, CANTON
NEW LIFE IN LIBERTY, YOUNGSTOWN
ST JOHN, EAST LIVERPOOL
HOLY TRINITY, SALEM
FIRST, STRASBURG
CHRIST, MASSILLON
GOOD HOPE, NORTH LIMA
BETHEL, BATH
PRINCE OF PEACE, CORTLAND
JERUSALEM, COLUMBIANA
EMMANUEL, NEW PHILADELPHIA
MESSIAH, LYNDHURST
ST MARK, TALLMADGE

**The percentage is based on recorded 2024 mission support to the NEOS divided by the latest regular giving reported to the ELCA in a congregational report.*



Northeastern
Ohio Synod

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!

Contact Us



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Find Us on Social Media:



@neoselca



@neosynodhappenings



@NEOSynod



@neos-elca.org

We are excited about this new Annual Report! What did you think? Please take a moment to give us your feedback by scanning the QR code on this page.



Northeastern
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