

**North/West Lower  
Michigan Synod**

**P.O. Box 517  
Dewitt, MI 48820**

**517-321-5066  
[mittensynod.org](http://mittensynod.org)**

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## **On Death**

For some time, I have felt Death's shadow cast over our path as our church, society, world, and many of us individually walk through an unending valley (Psalm 23:4). More recently, I resonate with First Peter's observation: "Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour" (5:8). First Peter identifies our adversary as "the devil," whose existence we can debate. I identify our adversary as Death in all its forms, whose prowling, devouring reality we cannot deny.

Make no mistake. I am not publicly pleading for personal pastoral care. I am naming an existential reality that has reared its ugly head. Like a roaring lion, our adversary Death prowls around looking for someone to devour. Not that many years ago, I regularly conversed with people who challenged the gospel because they considered death natural, even necessary, for humanity and the planet to evolve. COVID-19 changed that perspective as Death became personal, powerful, pervasive, and, for a time, completely out of our control.

I capitalize "Death" to emphasize just how personal, powerful, and pervasive Death is. Lewiston is the latest in the long list of communities where Death reigned, a list that includes Oxford and East Lansing, because our society seems to love our guns more than our children. We seem to think the ability to align ourselves with Death by protecting our right to pull the trigger will somehow protect and preserve us from Death. Now Death wars in Russia and Ukraine and Israel and Gaza. Closer to home, I can only say that cancer has become my hated, dreaded enemy for the lives it claimed. Death may be natural. Parents burying their children and congregations burying their pastor is not.

And Death is not content confining itself to devouring individuals. For some time now, like a hungry lion, Death has prowled around, looking to devour tangible expressions of Christ's Church. In the same way we refer to our loved ones dying as "passing," so we speak of congregations celebrating their "holy closure" and "completing their ministry." Even when closing is the right decision, it brings the sting of Death. On All Saints Day, I remembered and prayed for the 17 congregations that died during my time as bishop. I prayed fully aware that there are more deaths of congregations to come.

When we can point to congregations celebrating their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we can forget or deny that, like all living things, congregations have lifespans. We mistakenly conclude that churches are meant to endure forever. The death of congregations can be somewhat more acceptable when they have a long and revered history. But when their lives are short, when we know and remember those who invested so much of themselves to establish and maintain a congregation, or when we are those people ourselves, or when we have fought so hard to prolong a congregation's life, we can be tempted to look for a reason, a person, a decision, or a circumstance that we can name as the cause of Death, someone or something that we can hold accountable for not defeating Death. Then, we think, at least we can make sure that no congregation will ever die again.

Like a roaring lion, our adversary Death prowls around looking for someone to devour. Confronted by our own death, the death of a loved one, or the death of a congregation, we can blame, we can punish, and perhaps we can keep Death at bay, at least for a time. We cannot prevent Death. We cannot overcome Death. We cannot resurrect from Death...

*[I invite you to pause and take this in, as I did, before reading on.]*

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Thankfully, Jesus can. Thankfully, Jesus does. Jesus resurrects. Jesus overcomes. Yet, Jesus does not prevent Death or keep Death forever at bay. Jesus tells a certain parable that I have come to love: "But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man; then indeed he may plunder his house" (Mark 3:27). One interpretation of this parable holds that Jesus is referring to our adversary, whether we name "the strong man" the devil or Death.

Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) asserts that, to "bind" the devil and Death, Jesus, though innocent, allowed himself to be executed on the cross, thereby entering "the strong man's house" or Satan's dominion of death. Jesus overcame Satan through innocent suffering and plundered his property, namely, freeing humanity held captive by Satan in sin and death.

Augustine's understanding grows out of Christians' reflection, since the second century, on the New Testament's testimony about the cross, as a curse on the one hand and a ransom on the other (Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 1:18-19). In some passages, Jesus saved us by succumbing to evil in death but then victoriously overcoming it. In other texts, Jesus allowed Satan to seize him as the "ransom" in exchange for which Satan frees the descendants of Adam and Eve [Luke 11:21-22; Mark 10:45]. The good news is that, while Death is inevitable, thanks to Jesus, Death is not invincible.

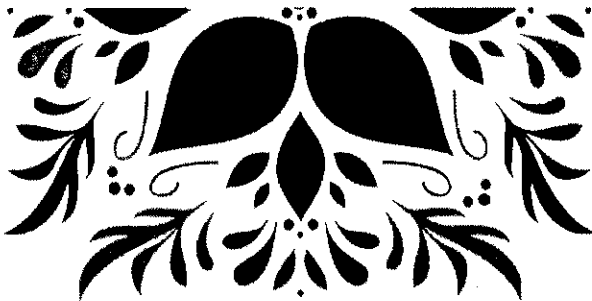
So, whether we are devoured by Death, held hostage by Death, or killing ourselves with our feeble attempts to outrun Death or keep Death at bay, Jesus delivers us from Death. More precisely, Jesus delivers us through death to new life. And this is as true for our beloved churches as it is for our beloved ones and for us ourselves.

Notice I switched to a lowercase "d" to name death as a sign that death loses its power, its victory, its sting. We can live in confidence and hope, especially when the shadow of death is cast over our path as our church, society, world, and we ourselves walk through an unending valley.

Pastor Sarah Samuelson recently said to me, "Sometimes it stinks. And all we have is Jesus. Thankfully, we do. We have Jesus." Preach it, Pastor Sarah! It's what we need to hear! Amen.

Walking alongside you,

The Rev. Craig Alan Satterlee, Ph.D., Bishop



NORTH/WEST LOWER MICHIGAN SYNOD ELCA

## **A SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS**

### **Advent and Christmas Worship Videos**

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod will be rereleasing the Synod produced Lessons and Carols video worship service for congregational use.

If there is interest, Bishop Satterlee will also record a sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Advent (December 24) for congregational use.

If your congregation would like to receive access to these videos, please complete the form linked below. Video links will be emailed to those registered on Monday, December 18, 2023.

Register: <https://forms.gle/ET31jCBuayUSpeXF6>

If you have additional questions, please contact [communications@mittensynod.org](mailto:communications@mittensynod.org).

## Safety and Security for Houses of Worship

Sometimes it is difficult to comprehend the world we live in. Even churches are not as safe as they once were. These days, it takes planning and caution to protect against things we didn't even think about years ago. In my first call, now over 40 years ago, the church doors were not locked. Then one Halloween evening, some kids got into the church after midnight and rang the bell. It scared the daylights out of me because we lived in the parsonage next door and I woke up and thought I was late for church.

These days churches and other houses of worship must worry about active shooters, acts of domestic terrorism, violent extremists, and so much more. The good news is that with planning and vigilance there are many ways we can continue to make church a safe place. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and The Department of Homeland Security have provided resources for the safety and security of Houses of Worship. You can access them on the "Resources for Congregations" of our synod's website under the "Disaster Planning & Response" heading: <https://www.mittensynod.org/congregations/resources-for-congregations/>

I would start with the [Department of Homeland Security's Self-Assessment Tool for Houses of Worship](#) and it addresses a variety of vulnerabilities. Then, use the resources [Protecting Places of Worship](#), and [The Power of Hello](#), and the [Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship](#) to enhance security and create emergency plans. It might also be helpful to talk to your local city or state police, county sheriff, local fire department and emergency medical service. Ask them for resources and see if they would like to do a tour of your church building or a presentation safety and safety planning to your congregation's leadership.

Think about safety and security for those that are in the building during the week; the pastor, secretary, custodial, and others. What procedures and precautions should be in place for them? Church Mutual Insurance offers free resources for security and safety on their [Safety Resources Page](#). The ELCA also offers a [Risk Management](#) page with additional resources.

We gather to worship and to share Jesus in word and sacrament. Our primary calling as witnesses is to go out into the world and share Jesus. We then invite folks into a community of people who are welcoming, accepting, and share and follow Jesus. Creating a safe place for all people to come and meet Jesus in worship and all we do as the church is a primary part of our mission.

Pastor David Sprang  
Assistant to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission  
Lutheran Disaster Response

### ELCA Webinar: Learn to Construct a Narrative Budget for Your Community

On Monday, November 27, the Rev. Tim Brown, the ELCA's Director of Congregational Stewardship, will lead a free webinar going step by step through how to create a narrative budget.

Bring your current (2023) budget and pieces of your projected (2024) budget, and get ready to do some work in real time to start the narrative budget process. Over the course of 45 minutes (with plenty of time for questions), this webinar will prepare you to present a narrative budget for your next annual meeting.

Pastors, council members, stewardship teams and all other interested parties are welcome to attend. The webinar will be held via Zoom on November 27, 2023 from 7:30-8:30pm ET.

Learn more: <https://bit.ly/47rUCfP>

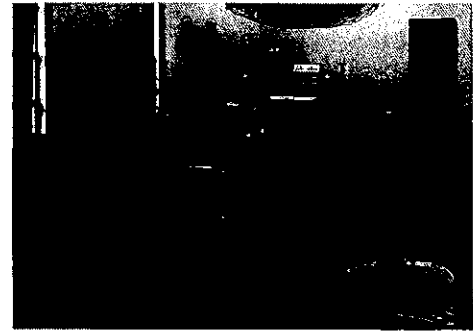
## My Burden is Light Preaching Retreat

In the middle of October, preachers and receivers of the word gathered at the St. Francis Retreat Center in Dewitt for a preaching retreat focused around Bishop Satterlee's newest book, *My Burden is Light: Making Room for Jesus in Preaching*.

The retreat began with worship in which Bishop Daniel Beaudoin of the Northwestern Ohio Synod reflected on Matthew 11:28-30, placed stoles around rostered ministers shoulders as a reminder of our calling as preachers, and prayed for all of us who hear the word. The worship offered a meaningful time for reflection and grounded participants for the days ahead.

Over the next two days, Bishop Satterlee led us in talking about Jesus — in our preaching, in our teaching, in the various congregations we are a part of, and, mainly, in the totality of our everyday lives. There was also a significant amount of time for fellowship, relaxed conversation, laughter, shared joy and sorrow, rest, and renewal.

One of the things I really enjoyed was thinking about where Jesus was when we preach. Perhaps Jesus is right next to us in the pulpit or standing at the altar. Or maybe Jesus is a little further away and is sitting in the narthex or with the choir. Many of us mentioned how we see and experience Jesus in the pew, in the faces looking back at us, and as we all try to put ourselves in the pew listening to the preacher. Each and every person who attended the retreat went home with a different sense of Jesus in our preaching and our lives than we had when we arrived.



I had the bonus of having a dear friend from seminary attend the retreat and feel she summarized it well. Rev. Jen Hartweg-Brown shared, "It was a retreat in every sense of the word: Bishop Satterlee accompanied those gathered through a process of sermon preparation that allowed the preacher to encounter the love of Jesus and the presence of God and the Spirit in every step of the process. Bishop Daniel's gifts of spiritual care centered us in God's love and faithfulness many times throughout our days, as we were reminded continually of God's love and care for us and all people. And the beauty of the grounds of the retreat center offered a peaceful setting for fellowship, contemplation, laughter, and rest."

We give thanks to those who attended our synod's learning events and retreats this fall and are excited to gather with many of you at our upcoming winter events!

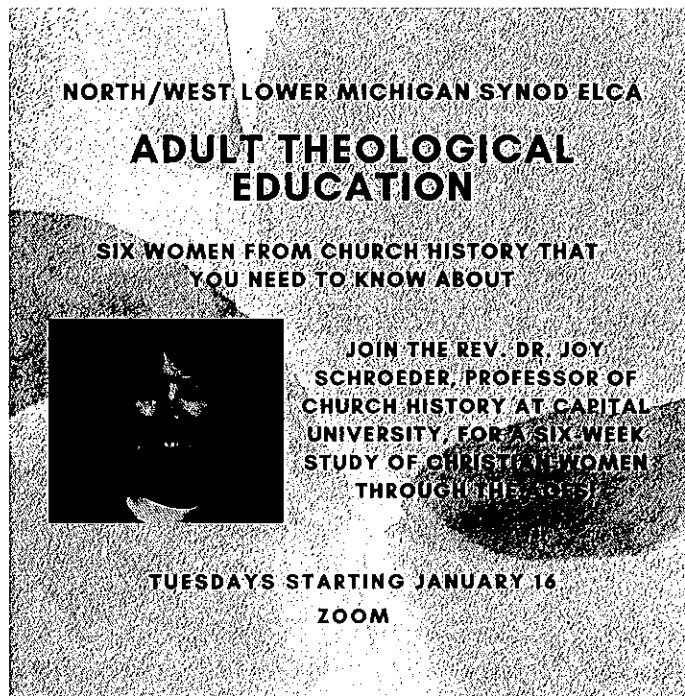
The Rev. Chrissy Bright  
Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Candidacy

### Living Lutheran

Living Lutheran's final print issue will arrive in mailboxes the first week of December. Afterward, Living Lutheran will shift to an all-digital platform with new content appearing daily (no subscription or login required) on <https://www.livinglutheran.org/>

Get Living Lutheran stories sent right to your inbox by signing up for LL Stories, a free email digest, at [livinglutheran.org/subscribe](https://www.livinglutheran.org/subscribe) and follow @Living Lutheran on Facebook and Instagram!

## Adult Theological Education - Six Women from Church History that You Need to Know



The North/West Lower Michigan Synod announces the next session of our Adult Theological Education program: Six Women from Church History that You Need to Know About. Join the Rev. Dr. Joy Schroeder for a six-week study of Christian women through the ages starting on January 16, 2024!

The Rev. Dr. Joy Schroeder, an ELCA pastor, is Professor of Church History at Capital University, where she teaches in the Department of Religion and Philosophy and Trinity Lutheran Seminary. She holds the Trinity Chair in Lutheran Heritage. Dr. Schroeder earned a B.A. in Classics from Luther College, a Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. from the University of Notre Dame.

She is the author of five books on the history of how Christians and Jews have interpreted scripture. Her most recent book, co-authored with Marion Ann Taylor (University of Toronto) is *Voices Long Silenced: Women Biblical Interpreters through the Centuries* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2022).

Ever since the beginning of Christianity, women have been teachers, writers, and preachers of the Gospel. Learn about the struggles and accomplishments of six exemplary women from church history:

- Perpetua (d. ca. 202), North African martyr and visionary writer
- Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), Saxon nun and theologian
- Argula von Grumbach (ca. 1492-ca. 1554), Bavarian Lutheran reformer and pamphlet writer
- Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695), Mexican nun and poet
- Jarena Lee (1783-1864), African American preacher
- Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), Indian Bible translator and founder of women's shelters

Dr. Schroeder will discuss these women's inspirational lives and writings.

The class will meet on six consecutive Tuesday evenings: January 16, 23, 30, February 6, 13, 20, 2024 from 7:00 - 8:15pm ET via Zoom. This course is open to all adults, both laypeople and rostered ministers, and is free of charge. Sessions will be recorded and available to registered participants. Registration is required and will close on January 5 2024. Register now: <https://forms.gle/L5nBFWXf4sEqhbLg9>

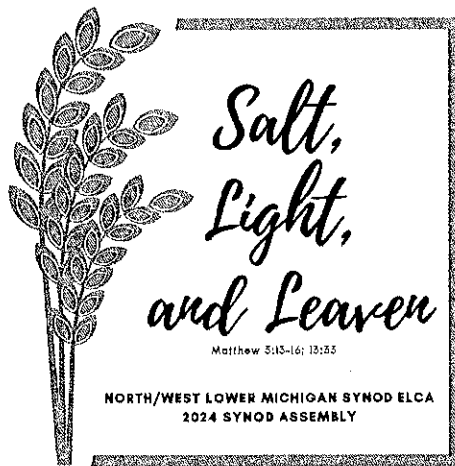
Additional information, including Zoom links, will be sent via email closer to the start of the course. If you have additional questions, please contact [communications@mittensynod.org](mailto:communications@mittensynod.org).

### Young Adults in Global Mission

The ELCA's Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program is ready for new volunteers! Through YAGM young adults aged 21 to 25 learn what it means to serve in a spirit of accompaniment as they walk alongside global church companions. They'll become immersed in a new community and form deep relationships. Applications are now accepted on a rolling basis, year-round. Those who apply by February 1 will be considered for the service year beginning the following August. Priority will be given to those who apply before January 15. Learn more at [ELCA.org/YAGM](https://ELCA.org/YAGM).

## Salt, Light, and Leaven: 2024 Synod Assembly

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod is excited to announce "Salt, Light, and Leaven" as the theme for the 2024 Synod Assembly!



Jesus names us "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world," and compares the kingdom of heaven or reign of God to "leaven" (Matthew 5:13-16; 13:33). At the 2024 Synod Assembly, we will celebrate ways our congregations are "salt of the earth," "light of the world," and "leaven" of the kingdom in ways large and small as we prayerfully participate in Jesus's own work of reconciling the world to God's very self.

In order to celebrate and share the ways our congregations are "salt of the earth," "light of the world," and "leaven" of the kingdom, congregations or groups of congregations will have the opportunity to produce and submit a video showcasing one way they are salt, light, and leaven. We will select four videos to be shown during the 2024 Synod Assembly. Congregations who submit a video will receive a \$100 donation to their ministry and congregations whose videos are selected to be shown at the 2024 Synod Assembly will receive a \$500 donation to their ministry.

All congregations in our synod are invited to submit a video for consideration. There is a limit of one video per congregation. The goal of the video is to provide an experience of the congregation's ministry rather than a report about it. Think of the video as a "virtual tour" of an aspect of the congregation and ministry. This might be an annual event, such as providing backpacks to school kids, or an on-going ministry such as a food pantry. Preference will be given to ministries that in some way include sharing the story of Jesus. Videos must be 8-10 minutes in length.

Congregations interested in submitting a video must complete the interest form by January 15, 2024. This form confirms a congregation's intent to submit a video. All videos must be submitted by April 3, 2024 for review.

Selected congregations will be notified on April 17, 2024. Videos from congregations who are not selected will be shared on the Synod's social media after the conclusion of the 2024 Synod Assembly. As this opportunity is for congregations, Synod task forces, tables, and ministries are not eligible. Congregations should review the submission guidelines carefully and contact [assembly@mitten-synod.org](mailto:assembly@mitten-synod.org) with any questions.

### Video Submission Guidelines

- Congregations must be located in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod. Synod task forces/tables/ministries are not eligible for this opportunity.
- There is a limit of one video per congregation.
- Videos must focus on one area or ministry that shows how the congregation or group of congregations is salt, light, and leaven. Preference will be given to ministries that include sharing the story of Jesus.
- Congregations must produce and submit their own videos. The Synod Staff is not available to assist with video production.
- Videos must be 8-10 minutes in length.
- Congregations interested in submitting a video must complete the interest form by January 15, 2024. Interest Form: <https://forms.gle/xVqyZF1GXYrR9occ8>
- All videos must be submitted by April 3, 2024. Video Submission: <https://bit.ly/3tdgLPg>

<b>Synod Finances</b>		
	<b>October</b>	<b>Year to Date</b>
<b>Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund</b>		
Mission Support Revenue	88,292	878,098
Synod Assembly Revenue	0	40,550
Other Revenue	6,412	62,169
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>94,704</b>	<b>980,817</b>
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	45,146	440,049
Synod Assembly Expense	0	54,665
Other Expenses	58,709	491,958
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>103,855</b>	<b>986,662</b>
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	(9,151)	(5,845)
Beginning Fund Balance	512,632	509,326
Ending Fund Balance	503,481	503,481
<b>Other Fund Balances</b>		
Unrestricted-Designated		600,895
Temporarily-Restricted Endowment-Related*		730,081
Temporarily-Restricted		334,216
Permanently-Restricted		1,002,547
<b>Total - All Funds (as of 10/31/23)</b>		<b>3,171,220</b>

\*October 31 ELCA Ministry Growth Fund Account Statements were not available at the time of publishing this summary. The amounts shown here reflect balances as of 9/30/23.

### Mission Support

Third quarter contribution statements will be mailed this month along with a supply of Mission Support remittance slips for the coming year.

Please review your statement and compare it with your records. If you find any discrepancies, contact Rebecca Bossenbroek at [finance@mittensynod.org](mailto:finance@mittensynod.org).

### Stories of Faith in Action

The October 2023 Mission Support Memo is now available!

In this edition, learn about the Northeastern Minnesota's *Walking Together* event and an upcoming stewardship webinar on narrative budgets.

The October 2023 Mission Support Memo and previous Mission Support Memos are located on the ELCA website: <https://bit.ly/3Qf7waL>

## Crisis in the Holy Land

In response to the Hamas attacks in southern Israel on October 7 and Israel's declaration of war against Hamas, including the ongoing siege of Gaza, the ELCA offers statements and resources from some of our Lutheran and global partners in the region. Lutheran Disaster Response is also responding to the humanitarian crisis in the Holy Land.

We invite you to read these statements, review the resources, and join us in prayer.

Read Now: <https://elca.org/crisis-holy-land>

## Boundary Training for Rostered Ministers

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod will be offering Boundary Training as a four part series via Zoom. These 1-hour sessions will be held on Thursdays at 11am ET on January 11, 18, 25, and February 1, 2024. Participants are expected to attend all four sessions.

We are privileged that Barbara Keller, Misconduct Prevention Director for the ELCA, will be the presenter for the initial session on January 11. Pastor David Sprang and Pastor Rosanne Anderson will lead the other three sessions.

Register Now: <https://bit.ly/3ZU0HyE>

## 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering



The 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering will be held July 16-20, 2024 in New Orleans under the theme, "Created to Be." It will also include MYLE, tABLE, and Young Adult gatherings.

Registration for the ELCA Youth Gathering is now open! Registration prices, deadlines, and information about the process is available on the Gathering's website. Learn more: <https://elca.org/gathering>

Synod Council recently approved the creation of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod ELCA Youth Gathering Fund, which seeks to make the ELCA Youth Gathering more accessible for families and congregations in our synod. The aim is to provide 100 \$250 scholarships for the 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering. Congregational Leaders can apply for these funds by completing this application: <https://bit.ly/3QYRQsz>

Congregations and individuals are welcome to give to this fund by mailing a check, designated "ELCA Youth Gathering Fund" to the Synod Office or by donating online and selecting "NWLM Synod ELCA Youth Gathering Fund" from the dropdown menu: <https://mittensynod.org/donate>

As you plan for the 2024 Gathering, Pastor Dan Schewe, our synod's ELCA Youth Gathering Champion, is available to answer questions. Email Pastor Schewe at [mittensynodgathering2024@gmail.com](mailto:mittensynodgathering2024@gmail.com).

Wishing you and your family a blessed

# Thanksgiving





## Congregations in Transition

Note: We include congregations on the public list when the called pastor or rostered leader completes her or his ministry in the congregation. Thus, congregations in which the pastor has resigned but is still serving are not listed here. We also do not post calls that are accepted until Bishop Satterlee signs the Letter of Call.

<b>Bay Conference</b>	<b>Pastor Emily Olsen-Brandt, Dean</b>	<b>Kalamazoo Conference</b>	<b>Pastor Joan Oleson, Dean</b>
Messiah/Bay City	Pastor Dan Stoneback, Interim / <b>CALL ACCEPTED:</b> Pastor Tim Jahn	Lord of Life/Portage	<b>CALL ACCEPTED:</b> Pastor Martha Porter-Reid; Installation November 26
St. Matthew/Bridgeport (Part-Time)	Pastor Andreas Teich, Stated Supply / <b>CALL ACCEPTED:</b> Pastor Diane Sponheim; Installation December 3	Prince of Peace/Portage	Seeking to call a deacon / Seeking candidates
Our Savior/Saginaw	Pastor Andreas Teich, Stated Supply though 2024	<b>Stony Lake Conference</b>	<b>Pastor Sarah Samuelson, Dean</b>
Resurrection/Saginaw (Part-Time)		Harbor of Grace/Muskegon	<b>CALL ACCEPTED:</b> Pastor Jack Ferra; Installation January 7
<b>Capital Area Conference</b>	<b>Pastor Neil Brady, Dean</b>	<b>Sunrise Conference</b>	<b>Pastor Megan Crouch, Dean</b>
University/East Lansing	Pastor Bryan Schneider-Thomas, Interim / Interviewing	New Life/Alcona County	Supply Pastors / Seeking candidates
<b>Greater Grand Rapids Conference</b>	<b>Pastor Julie Schneider-Thomas, Pastor Kate Van Valkenburg, Co-Deans</b>	St. Paul/Alpena	Seeking a part-time assistant pastor
St. Luke/Grand Rapids	<b>CALL ACCEPTED:</b> Pastor Kyle Duff; Installation November 12	<b>Traverse Conference</b>	<b>Pastor Jonathan Reid, Dean</b>
Trinity/Grand Rapids	Pastor Bob Linstrom last Sunday November 26 / Pastor Dennis Smith, Interim Senior Pastor	Feast of Victory/Acme (Part-Time)	<b>CALL ACCEPTED:</b> Pastor Haley Vay Beaman; Installation November 19
Bread of Life/Hudsonville	Pastor David Beese, Stated Supply / Discerning future	St. Paul/Reed City	Supply Pastors / Seeking candidates
Peace/Sparta	Supply Pastors		
Zion/Woodland (Part-Time)	Supply Pastors / Seeking candidates		