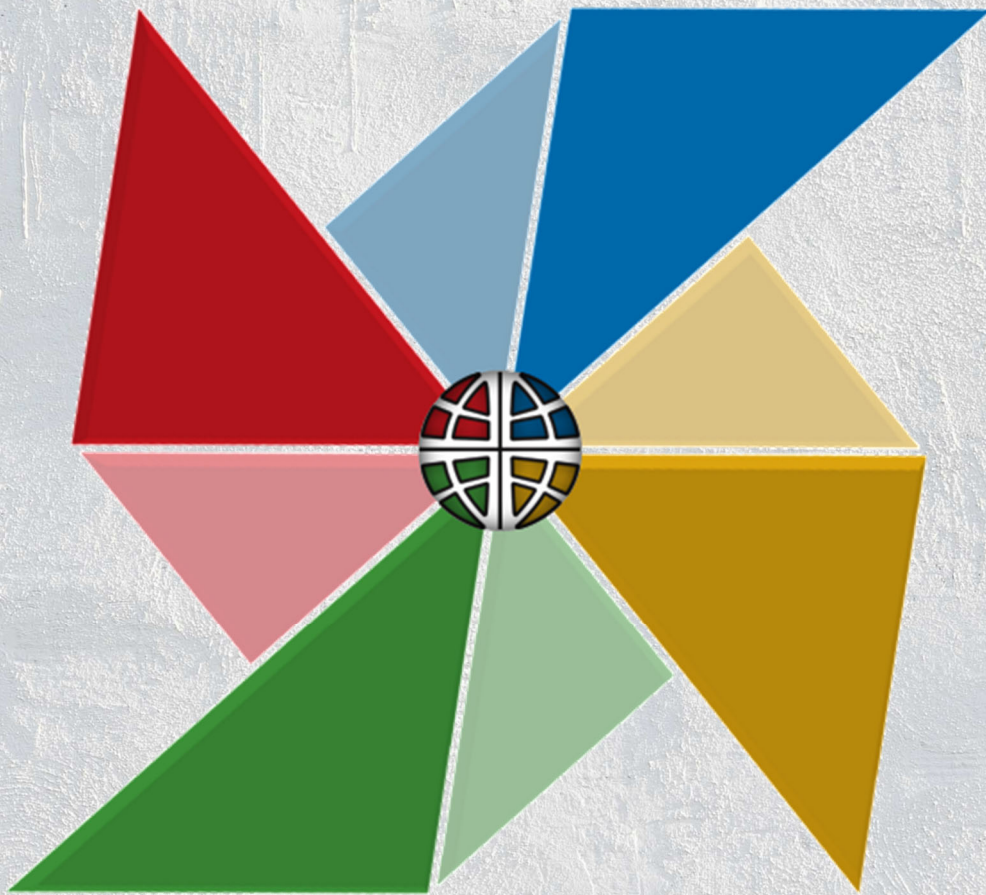


# *Spirit Breathed; Spirit Blown*



## **Walking Together 2024**



**Central States Synod** Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



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## From Our Presiding Bishop



*“We have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them” (1 John 4:16).*

Dear friends in Christ,

Thank you for your faithful and continuing partnership as we work together to help people discover the difference God’s grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation.

Because God’s grace and love have made a difference in our daily lives, we want others to experience that same love and acceptance. There are many in our communities who feel alone and are searching for love and connection. Sometimes we feel at a loss to know how to make a difference — what do we say, what can we do, how do we share God’s love?

You share this love every day. When you invite others to join in your faith community, to worship, to participate in service activities, to pray together, to share their story — these are all ways our neighbors experience the love of God in community.

There are examples of God’s love throughout our church as we work for healing, peace and justice to make a difference in the lives of those around us.

The Spirit is calling us to move together as one church to share the grace and love we experience every day. May God bless your time together.

In Christ,



The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

# From Our Synod's Bishop



## Bishop's Report for the Central States Synod Assembly 2024



As we continue to live out our call to join *God's reign of justice and radical love for the world by traveling the way of Jesus*, knowing that we are *united with Christ in baptism*, the questions I have been asking this past year are:

- What's church got to do with it?
- How does being the church enable us to participate in God's mission?
- Why do we need the church?

At our Fall Theological conference, Dr. Cheryl Peterson helped me reframe those questions by asking: **Who is the church?** The answer lies with the Spirit. The church is the community of faith brought to life by the breath of the Spirit who blows us out to serve God's world. In the ELCA, we live out this identity in an interdependent relationship as congregations, the synod, and the churchwide expression. As the bishop of the synod, I have worked with these three expressions this year in the following ways:

### Congregations

- Preached and participated in worship at 35 congregations across the synod, celebrating anniversaries and installations or simply visiting and being present.
- Had conversations with Trinity Lutheran in Otis, KS, about their concerns regarding the ELCA prior to their vote to disaffiliate in December of 2023.
- Have been working with volunteers, city officials, attorneys, and real estate brokers to sell the property of Bethany Lutheran Church in Webster Groves after the synod assumed administration of the property and closed the congregation. We were finally able to sell the property to another church. **This serves as a reminder that every congregation should develop a plan should they no longer be able to fulfill their purpose as a congregation; they, and not the synod, can make decisions about their property and legacy.**
- 34 of our congregations are served by Parish Ministry Associates or Synod Authorized Ministers – trained lay leaders who preside at communion by my authorization as bishop as an extension of my responsibility as the pastor of the synod. I am deeply grateful for the ministry of these individuals. In August, I conducted two online classes for individuals serving these congregations, lifting up the gifts of Lutheran Theology and how they inform our preaching and presiding at the sacraments.
- My associate, Rev. Dave Whetter, and I work with congregations to help them clarify their purpose and find pastoral leaders. This continues to be a challenge because of the shortage of rostered candidates and the inability of some of our congregations to afford a full-time or even part-time rostered minister.



**Synod** – We, all the congregations and ministries, are the synod!

- Led online presentations in the fall entitled, **What's Church Got To Do With It?** lifting up the importance of our interdependent relationship with all expressions of the church.
- Launched the Synod's **Ministry Lab**, which provides resources and education for congregations regarding:
  - Good Order – leadership
  - Means of Grace – how to read Scripture through a Lutheran lens.
  - Living Faith – how to do ministry collaboratively.

Check out the synod website at [www.css-elca.org/lab](http://www.css-elca.org/lab) for upcoming offerings.)

- Hosted the **Fall Theological Conference** for rostered and synod-authorized ministers. Dr. Cheryl Peterson was our speaker, helping us understand the identity of the church in connection to the work of the Spirit.
- Designed and presented boundary education workshops entitled **A Sacred Trust. All rostered and synod-authorized ministers** actively serving a congregation or ministry were expected to attend. There were five opportunities to attend, including three in-person and two online sessions.
- Worked with the synod council, an amazing group of leaders, to address the budget in light of the continued decrease in mission support received from congregations, as well as other matters, such as the decision to sponsor a resolution to become a **Reconciling in Christ Synod**, which will be presented at this assembly. I hosted conversations with rostered and synod-authorized ministers in early April and then with lay members in May to talk about what it means for the synod.
- I serve on the board of the Kansas Interfaith Action Coalition, which is our synod's public policy office through the ELCA.

### **Churchwide Expression of the ELCA**

- I serve as the chair of the leadership committee of the Conference of Bishops, which meets in person twice a year.
- I am chairing a churchwide task force charged with revising the candidacy process by which individuals become pastors and deacons to make it simpler, more consistent, and more flexible to meet the needs of the candidates and the church. We have been meeting for two years. Our goal is to complete our work by the churchwide assembly in 2025.
- I participate on the boards of the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago and Bethany Lutheran College in Lindsborg.
- Seven synods in the mid-west, including ours, are participating in a grant through the ELCA to improve the Quality of Calls for Women in Ministry. Our synod acts as the fiscal agent of this grant, and I supervise the project manager.

I deeply appreciate all the ways in which I am able to serve in and through this **one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic church, and continue to breathe** in the wisdom and power of the Spirit to guide my call.



Bishop Susan Candea

## From the Synod Discernment Team



### 2025 Bishop Election

Reflecting Together in Mindful Preparation

#### The Discernment Team's Purpose

In early 2024, anticipating the Bishop Election at the 2025 Central States Synod Assembly, the Synod Council established a Discernment Team to:

- design and carry out a process to invite the Central States Synod into a time of discernment concerning the needs, hopes and realities of our life together as the body of Christ in the Central States; and
- design and carry out a process for congregations and voting members to learn consistent biographical information about those discerning a call to be considered as bishop, who agree to share that information.

#### The Team's Work and Schedule

To that end, the Team began publishing monthly devotions in April 2024. That series, which recognizes our need for the Spirit's guidance, will continue through the 2025 Synod Assembly. The Team also developed questions designed to guide Synod conversations that identify our common understandings about the Synod's ministries, values, challenges, and needs. This will enable rostered ministers, in turn, to discern whether they are open to the call of serving as the Synod's next Bishop.

#### The Team's remaining timeline is:

June 2024 - August 2024:

- Voting members at the Assembly participate in table conversations using the discernment questions
- Individuals, congregations, and regional groups respond to the discernment questions through various means currently under development.

August 2024 - December 2024:

- The Team collates the responses along with statistical data provided by Synod Staff to develop a description of the Synod and its future calling.
- The Team develops a set of common biographical questions for use by those who discern they are open to being called to serve as the next Bishop, and develops a process to collect the completed forms.

January 2025 - March 2025:

- Rostered ministers review the Synod description and, if they discern an openness to being called as the next Bishop, complete and submit the biographical form.

June 2025:

- Nominations may be made at the 2025 Synod Assembly through the ecclesiastical ballot process.
- Bishop election.

#### The Team's Members

The Team, facilitated by **Cathy Hohl** (Lutheran Church of the Atonement, Florissant, MO) includes:

**Rev. Merle Brockhoff** – Retired, **Rev. David Frerichs** – St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Columbia, MO, **Andrea Keese** – Disciples of the Plains, Stuttgart, KS, **Rev. Kim Knowle-Zeller** – St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Cole Camp, MO, **Bill Lang** – Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Hutchinson, KS, **Nancy Nagel** – Vice-President, Central States Synod, Peace Lutheran Church, Washington, MO, **Debbie Schroeder-Saulnier** – Living Lord Lutheran Church, Lake St. Louis, MO





## 2025 Bishop Election

Reflecting Together in Mindful Preparation

### Discernment Questions

#### REFLECT

Use these questions to describe the current activities of the Central States Synod.

- What three words describe God's activity within the Central States Synod?
- What three words describe the Central State Synod's contribution to its member congregations?
- What does the current situation require of members of the Central States Synod?

#### MISSION

The church must constantly adapt to effectively proclaim the Gospel as the world changes. In this section, discuss your dreams for the Central States Synod mission over the next five years.

- How will the Holy Spirit use the Central States Synod to proclaim the Gospel over the next five years? Where is the Holy Spirit calling us to minister?
- What unique gifts do the (a) congregations; and (b) people in the Central States Synod have to support that mission?
- What will occur if these gifts are used effectively?
- What obstacles must be overcome to fulfill this mission?

#### LEADERSHIP

Use the questions below to consider the Central States Synod leadership and organizational structure.

- What are the most important gifts for ministry that the incoming Bishop should exhibit to guide the Central States Synod in fulfilling its mission?
- Without identifying a specific person, what type of person is the Holy Spirit looking for to lead us in this mission?
- What organizational structure will best support collaboration throughout the Central States Synod in fulfilling the Holy Spirit's call?

#### CLOSING

Use these questions to highlight what's most important.

- What question wasn't asked? (You may also offer an answer, at your option.)
- How, if at all, will the Central States Synod change as a result of these conversations?
- What do you want the incoming Bishop to have heard loudly and clearly?

## Congregational Vitality



The ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations, which we have all adopted, outlines a number of purposes for the individual congregation, including:

- Provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered.
- Provide pastoral care and assist all members to participate in this ministry.
- Challenge, equip, and support all members in carrying out their calling in their daily lives and in their congregation.
- Witness to the reconciling Word of God in Christ, reaching out to all people.
- Respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society.
- Motivate its members to provide financial support for this congregation's ministry and the ministry of the other expressions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
- Foster and participate in interdependent relationships with other congregations, the synod, and the churchwide organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

To support congregations in carrying out these purposes, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America deploys Directors for Evangelical Mission (DEM's) to each synod, with a mandate to assist congregations in living out their purpose in as robust a manner possible. As your DEM's, Aimee Appell and I assist congregations in measuring their success in carrying out the purposes of the congregation—a mission we have come to call "congregational vitality." We have now conducted such an assessment, using the Congregational Vitality Survey, with about a third of the congregations in our synod. We've used that data within the congregation to suggest avenues for growing vitality, such as the faithful innovation process, collaborative ventures, and leadership training.

We now have a process that congregations can utilize to grow vitality in their contexts, which utilizes tools like these:

- The Congregational Vitality Survey
- The Faithful Innovation process, which helps congregations experiment with new ways of responding to the movement of the Holy Spirit in their contexts
- Consultation with church councils and other leadership bodies to identify areas for growth and change
- Raising up and supporting opportunities for collaborative ministry
- ELCA Congregational Vitality training.

We want to hear from you, especially if you are interested in growing vitality in your context. We are grateful to serve this synod, and eager to work closely with all of our congregations.

Faithfully,  
Donna Simon  
[dsimon@css-elca.org](mailto:dsimon@css-elca.org)



## From Our Synod - Ministry Lab

Central States Synod



*Providing resources and tools so that we may live out God's purpose, united with Christ, as we walk the way of Jesus.*

A lab is a place of learning, a place to work with different “tools” or resources, to try things out and experiment to see what works. Starting in the Fall of 2023, the Central States Synod launched our Ministry Lab to expand our capacity to do ministry.

Since September, we have offered twenty five hours of educational, exploratory and collaborative sessions with another eleven hours already scheduled through November. Ministry Labs are organized into three areas of focus. . .

### GOOD ORDER

Lutheran theology recognizes the importance of good order to provide structures, policies, and practices that can undergird and support the ministry of the church.

### LIVING FAITH

Remembering our purpose, we grow, learn, experiment, and work together as the church to participate in God's reign of justice and love for the world for the sake of our neighbor. That is how we live out our faith.

### MEANS OF GRACE

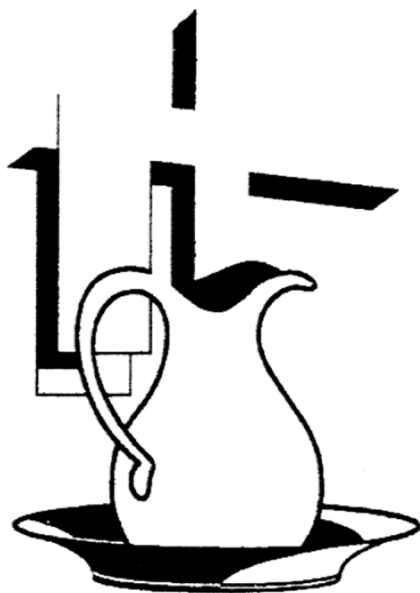
We have an incredible gift in our understanding that we are saved by grace through the faith of Jesus. How do we continue to lift and convey this gift so that it can be a transformational presence in our communities?

- Good Order - Topics include: leadership, constitutions, policies, building use, and stewardship
- Means of Grace - Topics include: worship, lay participation, language, and Biblical interpretation
- Living Faith - Topics include: connecting with community, social statements, ecumenism, and technology

If you have an idea, need or suggestion for a Ministry Lab topic, or would even like to host a lab, send your ideas to [communications@css-elca.org](mailto:communications@css-elca.org).

## ***From Our Synod's Parish Ministry Associates Program - Lay Ministry***

PMA Team Members: Rev. Adam Wutka, chair; PMA Rhonda Templing; Rev. Richard Monson; Rev. Larry Lemke; Rev. Kristen Koch; PMA Dennis Kemper; PMA John Dumler; PMA Jane Brda



The Parish Ministry Associate program seeks to equip people for their own ministry as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries.

Additionally, the program seeks to help identify and nurture the gifts God has given God's people for public ministry, so that that good news can be shared among all people. As servants we are obedient to Christ. As stewards of God's mysteries, we are responsible to care for and use the gifts given to us and to the church.

The PMA program continues to be a vital resource for the Central States Synod as it instills a greater sense of confidence and trust in the ministry of these laypeople from their congregations and the Bishop and synod staff. In addition, many of our PMAs (about 1/3) have consistently stepped up to serve in congregational Word and Sacrament ministry under authorization (SAMs), making them a vital tool in our multi-faceted efforts to continue pastoral support of our shrinking congregations across the synod.

As more ELCA synods continue to experiment with lay pastoral ministry to meet the leadership needs of their congregations, there have also been significant developments within our wider church to address these shifts. Several of our educational institutions are discerning how to better meet the needs of lay ministry training and our PMA program leadership here in the Central States Synod has been an integral part of those conversations, as well as a pioneering example to the rest of the church.

Here in our own synod, the Central States PMAs attended an excellent retreat at Camp Tomah Shinga in May 2023, and are looking forward to the 2024 PMA Conference just before Synod Assembly this year. In the summer of 2023, Bishop Candea and Pastor Adam also led a two-session Zoom workshop for our PMAs on the Gifts of Lutheran Theology.

Perhaps our most exciting news is the strong upturn in enrollment to the PMA program in recent years. Last February (2023) our PMA Team certified 1 new PMA and enrolled 3 new students. This March (2024) we approved the certification of 3 more PMAs and completed the enrollment of 5 new students. Our enrollment is on fire! Also, we have observed that more and more PMA students are discerning a call to take up the challenge of PMA certification specifically so that they can keep the ministry of their home congregation active and vital as future SAMs, since their congregation will likely never be served by another rostered minister. While this is a sad truth, we believe that the Holy Spirit is truly working through these people to answer the call.

Thank you for your continued support of this vital ministry of our synod. If you have any questions, or would like more information about becoming a Parish Ministry Associate yourself, please contact Pastor Adam Wutka: [pastoradamtlbwy@gmail.com](mailto:pastoradamtlbwy@gmail.com)



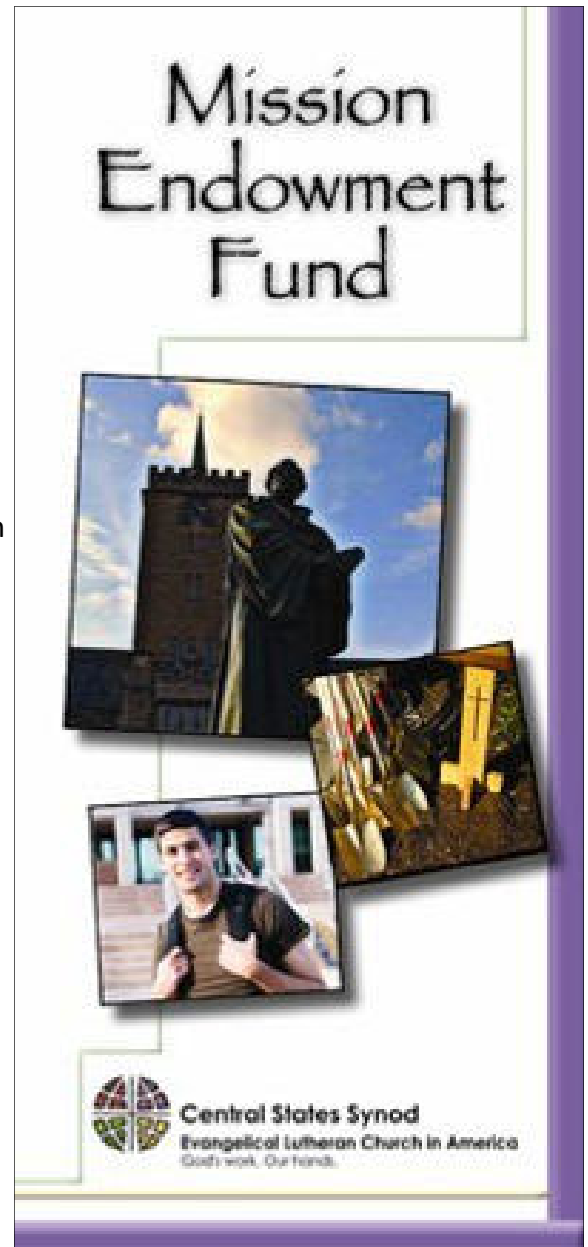
## ***From Our Synod's Mission Endowment Committee***

The priority of the mission endowment fund is to spend the earnings to grow ministry based upon the grant requests received and funds available for distribution. Fund requests are considered by a committee consisting of four members appointed by the synod council, along with the treasurer, bishop, and vice-president who are ex-officio. Current members of the committee are: Scott Schulte, (treasurer), Rev. Barb Jones, Ralph Donald, Dennis Allerheiligen, Rev. Kim Frederking, Nancy Nagel (vice-president) and Bishop Candeia

The following amounts were awarded in grants last year:

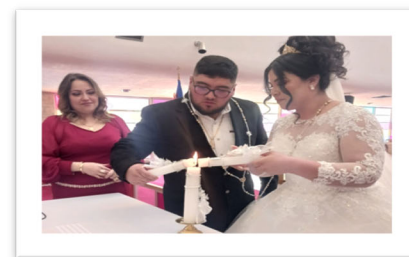
- \$21,000 in seminary scholarships to five candidates from the synod
- \$10,000 to the Synod Mission Table to be dispersed to synod authorized worshipping communities.
- \$4625 in debt reduction to five rostered ministers
- \$1700 for continuing education for two rostered ministers
- \$26,617 in other grants which included
  - \$4750 to the Gathering Table for building repairs
  - \$1000 to Gloria Dei, Wichita to support youth
  - \$5000 to Messiah, Springfield to support refugee program
  - \$867 to First Lutheran, St. Joseph to support community outreach program, Santa's Elevator
  - \$5000 to Hollis Renewal Center for building improvements
  - \$10,000 to Trinity, Russellville, MO to make bathroom handicap accessible

We also dispersed \$ 11,200 from a social ministry grant to 14 congregations in amounts of \$500, \$750, and \$1000 for various outreach and community ministries.



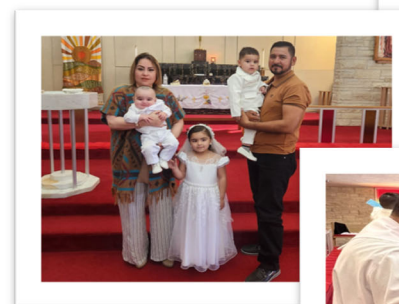
## From Our Synod's Mission Congregations - Mision San Juan de Dios

**WHAT ABOUT 2023:** Celebrating weddings and first communions. As I say: We live and celebrate the Love of God. A young couple, parents already, decided to celebrate their marriage After an orientation we had the ceremony.



**FIRST COMMUNION,** the whole family celebrates the sacrament, with reverence and love.

**BIBLE CLASS:** People come to learn more and more about the great Love of God for us. One evening a week they come to get the great message of the Gospel.



**BAPTISMS:** we have had some families that came looking to have their child baptized, after an orientation and being in our services the children are baptized.

**OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE CELEBRACION.** An annual tradition, devotion, and love, we celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12th. People make great effort to honor the Virgin Mary, and ask for her help in their prayers.



**PRAYER AND SHARING AT FAMILY HOMES :** It is a beautiful experience to go and visit families and pray with them. The posadas is a good opportunity to visit the families. It is so nice to share whatever the family wants to share, sometimes tamales, a drink, or food. Currently we are visiting a family each month, bringing the Lady of Guadalupe. We do the rosary and then, we reflect on the Gospel and pray for the whole family and whoever is there to pray. It is a beautiful experience.

**MY GOAL :** To keep our people with a spirit of belonging with a solid sense of community that they may feel a Lutheran identity, engage in our activities, and cooperate to build a real community of faith. Usually we use Facebook to share the Gospel and the reflection or sermon.

2023 was a very difficult year, I lost basic benefits (disability, life insurance and retirement). However I am happy and grateful to have the opportunity to be with people celebrating the Word and Sacrament. As always I am grateful for the support and encouragement I have had from Bishop and the whole staff of the Synod. This year Christ Lutheran Church is my biggest supporter for the ministry.

# From Our Synod's Mission Congregations - South Sudanese Worshipping Community

First Lutheran Church St. Joseph, MO 64501

**Mission Developer** Philip Deng: 40% of time at Church & Service, 60% other job.



## Participation -

- Average Worship Attendance 64
- Number of people who participate in ministry -1

## Ministry -

- Our congregation worships weekly every Sunday.
- Our Church prepares meals to serve the congregation and other members of the community during the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas and on New Year's day.
- We have done many funerals last year and more in this year

## Finances & Income -

- Church wide grant \$ 10,000
- Synod grant \$ 3000
- Offering from congregation or community worship \$ 1491
- Other sources \$1000

## The previous year:

During the previous year, we have worked to develop our congregation.

Our church reelects its administration committees and their leaders.

We conducted fellowship for Bible study and provided Sunday School services to the community

## Hopes/goals for this year

Looking forward to continue to offer Bible studies and Language teaching.

We hope fellowship with some African Churches in the Kansas City area to further spread the word of God.

We plan to do more community outreach with the hope to bring the people of God back to church.

We will empower our youth by taking them to fun places for activities such as Worlds of Fun, Oceans of Fun, the Zoo and to training centers for dancing.

## Our biggest challenges/concerns:

The great challenge is majority of our congregations work on Saturday which keep them from coming to church on Sunday.

Some of the trained Church clergymen, lay readers who help in the ministry have moved out of Saint





# From Our Synod's Mission Congregations - Gathering Table

## we invite

We invite our community to worship to bring the good news of Jesus and build God's kingdom with our neighbors to worship, engage in fellowship, Bible study, and holy communion.

Welcome to the Gathering Table  
Where All Are Fed.

## to worship.

In the heart of blight, poverty, crime and physical and mental illness, Rev. Ann Rundquist uses her extensive experience, education and passion to develop ministry and inspire volunteers to carry on Christ's work.

## walk with us

- Carry Us in Your Prayers
- Financial Help to Cover Utilities
- Grocery Gift Cards
- Cash
- Share Your Skills:  
(Carpenter, Plumber, Electrician, Seamstress, Barber, Beautician, etc.)

Have Questions?  
gatheringtablekc@gmail.com



GATHERINGTABLE

WHERE ALL ARE FED

EXPERIENCING CHRIST WITH OUR NEIGHBORS,  
BY INSPIRING HOPE, DIGNITY AND COMMUNITY.

### THE GATHERING TABLE DIFFERENCE

The Gathering Table is different from other non-profits because we strive to bring the good news of Jesus and build God's kingdom with the very poor. Those who may not have other opportunities to worship, engage in fellowship, enjoy a nutritious meal, participate in bible study, and holy communion.

### A PLACE FOR EVERYONE

We operate on only \$100,000 a year for expenses. Our budget includes food for meals, ministries, utilities, insurance and one 30 hr/week part time salary. In 2019, we served over 4500 meals. We have served over 17,000 meals in 2023. Meals are served up to 6 times a week.

### OUR AMAZING TEAM

Our amazing team of regulars and part-time volunteers are committed to helping others. We take our convictions and turn them into action. Think you would be a good fit? Contact us at gatheringtablekc@gmail.com for more information!

### VOLUNTEER

We'd love to have you come down and join us. Bring your bible study group in to cook breakfast or lunch, help serve, be a table buddy, and get to know our Parish. We need help in the clothing room, organizing and distributing clothes. Help keep our facility clean. Assist with repairs and plumbing. If you don't have time, we always welcome clothing and food donations.

**Gathering Table**

"I started coming for the meals, Pastor Ann trusted me and now I help the whole church from mowing the yard to helping move heavy equipment." - Bruce

"Since coming to Gathering Table my life has purpose." - Jennifer



# WALK WITH US HELP US GET A STEP AHEAD



**GATHERING TABLE IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

## our community

We offer **COMMUNITY** through worship, shared meals, and a sense of belonging. We give **HOPE** through worship, and by nurturing the community. We build **INDEPENDENCE** and **DIGNITY** via showers, clothing, nutritious meals, and being valued.



**1500 SHOWERS**

"I ain't had a hot shower in God knows how long til now. Now look at my feet I've had a hot shower and now I am officially clean."  
- Brandon



**17k MEALS SERVED**

"My meals were coming from restaurant dumpsters, what a difference it makes to get a hot, nutritious meal from Gathering Table. Thank you!" - Michelle

"This is meaningful volunteer work on Saturday and Sunday and doesn't interfere with my job in the school district." - Yvette



**GATHERINGTABLE**



**15k PIECES OF CLOTHING DISTRIBUTED**

**33% OF THE COMMUNITY HAS NO ACCESS TO HEAT, ELECTRICITY OR WATER**



**800 LOADS OF LAUNDRY**

"I came here 7 years ago for a hot lunch for me and my nieces. They were baptized several years later and loved Bible School. Now I volunteer with food and clothing. I like the responsibility and Pastor trusts me." - Jennifer

**EXPERIENCING CHRIST WITH OUR NEIGHBORS, BY INSPIRING HOPE, DIGNITY AND COMMUNITY.**

## GATHERING TABLE

**Pastor Ann Rundquist**

5001 Independence Ave. - Kansas City, MO 64124  
(785) 643-7697 - [pastorannrundquist@gmail.com](mailto:pastorannrundquist@gmail.com)  
[www.gatheringtablekc.org](http://www.gatheringtablekc.org)



**SCAN QR CODE**



**VISIT WEBSITE**

**LEARN ABOUT US**

**MAKE A DONATION**

## help us

**WE NEED** Jeans & Belts, All Sizes: Guests walk everywhere, they are tall and slim.

**WE NEED** Shirts, Tops & Undergarments: Washable Tops, New Underwear, Socks & Bras

**WE NEED** Outdoor Wear: Hats, Gloves, Coats, Shoes & Boots

**WE NEED** Food: Canned Vegetables, Pasta, Tomato Sauces, Single Serve Canned Tuna, Soups, Chili, Chicken, Fruit & Protein Bars

## ***From Our Synod's Companion Synod***

The Central States Synod has companion church relationships with the Kote District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea (ELCPNG) as well as the Lutheran Synod of the Urals, Siberia and the Far East of Russia. These relationships are rooted in “accompaniment,” which promotes the values of mutuality, inclusivity, vulnerability, empowerment and sustainability. Through the program, companion churches and ELCA synods nurture and strengthen one another for life and ministry through prayer, study, communication, exchange of visitors and sharing of resources.

### **Kote District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea (ELCPNG)**

A group of 4 individuals from the Central States Synod together with representatives of three other synods that have companion relationships with districts of the ELCPNG will travel to Papua New Guinea in August for a Consultation and visitation. The four are, Gary Teske, Aimee Appell, Daniel Lilienkamp and Joyce Benedict. The purpose of this visitation is to re-energize our relationship following the interruption to our working together caused by the Covid Pandemic.

It is also to:

Meet and get to know new district leadership.

To follow-up on the Sunday School project that our synod collected money for following our 2019 consultation and visitation.

To recruit young adults from PNG to serve at Camp Tomah Shinga as camp counselors through the ELCA international camp counselor program. And to establish and renew our ties with new and old friends such as Walter Tiu, Natasha, Noel, and many others.

And to explore new ways that we can walk together to help and encourage one another in our lives as followers of Jesus Christ.



The members of the Central States Synod and Kote District who met together for the last consultation and visitation in 2019. The Central States Synod was represented by Emily Greble, Gary Teske, Amy Truhe and Keith Holste.

***Please remember our Companion Christians in your personal and congregational prayers. Also, consider a special contribution to the Companion Synod Ministry. The companion synod team needs to raise the funds for the travel to the August visitation as there are no funds in the Synod budget for this purpose.***



## The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the Urals, Siberia and the Far East of Russia

The war between Russia and Ukraine has severely hampered our work with Russia. However, we have managed to keep in touch by means of email and zoom. Missionary Bradn Buerkle was forced to leave Russia, but not his ministry, following the outbreak of the war and is now living in Germany. Pastor Buerkle continues to provide weekly sermons and continuing education events by means of the internet. For a time after the outbreak of the war with Ukraine we were having difficulties getting funds to the churches in Russia due to sanctions. That problem has been resolved and our companion Christians in Russia are now able to receive funds for the support of Pastor Lapochenko and the ministries of the Russian Far East.

Since our last Synod Assembly, Pastor Manfred Brockmann, the Pastor who led the renewal of the Lutheran Church in the Russian Far East following perestroika, has died. The pastor who succeeded him is Vitaly Mohr and the reports are that the congregation in Vladivostok is thriving under his leadership. We have been asked to help provide financial support for the ministry of Pastor Mohr. Maintaining the ministry of Pastor Vitaly Mohr in Vladivostok is a very high priority for the ELSUSFE.



Pastor Vitaly Mohr processing in at the beginning of a worship service at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Vladivostok, Russia.

At the present time we are unable to visit Russia for obvious reasons. However, Rev. Alexander Scheiermann, bishop of the ELSUSFE would like to visit our Synod sometime in 2025. The companion synod team is working on this.

In September, Rev. David Whetter and Rev. Jon Brudvig will represent our Synod at a gathering in Serbia. This gathering will include representatives of other ELCA synods that have companion church relationships with the Lutheran Churches in Russia and Eastern Europe. Bishops and representatives of the Lutheran churches in Russia and Eastern Europe will also be there. this will be an opportunity to meet together with our Lutheran Siblings in Russia and Eastern Europe to worship together and provide encouragement and support to them in the face of the needs and challenges they are dealing with.

***Please remember our Cousin Christians in Russia in your prayers. Also, consider a special donation for the support of Pastor Vitaly Mohr, or Pastor Alexander Lapochenko, or for the ministry of the Russian Far East.***

# From Our Justice Ministries - Hearts Across the Heartland

**Approved to be a standing committee of the Central States Synod by the Assembly 2022.**

During the 2022 Synod Assembly, the Central States Synod designated Hearts Across the Heartland (a grassroots organization of LGBTQIA+ affirming members, pastors, and congregations of the synod) as a ministry partner and LGBTQIA+ social justice team for the CSS. This group was formed in 2019 by Kansas City ELCA members and congregations organizing around having a presence at KC Pride and has become a bi-monthly zoom fellowship of those interested in creating a more inclusive church. Hearts Across the Heartland is currently co-led by Rev. Megan McLaughlin and Dee Morin assisting congregations in their areas.



The synod has directed Hearts Across the Heartland to:

- develop educational materials on LGBTQIA+ issues and concerns that are being faced in our society for congregations and rostered leaders
- create resources and practices to make our synod meetings and spaces more welcoming for LGBTQIA+ persons.
- add sexual identity and gender expression to our current diversity training of rostered leaders.
- partner with Kansas Interfaith Action, Missouri Faith Voices, and other community groups to raise awareness and advocate for the rights of LGBTQIA+ persons.

## Resources are Available on the Synod Website!

Check out the Hearts Across the Heartland page [Hearts Across the Heartland | Central States Synod \(css-elca.org\)](https://www.elca.org/central-states-synod/hearts-across-the-heartland) to see what's available!

## Traveling the Way of Jesus

As part of our call to provide education and support for congregations having conversations about our Gospel call and inclusion of LGBTQIA+ folks across the Synod, members of Hearts Across the Heartland created a four-session study of scripture and Lutheran theology that is now available for congregations, conferences, and the Synod to use! An overview of the study is below, and the materials are available on the Synod website. Contact the Synod office to learn more!

### Session 1: What's the Word?

- Focus: Luther's 3-fold understanding of the Word, scriptural authority
- Application: Reading Biblical texts looking for Christ, interpretive questions in community

### Session 2: What Does the Word Say?

- Focus: Scripture is the cradle for Christ, Biblical interpretation using law/Gospel, lens of Christ, let scripture interpret scripture
- Application: Practice using scripture to interpret scripture

### Session 3: God's Word is Love

- Focus: God's Word leads us to love all, not judge
- Application: Reading scripture to help overcome differences

### Session 4: What Does this Mean?

- Focus: Application of Lutheran hermeneutic to Biblical interpretation
- Application: Utilizing scriptural interpretation to think about current issues (example-sexuality)

## Advocated as People of Faith for LGBTQIA People in MO

Cooperated with clergy across the state, coordinated by statewide advocacy organization [PROMO www.promoonline.org](http://www.promoonline.org), to advocate as people of faith for and with LGBTQIA folks, especially trans folks, in response to the 40+ bills that have been introduced this legislative session restricting access to health care, educational representation, sports for trans women, and other basic freedoms. Many from our Synod attended hearings and rallies at the Capitol and locally, wrote and called legislators, worked on educating their communities, and in other ways advocated for and supported LGBTQIA people in our Synod.



## From Our Justice Ministries - Hunger Team

In 2020 a Synod Hunger Team was formed. This team began as a forum to evaluate and make recommendations about hunger ministries in the Synod applying for an ELCA Domestic Hunger Grant. From that work, we considered ways to support both the ministries that received grants, and those that did not. We know that food insecurity affects all our communities—urban, rural, small town, suburban. Ninety-six percent of ELCA congregations participate in some form of anti-hunger work, from community meals to food pantries and more! In 2023, congregations and individuals in the Central States Synod gave **\$344,847 to Lutheran Disaster Relief** and **\$428,898 to ELCA World Hunger** directly or through the synod.

THANK YOU for generously sharing your abundance!

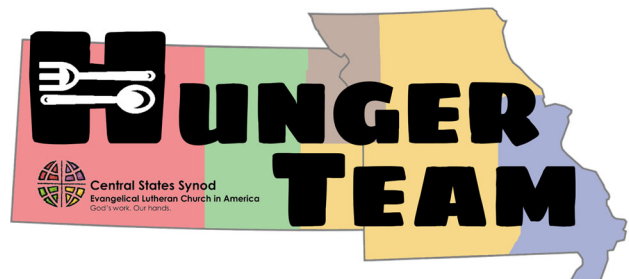
As a result of your generosity to ELCA World Hunger, four ministries in the Central States Synod are in the midst of a three-year Domestic Hunger grant cycle:

- **God's Helping Hand and Unity Lutheran** – for the continued development of a commissary kitchen, community garden and funding for graduate student interns to assist with fund-raising, program development and evaluation;
- **RSVP of Northeast Kansas** – for the preparation of low-cost freezer meals for persons who are elderly or disabled in this rural community with limited grocery shopping options;
- **ICT Food Rescue, Wichita, KS** – to distribute unavoidable food surplus, sharing with the food insecure of Wichita;
- **The Gathering Table SAWC, Kansas City, MO** – for accompanying and advocating for their neighbors living in poverty as they seek help from medical providers, rent and utility agencies, food pantries, Social Security, and more.

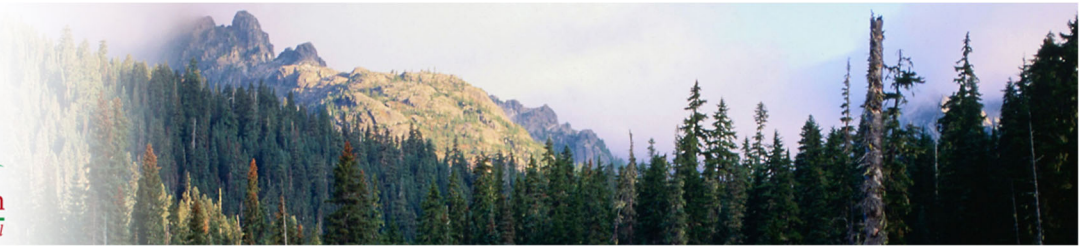
The 2024 application process for Domestic Hunger Grants (DHG) is open through June 16 2024. The application process begins with a simple two-page Letter of Intent (LOI). Learn more at: [www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/ELCA-World-Hunger/Get-Involved/Domestic-Hunger-Grants](http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/ELCA-World-Hunger/Get-Involved/Domestic-Hunger-Grants)

If your ministry or congregation is considering submitting a LOI, and has questions, please contact Cindy Kraft at [gckraft815@aol.com](mailto:gckraft815@aol.com) or Andrea Hodges at [wwandrea08@gmail.com](mailto:wwandrea08@gmail.com) from the Hunger Team.

In this year of celebration for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ELCA World Hunger, our team is excited to grow in numbers and support the many ministries in feeding ministries in our synod. We would like to know more about what your congregation is doing and with whom you are partnering to address hunger in your community. We are in awe of the unsung heroes/disciples throughout our synod following the command of Matthew 25, until all are fed. Consider joining our team by contacting Cindy or Andrea (above) or stopping by the Hunger display table at this Assembly.



## From Our Justice Ministries - Lutherans Restoring Creation



June, 2024

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 major project for the past year has been the creation and implementation of the [2024 Creation Care Plan](#) for use by congregations and ministry sites. The Plan includes curated ideas for multiple areas of congregational life: Worship, Education, Buildings and Grounds, Advocacy/Public Witness, and Personal Discipleship.

A monthly group meets by Zoom as the [Creation Care Collaboration](#) to discuss ideas and hear from occasional presenters as we implement the Plan together. All are welcome to join the Zoom call, and recordings are available at the link above. The Plan helps us to continue to fulfill our 2022 SA Resolution calling for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and going net-zero by 2050.

This spring we launched a new initiative to create a recognized network of LRC Congregations and ministries in CSS – the LRC-CSS Partners. The Partnership provides resources and connection for congregations and ministries, while helping the LRC Mission Table communicate more directly and intentionally with those who are involved and those who might be interested in joining as a Partner. More information is available at our display table at the Assembly.

CSS provided 4 congregational hosts across Missouri and Kansas for the April 16 National Faith + Climate Forum that was led by Blessed Tomorrow, “a coalition of diverse religious partners working to advance climate solutions in faithful service to God.” Interfaith participants enjoyed a day of excellent presentations and networking opportunities.

Individual members of the Mission Table continue to participate in various ways throughout the Synod to advance our efforts in Creation Care and Climate Justice, including attending advocacy events at our State Capitols, working with KIFA, planning and hosting events, creating educational and worship opportunities to share, participating in national LRC monthly calls, attending webinars, tabling at events, learning about IRA provisions for non-profits, and participating in the ELCA Creation Care Network tasked with implementing the 2022 Churchwide Memorial to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Our ministry continues as a Mission Table, and we invite everyone to join us – as a member of the Mission Table, through the Creation Care Collaboration, as a CSS-LRC Partner, in your own setting and context, and in your homes. Our role as people of faith caring for Creation is vital. As Baird Lincke, LRC Board Member states in the brief video, [FACT: The Earth is Good](#), “Faith, hope, and love are not luxuries. They are as essential as food and water and air.” We bring these gifts, along with our collective power, to serve and protect all that God has created.

With Gratitude,  
Noni Strand  
Chair, CSS LRC Mission Table



## From Our Justice Ministries - The Earth Charter



### The Earth Charter in Central States

Coordinator: Keith Mundy

In 2019 the ELCA Church Wide Assembly endorsed the Earth Charter. This document presents values and principles for achieving sustainable development by living into a mindset of global interdependence and shared responsibility to care for creation. The charter and its principles align well with ELCA social teachings.

In fall of 2019, the Central States Synod collaborated with the New England, Metro New York and Delaware-Maryland Synods to apply for a SOLI grant. This grant provided funds for training in the first year and implementation resources in the subsequent year(s). Teams in each synod were trained and each synod determined how to reach on in their contexts. CSS has made \$250 grants available to do work consistent with the Earth Charter principles in congregations or communities in both KS and MO.

Congregations receiving grants have included:

- Atonement            Florissant, MO  
Audit by Audubon Society to repurpose area to feed birds and bees.
- Bethel                Universal City, MO  
Develop a pollinator sanctuary
- Peace                 Manhattan, KS  
Expand food pantry for the neighborhood
- St. Mark              Waterville, KS  
Create a church garden for the community
- Trinity                Russellville, KS  
Plant trees on church property

More grant opportunities are available to CSS congregations. Information is provided on the CSS website. ([www.css-elca.org/earth-charter](http://www.css-elca.org/earth-charter)) Activities around the Earth Charter are now included in the work of the synod's Lutherans Restoring Creation mission table. This would include table displays at events, workshops in congregations and providing educational resources.

We are grateful for the ongoing support of Bishop Candea, Tim Anderson, Donna Simon, and other Synod Staff members as we continue to endorse the Earth Charter.



# PUTTING FAITH INTO ACTION

## REPORT TO 2024 SYNOD ASSEMBLY CENTRAL STATES SYNOD, ELCA

### ADVOCACY

**Kansas legislative leaders have chosen course of maximum confrontation, extremism**

KANSAS REFLECTOR, 1/16/24

**Kansas faith leaders point to religious beliefs as motivation for Medicaid expansion**

KANSAS REFLECTOR., 12/19/23

**Anti-trans discrimination an affront to human dignity and a sin, rabbi and pastor say**

WICHITA EAGLE 4/15/24



Walking Together - Central States Synod, ELCA 2024

KIFA's 2024 legislative priorities included:

- Support of public education, including full funding and the student's right to learn; the right to vote & to have that vote counted; protection of the rights of LGBTQ+ Kansans;
- Medicaid Expansion; payday loan reform; addressing homelessness in a way that is not enforcement centered;
- Supporting policies expanding efficiency and distributed generation; opposition to attempts to preempt local initiatives to address pollution caused by single-use plastics

We participated in 5 in-person lobby days, including on Medicaid Expansion, LGBTQ+ rights, and climate and clean energy. We testified on over a dozen bills, and met with legislators throughout the session in support of our priorities.

We organized a letter signed by over 100 Kansas clergy to protect the rights of LGBTQ+ Kansans, and worked with our coalition partners against efforts to ban gender-affirming care for trans youth - efforts that were successful when Gov. Kelly's veto of SB 233 was sustained in the House.

KIFA is a member of the WEALTH state table, Kansas' climate and energy coalition. We cosponsored WEALTH Day and again led the vigil for climate that began the day.

We sponsored a full slate of activities for Earth Month, including a seminar on Pope Francis' recent "apostolic exhortation" on climate. Reb Moti also interviewed about KIFA's work for the movie, "Hot Times in the Heartland."

### CLIMATE

### SPPO

Reb Moti participates in monthly calls with other ELCA State Public Policy officers, and attends their yearly convening. We work closely with Bishop Candea and Synod staff.



## RELATIONAL VOTER ENGAGEMENT

**14 - KIFA Small City Voter Mobilizers**  
**743 – Voters touched in Riley, Lyon and Harvey Counties**  
**44.78% – Turnout for voters reached by KIFA**  
**23.12% - Statewide turnout in 2023 election**  
**30.08% - Turnout by low-propensity voters reached by KIFA**  
**9.88% - Statewide turnout by low-propensity voters**  
**We were the only organization reaching out to low-propensity voters in Riley count**  
**County avg turnout : 5.05%, KIFA outreach: 41.11%**



As part of our Small Cities Project, KIFA sponsored a series of panel discussions on White Christian Nationalism: Nationalism: what it is, how it is affecting our country, and how we can counter it. Participants included a professor to explain the issue and its history; a pastor to talk about the need for Christians of good conscience to speak and act against it; and an explanation of the policy implications of this trend. These programs were consistently some of the best attended programs we've ever held.

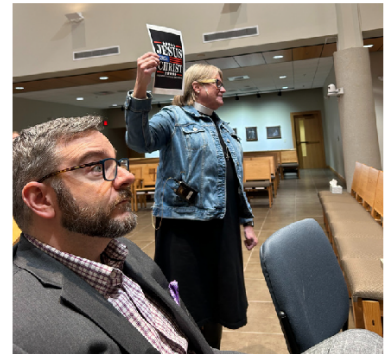
## WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

## OUTREACH

Our Small Cities Project featured an effort to engage “low-propensity voters” through relational voter outreach. Our success is shown in the numbers above.

Due to the demonstrated success of the Project, we received a second grant, from the United Methodist Health Ministry

Fund, to expand the project to four additional cities: Pittsburg, Hutchinson, Winfield/Ark City; and Leavenworth. We established four working groups to help expand engagement and outreach in the areas of LGBTQ+ rights; climate; public education; and poverty. These groups meet monthly and welcome new participants.







## CONNECT WITH US!

[KansasInterfaithAction.org](http://KansasInterfaithAction.org)

**KANSAS INTERFAITH ACTION**  
 PO BOX 654  
 LAWRENCE, KS 66044  
 (913) 232-2336



-  [KansasInterfaithAction](https://www.facebook.com/KansasInterfaithAction)
-  [KansasInterfaithAction](https://www.instagram.com/KansasInterfaithAction)
-  [@KS\\_Interfaith](https://twitter.com/@KS_Interfaith) [@KIFA\\_Climate](https://twitter.com/@KIFA_Climate)
-  [Kifa@KansasInterfaithAction.org](mailto:Kifa@KansasInterfaithAction.org)



## From Our Outdoor Ministries - Camp Tomah Shinga



As



we reflect on 2023, Camp Tomah Shinga had the opportunity to minister to more than 350 campers during the summer, through on-site camp and day-camp. Our theme for the year was “Listen”. Looking at Romans 10:17, “So faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ”, we discovered new ways that we can Listen to God’s calling in each of our lives. All of our campers were challenged to do the same, and listen to what God’s calling is for them and how they can hear that calling. Being in the midst of God’s creation, there is no better way to embrace this theme and see where we can Listen the best.







As the summer camp season wrapped-up, retreat season kicked into full gear. We hosted multiple groups including youth groups, weddings, hunters and sports teams. One highlight is that we had the opportunity to host the K-State Men's Basketball team again this year. The team came out and participated in team building activities on the high ropes course and low ropes course. They participated with us in worship and connected with the outdoors as they explored some of our beautiful trails. We also had a very beautiful wedding of 2 former staff members, which was very special to have their wedding where it all began for them.



During the winter months, cabins four through seven received a face lift with all new flooring, paint, water heaters, and A/C units. The kitchen was also updated with new lights and water heater. The outdoor education center is completed with an outdoor classroom, educational books, and constellation ceiling. We are excited to share this space where we can provide an outdoor educational experience to all those that come out to camp.

Spring 2024 has been nothing shy of exciting. We hosted the second annual Tough Camper 5k obstacle race. Participants enjoyed the event which ultimately provided an opportunity for us to share all of the things our camp has to offer with people who may have never been to camp before. Spring was also a time for multiple retreats, and our Annual Auction, which continues to be our biggest fundraiser of the year.



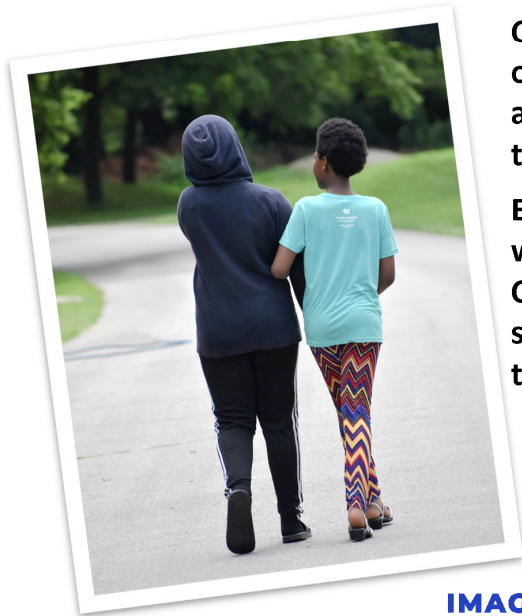
We look forward to summer 2024 where we are embracing the upcoming Olympics and having the CTS Olympics. Our theme this summer is "Carry the Torch", and we will look into what it means to Carry our own Torch and share the light of Christ to all those that we cross in our path, reflecting on Matthew 5: 14-16.

Thank you for your support of camp and the mission we serve to grow, build and explore. We hope to see you out at camp in the near future. Please let us know how we can best support you and your ministry.

## From Our Outdoor Ministries - Hollis Renewal Center



*We are in the Christian Hospitality Business*  
ALL ARE WELCOME. PERIOD.



Christian hospitality is not only an expression of faith but is also a practical means of making a positive impact in the lives of others and in the world.

Extending a genuine warm welcome is a powerful way of living out the core values of Christianity and fulfilling the mission of spreading God's love to all people.

*Dedicated to welcoming all; Hollis offers flexible and affordable space for you. Whether you are looking for a personal retreat, family gathering, office off-site meeting, hiking or camping.*



### IMAGINE WHAT YOU CAN DO HERE

#### HOLLIS IS A DONATION FOR USE FACILITY, OFFERING OVERNIGHT AND DAY RETREAT SPACES

- 1 large event space – The Hollis Lodge
- 1 multi-purpose overnight/small event space - The Meadow Cottage
- 1 secluded cabin in the woods. – The Hollis Hideaway
- 3 Tiny cabins. 2 sleep up to 4, 1 sleeps up to 5
- 1 Picnic Shelter, with surrounding camping area in meadow and RV hook up
- 2 primitive camping areas without access to water or electricity
- 153 acres of wilderness, crisscrossed with over 5 miles of hiking trails, which are open and free to the public dawn to dusk daily.

#### WE ARE DEDICATED TO OFFERING AFFORDABLE RETREAT SPACE

*Only 40% of our budget is covered by use donations. The remaining 60% is provided for by generous donations from organizations and individual donors.*

- **COMMUNITY CAREGIVERS** are eligible for a free retreat at any Hollis space
- Each summer we host a day camp called **HOLLIS CROSSINGS**

*Hollis is a registered 501(c)3 Not for profit.*

#### HOLLIS RENEWAL CENTER

11414 KANSAS AVENUE, KANAS CITY, KS 66111  
(913) 441-0451 OFFICE | (913) 206-4947 CELL  
info@holliscenter.org | www.holliscenter.org  
Dave Mareske, Executive Director

Follow us!    
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**REFLECTING THE GOOD WE SEE IN THE WORLD**

Walking Together - Central States Synod, ELCA 2024



## From Our Partners in Ministry - ELCA Youth Gathering

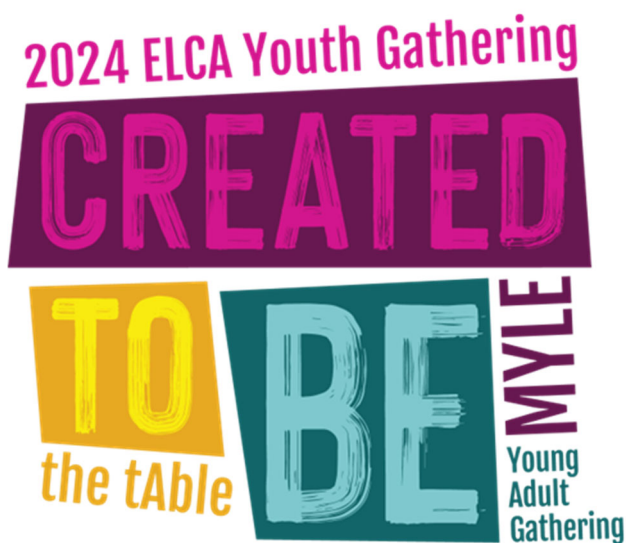
The summer has finally arrived for the ELCA Youth Gathering! It has been several long years without a gathering due to COVID. The last gathering was held in Houston in 2018. This has proven to be a year of rebuilding as none of the youth that are attending have ever been to a gathering. From the Central States Synod we have 263 total participants headed to New Orleans in July. Payments have been made, hotels have been reserved and now we anxiously await hearing everything about how we are **Created To Be**. The daily themes include Created to be **Brave**, Created to be **Authentic**, Created to be **Free**, Created to be **Disruptive** and Created to be **Disciples**.

Our first full day at the gathering we will have our Accompaniment day, rather than a day of just service we will accompany current missions and ministries within New Orleans and help them with their mission. Our second day will be our Synod Day. We will worship together with all of Region 4 and hear the message from our own Bishop Susan Candea. Then we will do a scavenger hunt to learn the history and culture surrounding us in New Orleans. Our last full day is our Interactive Learning Day where we will have hands-on experiences and talk to a multitude of ministry partners across the ELCA. The Gathering offering will be give to ELCA World Hunger.

As a synod we are assigned with all of Region 4 to collect Liquid IV packets for the Hurricane Relief Kits that will be assembled by congregations on Accompaniment Day. The best way to contribute is to order from Target or Amazon by searching registries and wish lists for **Hurricane Relief Kits**.

Thank you to everyone who has supported youth to go to the 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering. Please continue to support and add all of these groups to your prayers as we embark on the week of a lifetime!

Lynne English  
Central States Synod  
Gathering Champion



# From Our Campus Ministries - LuMin St. Louis

## What is campus ministry?

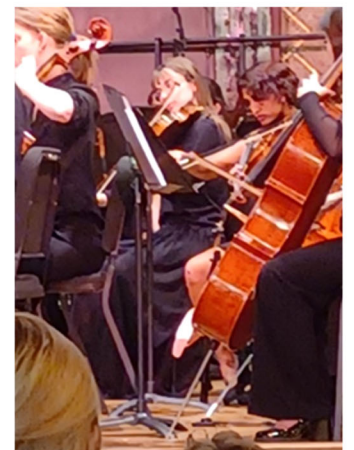
A picture tells a thousand words – so here are a few from 2023-2024.



Connections through worship, meals, and retreats.



Joy in swimming and holiday lights.



Partnerships with Universities to provide pastoral care at student events & attending student concerts



## From Our Campus Ministries - Kansas State University

Lutheran Campus Ministry at Kansas State University helps students Experience God's Love and Share it with the World! The 2023-24 Academic Year has been an exciting year of energy and growth for LCM at K-State! Our students have been inviting friends, classmates, families, and their home congregations to get involved with our ministry this year. They are excited about Worship, Bible Study, Service, Learning, Supportive Relationships, and of course Free Food!



In addition to volunteering at the Flint Hills Breadbasket community food bank, and delivering meals to the homebound through the Friendship Meals program, our students organized a Service Day at Rainbow Meadows Equine Rescue. Students got salty, muddy, bleached, and sunburned, but had a great time helping Rainbow Meadows care for God's creatures!



Another new thing for us this year was adding Trivia and Taco's to our Annual Campus Ministry Celebration. A big crowd of students, friends, families, volunteers and supporters helped us celebrate a great year of ministry with students at K-State!



We continue to be grateful for the support of the ELCA, the Central States Synod, and the many Congregations, Women's Groups, and Individuals who faithfully support our work at K-State!

I want to extend a special "Thank You!" to First Lutheran & Peace Lutheran Churches of Manhattan, as well as Olsburg and Walsburg Lutheran churches, and Faith Lutheran in Junction City for providing weekly meals for LCM at K-State!



Thanks to all volunteer Board Members and their congregations for "loaning them" to LCM! Thank you all for your partnership in the Gospel!  
Pastor Kevin Clark, Lutheran Campus Ministry at Kansas State University





## CORE VALUES

Integrity  
Hospitality  
Community  
Servant Leadership  
Sustainability  
Excellence

## AREAS OF STUDY

Art and Digital Media  
Biology & Chemistry  
Business & Economics  
Criminal Justice  
Education  
English  
Exercise Science  
History & Political Science  
Math & Physics  
Music  
Psychology  
Religion

**The Path  
to Your   
Purpose**



## The mission of Bethany College

is to educate, develop, and challenge individuals to reach for truth and excellence as they lead lives of faith, learning, and service.

### Learning by Doing

At Bethany College we believe what is special about a liberal arts education, is not just having access to small class sizes and professors who care for students, but also a strong focus on developing programs that emphasize high-impact educational practices that prioritize first-hand experiences.

We want students to learn by doing. This includes ensuring that all students participate in at least one of four experienced-based education programs: internship, service learning, project-based learning, or off-campus study opportunities.

Building on these and other initiatives, we plan to increase student participation in active learning environments while also facilitating the development of problem solving and

project management skills for our students. Any Bethany student will be able to take the key critical thinking skills of our liberal arts foundation and apply them to the day-to-day problems that may surface in the communities they will serve in the future.

Our immediate focus is on removing barriers, both financial and social, that prevent students from taking advantage of these high-impact practices. This will require us to become a trailblazing institution in developing best practices for students in small college settings, cultivating diverse and innovative learners, and creating equitable education environments—especially through developing accessible technology infrastructures.



335 East Swensson Street  
Lindsborg, Kansas 67456  
[www.bethanylb.edu](http://www.bethanylb.edu)  
800.826.2281



**As a college of the ELCA,**

Bethany College is deeply rooted in the Lutheran tradition and boldly open to insights from other religious and secular traditions. Spiritual development at Bethany is integral to our mission of preparing students for lives of faith, learning, and service. Our spiritual and religious life is decidedly ecumenical and interfaith, serving and providing opportunities for students, faculty, and staff of any or no religious background.



Each week, time is held apart across campus for Chapel Break, a time of reflection, community building, spiritual practice, and religious ritual and tradition. Additionally, a variety of campus ministry organizations develop programs through which students forge affirming community, recognize the imago dei in themselves and others, and learn to live our Christ’s radical message of love.



**"Being a part of Campus Ministry has helped me grow as a person. By learning about different people's perspectives, religious ideas, and goals, I have been able to broaden my outlook, finding ways to interact with anyone so that they can feel appreciated and loved. It has given me the blessing of community that is so hard to find for so many people."**

Ben Turner  
Class of 2024



335 East Swensson Street  
Lindsborg, Kansas 67456  
[www.bethanylb.edu](http://www.bethanylb.edu)  
800.826.2281



## ***From Our Education Partners***

Greetings from Luther College and from our home in Decorah, Iowa – where river, woodland, and prairie meet upon lands that have been home to the Ioway, Sac, Fox, and Dakota people and their ancestors. We are



proud to share with you highlights from this past academic year that reflect our mission to educate minds and develop whole persons equipped to understand and confront a changing society.

During the 2023-2024 academic year, we honored milestones in the college's history, including the 40th anniversary of our Asian Students Association and Allies and the 50th anniversary of our partnership with the TRIO Achievement Program, which provides first-generation and income-eligible students with financial assistance and a strong on-campus support system as they navigate their college careers.

We celebrated our living relationship with our Nordic heritage, including hosting a visit from Anniken Huitfeldt, Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs in September. Similarly, we took the opportunity to reflect upon our continued identity as a college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, welcoming to campus the Rev. Lamont Anthony Wells, executive director of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities, to give our Black History Month keynote address and to meet cohorts of students, faculty, staff, regents, and community leaders.

The academic year has also been uniquely focused on future-facing initiatives as we live into our grounded and global campus vision. We have launched a new Strategic Framework, a new core curriculum, a new engineering science major, and a new partnership with the University of Iowa College of Public Health to create a 4+1 bachelor's to master's degree.

We have expanded our Luther College Impact Award, which offers four years of free tuition for qualified students, to include not only students residing in Iowa, but also students residing in Minnesota. We have increased the amount of our academic merit scholarships, added First Generation and Campus Visit Awards, and continue to offer a wide range of merit and

need-based financial aid, including the EPIC (Education Partners in Covenant) grant, which matches up to \$1,000 per year in support of students from participating congregations. Annually, Luther students are gifted nearly \$50 million from more than 850 different funds, reflecting our ongoing commitment ensuring that a Luther education is affordable and accessible to students and families.

We celebrate two historic gifts toward the expansion and renovation of our Regents Center, home to Norse athletics and the campus center for sports and recreation: an unprecedented \$10 million gift from Michael and Nicole Gerdin and the Gerdin Charitable Foundation—the largest individual gift in the college's history—and a \$2 million gift from Dennis and Suzanne Birkestrand to support gymnasium renovations. These renovations are part of our Campus Master Plan, which envisions other capital projects, as well.

Other highlights from this year include music ensemble tours across the Midwest, Great Plains, and Southern United States, as well as summer tours to Norway and Brazil. We welcomed more than 600 high school and middle school students for last summer's Dorian music camps, 150 alumni and friends for our adult Dorian band retreat, and more than 1,500 high school students for our annual winter Dorian music festivals - choir, orchestra, band, and keyboard. A number of our Luther sports teams recently claimed American Rivers Conference titles, including men's and women's tennis, men's golf, and men's and women's swimming and diving.

It is with a spirit of gratitude, curiosity, and excitement that we continue to devote ourselves—students, staff, and faculty alike—to the pursuits of learning in community, discerning our callings, and serving with distinction for the common good. We do so ever-mindful of the challenges that face our institutions and our society, and with a deep sense of humility as we work to create a community of faith and learning for all. We are profoundly grateful for you, our partner congregations, and your ongoing support and prayers.

Soli Deo Gloria!

President Jenifer K. Ward

**Walking Together - Central States Synod, ELCA 2024**



## From Our Education Partners



# Lutheran School of Theology

*An Educational Ministry of Metro St. Louis Congregations—ELCA*

This has been a year of joys and challenges for the Lutheran School of Theology-St. Louis. We have endeavored to be faithful to our mission of bringing instructors and lifelong learners into theological study together, and our 2023-2024 slate of courses certainly provoked strong and formative discussions.

Highlights included *Finding Hope in a Divided Country: Christian Nationalism, Theology, and the Church* with Pastor Angela Denker, *New Research on Mary Magdalene* with Dr. Elizabeth Schrader Polczer, and *Inclusive Language for God: Talking Together Scripturally, Theologically, and Evangelically* with Dr. Mary Streufert, among many others.

Our courses have attended to a wide variety of constituents, including rostered leaders seeking continuing education, authorized lay ministers engaging formational training, and lay people searching for ways to deepen their faith. It has been marvelous to witness folks from all these interest groups interact with each other and co-foster the mutual growth of everyone in the classroom. From church basements to Zoom windows, these courses have been sites of transformation.

This ministry has been an absolute joy to steward, and yet we are contending with the same financial realities many other non-profit organizations are facing. Rising costs and uncertain revenue streams have caused much discernment in meetings of our Board of Directors, and we have chosen to suspend our course offerings indefinitely. There will be an opportunity at a later date to celebrate the more than quarter century ministry of LST, and so we ask that you be on the lookout for notice of this commemoration in the coming months.

We are thankful to our ever-curious students, our dynamic instructors, and all who have supported LST's ministry through the years in prayer, financial contribution, and by word of mouth. We are certain that by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, transformational learning and conversation will continue in the Central States Synod, and we give thanks for the ways these conversations expand our imaginations toward what God is doing in our world.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Rev. Andrew Baumgartner

Chair, Board of Directors of the Lutheran School of Theology- St. Louis

## From Our Education Partners

Dear ministry partners in the Central States Synod:

The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) is grateful to share highlights from our seminary in this 2024 report to supporting synods. Thank you for your continued support of our innovative and thriving seminary. Highlights from this year include:



Lutheran School of  
Theology at Chicago

CALLED INTO THE WORLD

- In May 2023, LSTC relocated to its new home on the fourth floor of the Rev. Donald P. Senor Academic Center building at 5416 South Cornell Street in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood. Designed as an agile 21st-century seminary offering in person and omnichannel learning opportunities, this strategic move has positioned LSTC to invest in key areas while opening the door for innovation and growth. Leasing space in a building shared with the Catholic Theological Union and McCormick Theological Seminary deepens our commitment to ecumenical collaboration.
- The LSTC Board of Directors appointed a task force to examine and propose a reparations plan for the seminary tied to the sale of our former building at 1100 E. 55th Street. As part of the ongoing communication about this vital initiative, the Reparations Task Force launched a website ([lstc.edu/reparations](http://lstc.edu/reparations)) to keep the community abreast of developments and milestones achieved by the Reparations Task Force. This platform is a comprehensive resource, providing updates and insights gained through research and discussions.
- A new investment area for LSTC is its expansion into asynchronous forms of online learning. This new platform will allow learners to access and complete lectures and readings within their own timeframe utilizing on-demand content such as podcasts and video lectures. In the first phase of this project, the seminary will focus on creating Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) and Synodically Authorized Ministers (SAM) certificates. In its second phase, the seminary will introduce First Call Theological Education (FCTE) courses, professional development courses for rostered leaders, and continuing education courses for those who want to grow in their faith. As we expand, the seminary will continue to offer its existing degree and certificate-based residential and distance learning tracks.
- This spring, we are undergoing our regular cycle of periodic comprehensive reviews by our accreditors, the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), our specialty accreditor, and the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), our regional accreditor. These involve the opportunity to research and write a valuable self-study report that summarizes our school's performance and improvements across the whole span of our operations. The reviews culminate in each case with an on-campus visit by accreditation teams, who will later gather their findings into reports shared with us this summer.
- Honoring the 50th anniversary of Christ Seminary - Seminex, LSTC is hosting a conference April 16-18 online and at its new facility in Hyde Park. This event-packed experience combines LSTC's annual Homecoming celebration and features engaging sessions, insightful discussions, and once-in-a-lifetime reunions. A digital version of the conference will be available after the event. Visit [LSTC.edu/Seminex](http://LSTC.edu/Seminex) for information about the conference, Homecoming, and other Seminex-related celebrations.
- Dr. Linda E. Thomas, Professor of Theology and Anthropology and Director of the Albert "Pete" Pero, Jr. and Cheryl Stewart Pero Center for Intersectionality Studies, was recently appointed Interim Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs for LSTC. In the fall of 2023, Dr. Karri Alldredge joined LSTC as an Assistant Professor of New Testament. Rafael Malpica Padilla was appointed as the inaugural DAMM Chair in Leadership and as the Director of Latin Ministry and Theology. A faculty search for the Braatz Chair in worship is currently underway.
- We look ahead to our 164th commencement at a new location: St. Paul and the Redeemer Episcopal Church, at 4945 South Dorchester in Hyde Park. This spacious, flexible, and fully-equipped facility is well-suited to house our commencement exercises in grand style, with plenty of room for a reception and socializing afterward. This year's commencement speaker will be our own Rev. Dr. Barbara Rossing, Professor of New Testament and longtime faculty member, who will be retiring at the end of this academic year.

To learn more about LSTC and the historic changes happening now, please visit [www.lstc.edu](http://www.lstc.edu). Sincerely,  
Rev. Dr. James Nieman, president  
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Walking Together - Central States Synod, ELCA 2024



## From Our Education Partners

Dear Partners in the Central States Synod,

Greetings from your siblings in Christ at Wartburg Theological Seminary, in Dubuque, Iowa. I am pleased to have the opportunity to share with you some of the ways the Holy Spirit is at work in and through your seminary.

First, we are delighted to announce the successful completion of Lead Boldly!, our comprehensive capital campaign. We exceeded our goal of \$28 million, which included enthusiastic support for student scholarships, one of our highest priorities. As a part of this ambitious campaign, we also are very pleased to announce the completion of an extensive remodel of our primary educational and office building, Fritschel Hall. This project came in under budget and on time, thanks to the excellent work of our staff and our local construction partners. We would love to show you the renovated educational space; please know that you are invited to visit anytime!

Second, I want to share with you a new emphasis that Wartburg is placing on TEEM and Certificate Programs, exemplified by the new director of these programs, Pastor Carrie Greenquist-Petersen. I invited Pastor Carrie to share some thoughts with you about this program:

*Over the past nine months it has been my privilege and pleasure to help Wartburg welcome and serve TEEM candidates for rostered ministry, lay leaders, synods and partners. I have gotten to know the students through admissions, candidacy processes, contextual education, classes/modules and endeavored to nurture an identity of quality and worth in Wartburg's TEEM and Certificate students. Clear and timely communication can make the difference between feeling forgotten and feeling immensely valued. This is why being available to all partners to hear and address any question or concern is my top priority. It is a true joy to accompany each student along their path of discernment for leadership in Christ's church.*

Third, Wartburg Seminary is announcing the launch of a Congregational Accompaniment Project to equip congregations for intercultural competence and to open doors to new mission opportunities with Latine people. This project aims to foster deeper understanding of diversity and to cultivate the development of meaningful relationships that reflect the love of Christ. Upon application, Wartburg staff from the Centro Teológico Luterano Multicultural and the Journey Together program will accompany congregations and their leaders in this process.

Finally, we have a new tagline at Wartburg, which speaks directly to our sense of mission in the current moment in the life of the church: **Listen. Wonder. Lead.** "At Wartburg Theological Seminary the voices of God and our neighbors call us to **listen** deeply. In these limestone halls and your local communities, Jesus' love invites us to **wonder** that transformative power of the Holy Spirit, who inspires our life together. Our graduates **lead** a changing church with holy curiosity, creativity and joy. In hope, we proclaim God's grace that carries us through death to resurrection life. **Listen, wonder, and lead at Wartburg.**"

We know the church needs leaders, and we are working with you to form them. Please continue to pray for, identify and raise up candidates for public ministry. At Wartburg, they will be equipped to share the good news of Jesus Christ in a world in need of healing and hope.

We give thanks to God for you and for our partnership, through which we participate in God's mission in the world. To learn more about Wartburg Seminary and our strategic, innovative programs, please visit [www.wartburgseminary.edu](http://www.wartburgseminary.edu).

Yours in Christ,

The Rev. Kristin Johnston Lergen, Ph.D.  
President



## From Our Education Partners

### BKSM's Core Values

- Prayer and spiritual growth
- Practicing grace amid multiple vocations
- Co-teaching and co-learning
- Relational and collaborative
- Honoring the gifts of all
- Affordable and accessible
- Fully support the mission of the Episcopal Church: evangelism, creation care, anti-racism

After a decade of existence as a local seminary that *provides theological education for all people*, we are pleased to report that the Bishop Kemper School for Ministry is stronger than ever.

Approving the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa as an official partner in 2023-2024, BKSM is now a collaborative venture of six Episcopal dioceses that cover the entirety of Kansas, Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska. We are proud of our ongoing relationship with the ELCA Central-States Synod and hope to strengthen that relationship in the years to come.

We continue to offer in person and online classes monthly from August through May that equip future lay and ordained leaders for the ministry to which they have been called. During the 2023-24 academic year, we had 15 students enrolled in one of our seven lay tracks, 21 in one of three ordination-track programs, and 11 students who took a class or two for personal enrichment. We had one Lutheran student taking classes for the Pastoral Ministry Associate (PMA) program and another for personal enrichment.

In any given month, we have 30-35 students taking classes. BKSM has experienced continued growth in attendance, yes, but more importantly, we value the diversity of religious perspectives, spiritualities, education, life experiences and cultural/ethnic backgrounds that our students bring into the classroom – all the more so when our ecumenical partners are around the table. The Church is stronger for it!

We are thankful that we count three ELCA faculty members among our ranks: Dr. Tyler Atkinson (Ethics), Dr. Arminta Fox (New Testament, Paul), and Bishop Emeretus Roger Gustafson (Congregational Leadership). They are part of a cadre of 20+ faculty members who bring the best in scholarship, praxis and pedagogy to their courses, offering high-quality, thought-provoking classes that challenge and stretch our students.

As the landscape of theological education continues to change, we at BKSM have always known that there are various good educational and formational paths to ordained and lay ministry. We reject any spirit of competition between institutions and models of theological education. We will continue to fulfill our unique mission to the very best of our ability and are already one of the important institutions discerning the future directions of ministerial formation and training. We will continue to explore and pursue partnerships and collaborations. We know that often we can do so much more when we join forces and share resources.

A final note, the Very Rev. Don H. Compier, who has stewarded BKSM as its dean for the last nine years, announced his retirement in late January 2024, effect August 1, 2024. Due in part to the strength of both staff and Board, the BKSM Board of Directors will hire a part-time interim dean for the 2024-25 academic year. This gives the Board ample time, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to conduct a thorough search process to identify the best possible candidate with the skills necessary to lead the seminary into the next phase of its amazing journey.






















BISHOP KEMPER  
SCHOOL FOR MINISTRY  
*Theological Education for All People*

# From Our Partners in Ministry - Metro Lutheran Ministry



Metro Lutheran Ministry was blessed in 2023 to serve over 33,000 of our fellow neighbors in need in Kansas City. Such ministry would not be possible without the support of so many ELCA congregations and members. Your support is a blessing that empowers us to continue to expand our reach and enhance more lives and building a stronger, more resilient community.

Once again, thank you for your partnership, dedication, and generosity. We are truly blessed to have ELCA by our side in our mission to serve others.

 <p><b>22,985</b> Individuals received food assistance from our pantries in KCMO, KCK, and NKC</p>	 <p><b>127</b> Individuals received financial and employment coaching through the Financial Opportunity Center program</p>	 <p><b>1,987</b> Senior Commodity Boxes given to elderly individuals</p>
 <p><b>275</b> Homeless Households exited homelessness, moving into their own apartments through Rapid Re-Housing and Eileen's Place.</p>	 <p><b>8,000+</b> Pounds of fresh produce provided to our neighbors through the MLM Orchard &amp; Garden</p>	 <p><b>37</b> Children received childcare assistance</p>
 <p><b>\$4.2M+</b> Was provided in emergency rent, mortgage, utility, and hotel assistance</p>	 <p><b>5,013</b> Breakfast meals served through the Saturday Breakfast Program</p>	 <p><b>18,293</b> Sack lunches given to hungry people who visit MLM</p>
 <p><b>2,777</b> Individuals received gifts from the MLM Christmas Store</p>	 <p><b>670</b> Projects on homes needing weatherization, wheelchair ramps, or repairs through the Minor Home Repair program</p>	 <p><b>943</b> Children received back to school supplies and backpacks</p>
 <p><b>56</b> Seniors received Older Adult Care Management services</p>	 <p><b>81</b> Families were provided emergency hotel voucher housing, ending their episode of homelessness. 64 of these were families with children in the Northland</p>	 <p><b>985</b> MLM volunteers provided over 9,922 hours of service</p>
 <p><b>178</b> Individuals received assistance obtaining a birth certificate or ID</p>	 <p><b>372</b> Individuals received emergency transportation assistance to help them attend school and get to work safely</p>	 <p><b>111</b> Individuals in 39 families, all formerly homeless, received furniture vouchers, providing furniture for their new rental housing</p>
		 <p><b>25</b> Different counties across MO and KS served through MLM</p>

With heartfelt appreciation,

Scott Cooper  
Executive Director  
Metro Lutheran Ministry



## ***From Our Partners in Ministry - Once We Were Refugees***



**We are pleased to get to share that as of May, 2024, we have graduated 208 beginning sewing students and 29 intermediate students. A number of these have taken their new skills to work, adding to family prosperity. We continue to place able graduates for full time employment and have seeded at home cottage industries as well!**

Thanks to the generosity of our partners we continue to be able to provide, tuition free, nine weeks of beginning 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 newcomers to get a start in a whole new environment.

**Please know that we will happily welcome anyone who visits to see what we are up to!  
We conduct our classes on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 10:00 AM to 12:30 PM at:**

**The Gathering Table  
5001 Independence Avenue  
Kansas City, Missouri**

**This is on the corner of Independence and Brighton Avenues, across from North East High School.**

\* \* \* \* \*

We have needs, some of which are really urgent. **The first is for opportunities to visit with any groups who are interested to learn about what we are doing. We especially appreciate invitations to come to Adult Sunday School Classes, Women’s or Men’s Organizations, Quilting Groups, or any others. Secondly, we need volunteers to assist with various tasks, primarily teaching basic sewing skills. We will provide training for any who are interested, so we ask that any who might join that effort please let us know soon.**





## From Our Partners in Ministry - Women of the ELCA



The 35th annual convention of the Central States Synod Women of the ELCA was held June 23 – 25, 2023 at the Stoney Creek Hotel in Independence, Missouri. The theme of the convention was “The Lord is My Light” which was woven throughout the convention by our speakers, devotions, singing, break-out sessions, prayer, and worship. Over 60 women were in attendance. We were asked to keep our Light shining and share the Love of God!



### 2023-2024 Synod Board



#### Left to Right

Kathy Steinke, Secretary-St. Mark, Clayton, MO  
Janice Gerken, Treasurer-St. Paul, Cole Camp, MO  
Rev Dinah Dutta, Board Member-Good Shepherd, Lawrence, KS  
Jill Duis, Board Member-Good Shepherd, Washington, KS  
Gaye Mizell, Board Member-Trinity, Kirkwood, MO  
Susie Borgstrom, Secretary-Andover, Windom, KS  
Gloria Sharp, President, Our Savior's, Jefferson City, MO  
Pat Dunavan, Board Member-Our Savior's, Topeka KS  
Louise Ahrens, Board Member-Hosanna, Liberty, MO (Not Pictured)



### Central States Women who Attended 12th Triennial Gathering in Phoenix, Arizona September 2023

(Back row, L to R) Jeanie Bardy, Gloria Sharp, Rhonda Schlesselman, Janice Gerken, Vickie Donnell, Louise Ahrens and Janice Rambo.

(Front row, L to R) Debbie Curtis, Gretchen Mueller and Lynn Vallandingham. Not pictured: Vicki Haugen. Pictured below Pastor Kim Knowles-Zeller.



**Current and on-going activities of the Board and our synod organization include:**

- **Publishing our newsletter**, Walking in the Word. Our newsletter is our main way to communicate with the women of the Central States Synod. It is available via e-mail and by USPS. We are grateful to Vickie Donnell who is our editor and publisher.
- **Maintaining an active Facebook page and website.** We are thankful to Tim Anderson in the Synod office for updating the women’s page on the CSS website. We are also grateful to Linda Lockhart, from Trinity in Kirkwood, MO, who maintains our Facebook page. She is anxious to hear about the activities and events of your units and clusters so that she can share them on Facebook.
- **Awarding Scholarships.** We award scholarships to female members of ELCA congregations who are seeking post-secondary education. We have received seven applications this year and will be awarding the scholarships soon.
- **Planning of Cluster Events.** We are transitioning from hosting an annual Synod convention to a bi-annual convention. During the non-convention years, each of our five Clusters will hold an event. The Eastern Missouri and the Border Clusters held their events on April 27 – both were inspiring and well attended! The Osage Cluster is meeting June 1 at St. Paul’s, Cole Camp, MO. The Western Kansas Cluster will meet on August 24 at Trinity in Hays, KS. The Central Kansas Cluster will gather in Lindsborg, KS October 19 and 20.
- **Planning for our 36th Synod Convention has begun.** Our convention is scheduled for **June 20 – 22, 2025**, at the Hilton Garden Inn, Independence, MO. Our theme is “Vessels of God’s Grace” using Ephesians 2:8 – *“For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and it is not by your doing; it is the gift of God.”*
- **Ingathering of Lutheran World Relief Quilts and Kits.**  
2024 Ingathering Locations:
  - Shepherd of the Hills, Saint Ann, MO – October 19, 9 am – noon
  - Our Savior’s, Jefferson City, MO – October 19, 9 am – 1 pm
  - Trinity, Ft. Hays, KS - October 24
  - St. John’s, Salina, KS - October 24

Eastern MO Cluster Meeting-April 27, 2024



Border Cluster Meeting-April 27, 2024





## From Our Partners in Ministry - The Bridge

3257-1 Domain St, St Charles, MO 63301 (636) 724-9921 new website: [www.thebridgecoffee.org](http://www.thebridgecoffee.org)



A 501(c)(3) faith-based organization since 2008, serving the 'New Urbanist' community of New Town – bridging to our region through partnerships and to the world through Fair Trade.

Our mission:

“Bridge the gap between God and everyday life by spreading God’s love to all in unexpected ways.”

Our motto:

Doing justice / loving kindness / walking humbly (Micah 6:8)

The Bridge continues to be acknowledged as an inclusive and welcoming place, seeking to counter the polarization of our current society through the grace of Jesus Christ. The ‘regulars’ at worship and more informal fellowship are often the ‘nones and dones’ who seek a quieter and freer expression of their faith, especially avoiding the commercialism and so-called Christian Nationalism of other popular faith communities.



Nearby New Town and Charlestown neighborhoods are booming with new houses and other development. Orchard Farms School District has opened a large new High School on Boschertown Road, just around the corner from New Town Boulevard. A popular BBQ stand, operating out of the original ‘Bridge’ Fair Trade kiosk on Rue Royale (2008-2011) is expanding into the large original Whittaker building in the center of town. New Senior Housing is being built (for the first time). The Coffee House is often packed, as it is one of the few indoor gathering places that welcomes children. Friday morning Story Time in the Micah Room has a devoted following, and blesses both kids and parents.

We have noticed a trend in young families moving in from Warren and Lincoln Counties, seeking to be closer to ‘civilization’, one might say. The regulars at Sunday worship tend to be older, though welcoming to the single people, national and international travelers, and families in transition who come around for a weekend or a season. Mary Drew, who serves as a barista during the week, has been a compassionate and pastoral faith leader.



The Coffee House is under the direction of Manager Stephanie Bakula (if you love '90s music, you might also catch her on weekends as the lead singer of "Polly and the Pockets"! ). A portion of our tips continues to be passed on to charities. We just initiated a special "Drink of the Month" which this month provides \$1 from each sale for the Crisis Nursery of St. Louis.

Fair Trade is a growing draw for county shoppers; the only other area Fair Trade business is 45 minutes away. Churches, schools, and occasional civic events invite us to bring off-site sales to both counties. We also support a major Kenyan importer based in St. Charles, Gitzell Fair Trade International, located not far from Hope Lutheran ELCA.



The Board of Directors has remained stable. Not to slight any of the current leadership, we especially give thanks for the awesome, steady work in Finance/Bookkeeping and Communications by Betty and Chuck Luebke, members of Atonement ELCA in Florissant.

Volunteers are key. Besides assisting with the property and off-site sales, a dozen of us deliver food and drinks within a 5-mile radius every morning but Sunday.

*The current major challenge for The Bridge: to find new storage space. For ten years, Christ's Church in St. Peters (Reformed Church in America, a founding partner of The Bridge) has provided an upper room on Mexico Road. That congregation has now disbanded, and their property reverted to the national church. We have temporary space in New Town, but that will be unavailable after June. If anyone knows of a free secure, accessible, available 250 square-foot space not too far away (church, business, home, warehouse) – please let us know!*



## From Our Partners in Ministry - Mosaic



Dear Friends in the **Central States Synod**, where Mosaic provides services in Kansas through locations in the Northeast, Southeast, North Central, Garden City and Liberal areas.

Last year, while taking down a building on our founding campus that was well past its useful era, we found a time capsule from around 70 years ago. One of the items in the capsule was a copy of The Small Catechism of Martin Luther. Many of you probably remember spending time with that catechism as a child—I know I do.

Finding the catechism in the cornerstone time capsule wasn't a big surprise, because since its founding 111 years ago, Mosaic has been affiliated with the Lutheran Church. The values handed down through faith of welcoming the stranger, embracing the poor, acting with compassion and integrity and serving those in need have shaped Mosaic into what it is today.

Mosaic is never shy about sharing that we are a faith-based, ELCA-affiliated organization. As your ministry, everything we do is about empowering people to live the full life God intended for them. In your name, we reach nearly 4,500 people with life-enriching supports.

What does that look like?

- Brenda moved from foster home to foster home (13 in all) until she aged out of the system and had to live on her own without knowing how to care for herself. After years of declining health and hygiene, she came to Mosaic and has transformed from being anxious and scared of life to embracing life and looking forward to what's coming next.
- Alexis came to Mosaic from another service provider whose staff said she was so difficult that we'd be sorry if we brought her in. Through Mosaic staffs' patience and kindness, we learned that all Alexis wanted was to feel loved and safe. We provided both—and more. Today, she is happy and singing through much of her day.
- Siblings Nate and Riri had lived together all of their lives until family could no longer care for them, and they were split up. Mosaic found the right shared living (host home) provider who wanted them reunited in her home, and said, "I see them being a presence in my life forever. I can honestly say, 'I love them.'"

Those are just three examples, but there are hundreds of similar stories across our network of services. It's how we live out our mission statement: *"Embracing God's call, Mosaic relentlessly pursues opportunities that empower people."*

We also have an opportunity that can empower your congregation in new ways. Our Rejoicing Spirits program creates welcoming worship opportunities for people with diverse needs. You can learn about it at [rejoicingspirits.org](http://rejoicingspirits.org). We've had congregations tell us it brought a renewed sense of mission to their work.

Thank you for being a partner in our mission to love and serve others. I'm thankful our organization was founded in faith and thankful we continue to be a serving arm of the Church.

*God bless you all.*

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda Timmons".

Linda Timmons, President and CEO, Mosaic

**Walking Together - Central States Synod, ELCA 2024**



## From Our Partners in Ministry - Global Refuge



New name, same mission. Welcoming newcomers since 1939 | [www.globalrefuge.org](http://www.globalrefuge.org)

Dear Partners in Ministry,

Grace and peace to you this synod assembly season. As you may know, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service has embraced a new name: Global Refuge. Grounded in Psalm 46:1, **"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble,"** we hope to enter our next 85 years with openness, building a bigger table to meet a growing need. Global Refuge was forged in faith. Our Lutheran heritage has always shaped our work of welcome and will continue to do so in years to come.

With the support of partners and Lutheran communities like yours, in 2023 we were able to...

- Help 17,000+ children reunify with their families or find loving foster homes
- Welcome 11,200+ refugees from countries across the world
- Assist 11,700+ people seeking safety from Central America and beyond

In a political season rife with anti-immigrant rhetoric and messages that villainize newcomers, we have a unique opportunity to change this narrative and refocus on all the gifts newcomers bring to community. We invite you to join us in this work!

- Share about Global Refuge in your church or [invite our team](#) to join you.
- Include Global Refuge [bulletin inserts](#) about our work in your bulletin.
- Start a [Circle of Welcome](#) to support newcomers in your community.
- Pack [Fresh Change](#) bags, a partnership with Border Servant Corps, to welcome our neighbors at the border with care and dignity.
- Sign up for our monthly e-newsletters for faith leaders and explore a [webpage specifically for congregations](#) which has the latest faith community resources.

Thank you for your continued support. The many ways Lutheran communities embody Jesus' ministry through the work of welcome is truly inspiring.

Go in peace. Welcome the stranger.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah Kretschmann".

*Deacon Sarah Kretschmann | Congregational Engagement Specialist*  
[outreach@globalrefuge.org](mailto:outreach@globalrefuge.org)

# BETHANY+VILLAGE

## THE ART OF LIVING



**THE COTTAGES**  
INDEPENDENT LIVING



**BETHANY HOME**  
LONG-TERM CARE



**SUNFLOWER TERRACE**  
ASSISTED LIVING

### Who is Bethany Village?

Bethany Village is a not-for-profit continuous care retirement community providing more than 100 years of Christ-centered services and care for the aging. Located in Lindsborg, Kansas, the home is a ministry of the Central States Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

The Kansas Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod endorsed the idea of a home in 1907. Over the past century, the buildings and facilities have seen major additions, renovations, and expansions. Today, Bethany Village includes The Cottages independent living, Sunflower Terrace assisted living, and Bethany Home, a skilled nursing/rehabilitation, and long-term care center.



### Bethany Home Year in Review

By Kris Erickson, CEO

One of the greatest blessings we experience is the joy of serving others here in the village. Staff and residents are always seeking ways to help one another. Because we spend so much time together, the relationships we form guide us to work together as one big caring family. Each person who serves or is served within our mission has a special part to play as we continually "Celebrate Life's Journey Together in God's Love."



This year our mission continued to emerge from pandemic conditions. While much of the world has moved on, we are required to remain diligent regarding the health and well being of those around us. We are finding that the post-pandemic world is very different than the one we knew four years ago, and we are still working to adapt to the realities that have emerged in the last year. Your prayers and support are needed now as much as they have ever been, as we strive to adapt our mission for another 100 years of service.

Thank you for all you have done to support our mission, our work, and our programs over the years. You are a blessing to those around you, and we are grateful for the blessings you have provided for us.



Bethany Home hosted their annual Ice Cream Social after nearly 4 years of pandemic restrictions.

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Reverend Dr. Mandy Todd and Bethany College Pastor, Rev. Melissa Woepfel, collaborated for a "Longest Night" service on December 21.

## Chaplain Offerings at Bethany Village

Rev. Dr. Mandy Todd has expanded the spiritual offerings for the Bethany Village community. Aside from weekly Sunday and Wednesday chapel services, she has integrated regular Bible studies, focused studies for advent and lent, and special services of remembrance for those we've lost.

"My hope and vision for the Ministry is to bring comfort and peace to the aged, to serve our families, and to be present for our staff. My hope is to bring God's word to those who most need to hear the message of hope. My hope is to bring peace to those who are facing challenging personal issues and to help everyone realize how deeply loved they are by their Creator."

# SUNFLOWER TERRACE

## by BETHANY VILLAGE

Our newly expanded assisted living, Sunflower Terrace, continues to grow and invite new friends to join in living a carefree lifestyle! What a joy it is to see these folks enjoying such comfort and security. It is such a vibrant community, and we are excited for even more growth in the coming months.



Sunflower Terrace has had a year full of shenanigans and celebrations including a couple of 100th birthdays! We enjoyed visits from our local schools, churches and senior center.

With fewer pandemic regulations and fears, we ventured out to the Rolling Hills Zoo near salina, hosted tea parties, joined our friends at Bethany Home for an Independence Day party and made lots of trips to our local shops.

If you, or someone you know is interested in learning more about Bethany Village in Lindsborg, visit our website:

[www.BethanyVillageKS.com](http://www.BethanyVillageKS.com)

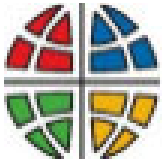
Or contact Jennifer Cantrell  
**785-227-2334**

[jcantrell@bethanyhome.com](mailto:jcantrell@bethanyhome.com)



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## From Our Partners in Ministry - Mission Investment Fund

Mission Investment Fund

### The Mission Investment Fund: Your financial partner

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 offers a range of investments for individuals, congregations and ministries. We put those investments to work to fund building and renovation loans for congregations and partner ministries, including outdoor camps, senior housing and social service agencies.



**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.

#### Why is MIF the right choice?

- **MIF has demonstrated** expertise in church and ministry financing. With longstanding experience in congregation and ministry building projects, we're unique among lending institutions.
- **We consistently offer competitive rates and terms.**
- **We offer a full suite of financial services.** MIF offers congregations, ministries and individuals a host of investment options. We work in deep partnership with the ELCA Federal Credit Union to offer a wide range of financial products and services.
- **The faithful stewardship of Lutheran congregations and their members funds our loans.** The money invested in MIF finances hundreds of capital projects across the church.

**MIF has a longstanding tradition of strength and stability.** At year-end 2023, MIF had 811 loans outstanding, totaling \$578.3 million. Investment obligations totaled \$547.7 million. With total assets of \$774.4 million and net assets of \$208.2 million at year-end 2023, MIF maintains a capital ratio of 26.88 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 minister to a world in need. We are honored to walk alongside you as a trusted partner.

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#### MIF at work in the Central States Synod (as of December 31, 2023):

- 14 Mission Investment Fund loans, with a balance of \$6,060,505
- \$9,900,703 in Mission Investment Fund investment obligations

**For more information about MIF capabilities, please visit our website, [mif.elca.org](http://mif.elca.org) or contact your Regional Manager Deacon Jerry Johnson: 773-682-5954 [jerry.johnson@elca.org](mailto:jerry.johnson@elca.org)**

Mission Investment Fund | 8765 West Higgins Road | Chicago, Illinois 60631 | Tel: 877-886-3522 | Web: [mif.elca.org](http://mif.elca.org)

## From Our Partners in Ministry - ELCA Federal Credit Union



ELCA Federal Credit Union

### ***Providing a full array of financial services to ELCA members, congregations and ministries***



The ELCA Federal Credit Union, chartered in 2015, provides a full suite of financial products and services to members, congregations and ministries of the ELCA. **We are the first of the ELCA's financial ministries to offer loans to individuals.** The Credit Union offers a rich variety of products—from savings and checking accounts and CDs ... to loans, lines of credit and credit cards. And now, we provide home mortgage loans for new homes or remodeling, along with home equity lines of credit.

**We serve ministries** with federally insured deposit accounts, a flexible credit card program, auto loans and unsecured ministry loans up to \$100,000 for small projects such as building repair and purchases. Our new CU@Work program presents the opportunity for ministry organizations to offer our Credit Union products and services along with other exclusive perks to their employees.

**In 2023, we ushered in the fifth 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 deposits up to an established amount. Together, we have served **722 rostered ministers** who, collectively, have made emergency savings deposits of more than \$1 million.

Our strong online presence allows members to access their funds anytime, anywhere—as consumers expect.

### **Why choose the ELCA Federal Credit Union?**

- **The ELCA Federal Credit Union supports the ELCA's mission of good stewardship.** We provide full services to all ELCA members, congregations and related ministries.
- **Our mission is to offer competitively priced products and services. As a not-for-profit financial cooperative,** we can often offer better rates and lower fees than traditional banks. We have demonstrated success in providing savings to our members.
- **With the church as our sponsor, we operate in ways that are consistent with the church's values.**

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

**For more information about the products and services of the ELCA Federal Credit Union, please visit our website, [elcafcu.org](http://elcafcu.org) or call us toll free at 877-715-1111.**

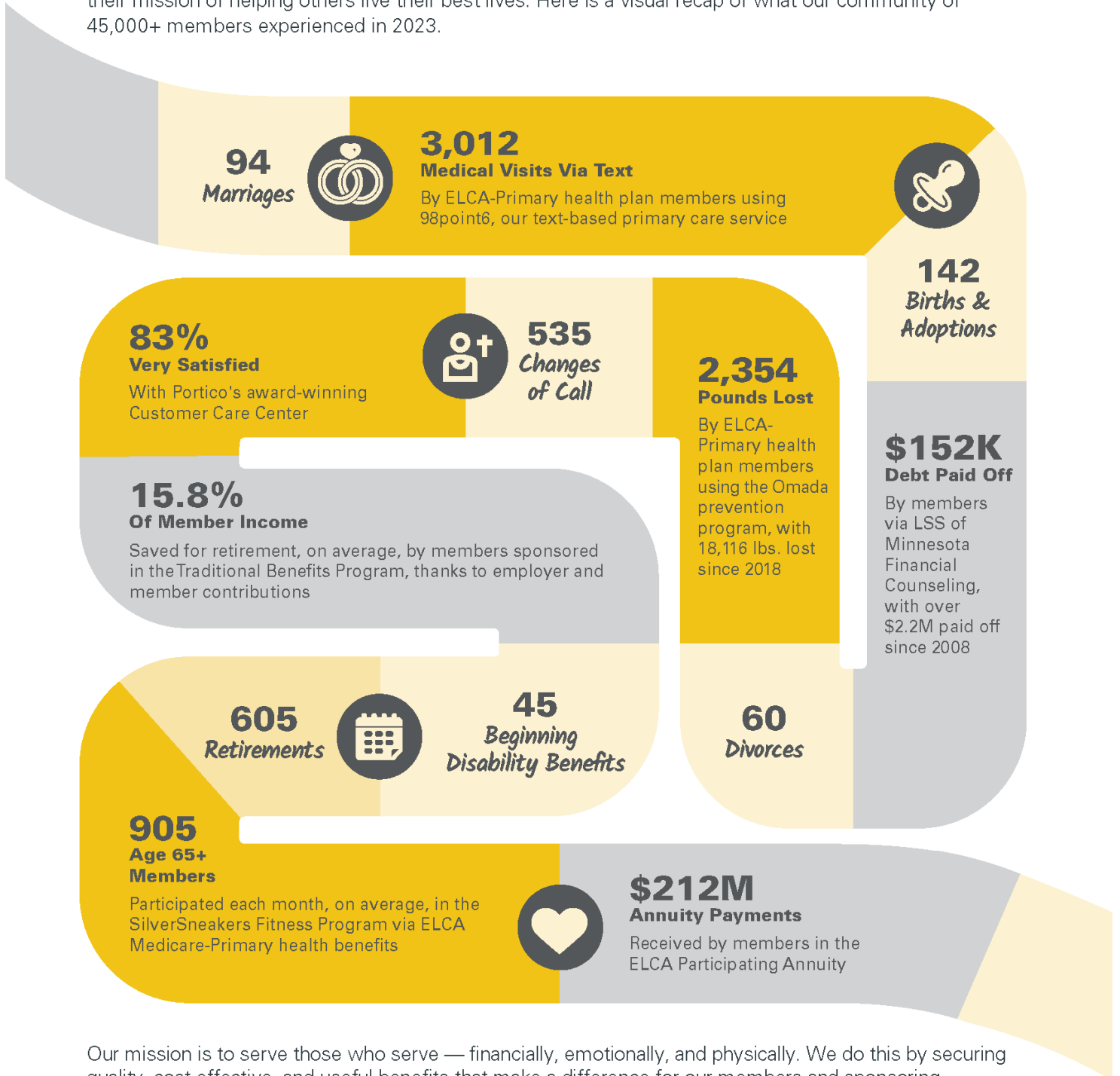
# From Our Partners in Ministry - Portico

**PORTICO**<sup>®</sup>

Benefit Services | A Ministry of the ELCA

## Benefits Making a Difference

At Portico we strive to offer benefits that make our plan members' lives better, so that they can fulfill their mission of helping others live their best lives. Here is a visual recap of what our community of 45,000+ members experienced in 2023.



Our mission is to serve those who serve — financially, emotionally, and physically. We do this by securing quality, cost-effective, and useful benefits that make a difference for our members and sponsoring organizations. With each new year we continue to grow our pool and affirm the value and importance of church together.

Note: Unless a specific benefit program is mentioned, these numbers and percentages were drawn from across Portico's benefit programs.

60-302 (02/24)