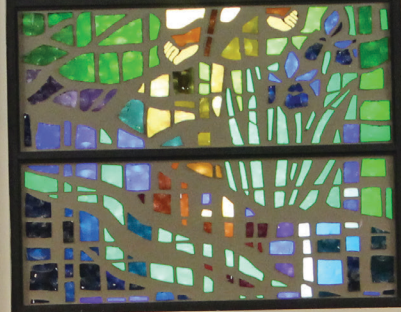




Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

# 2023 Year in Review

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





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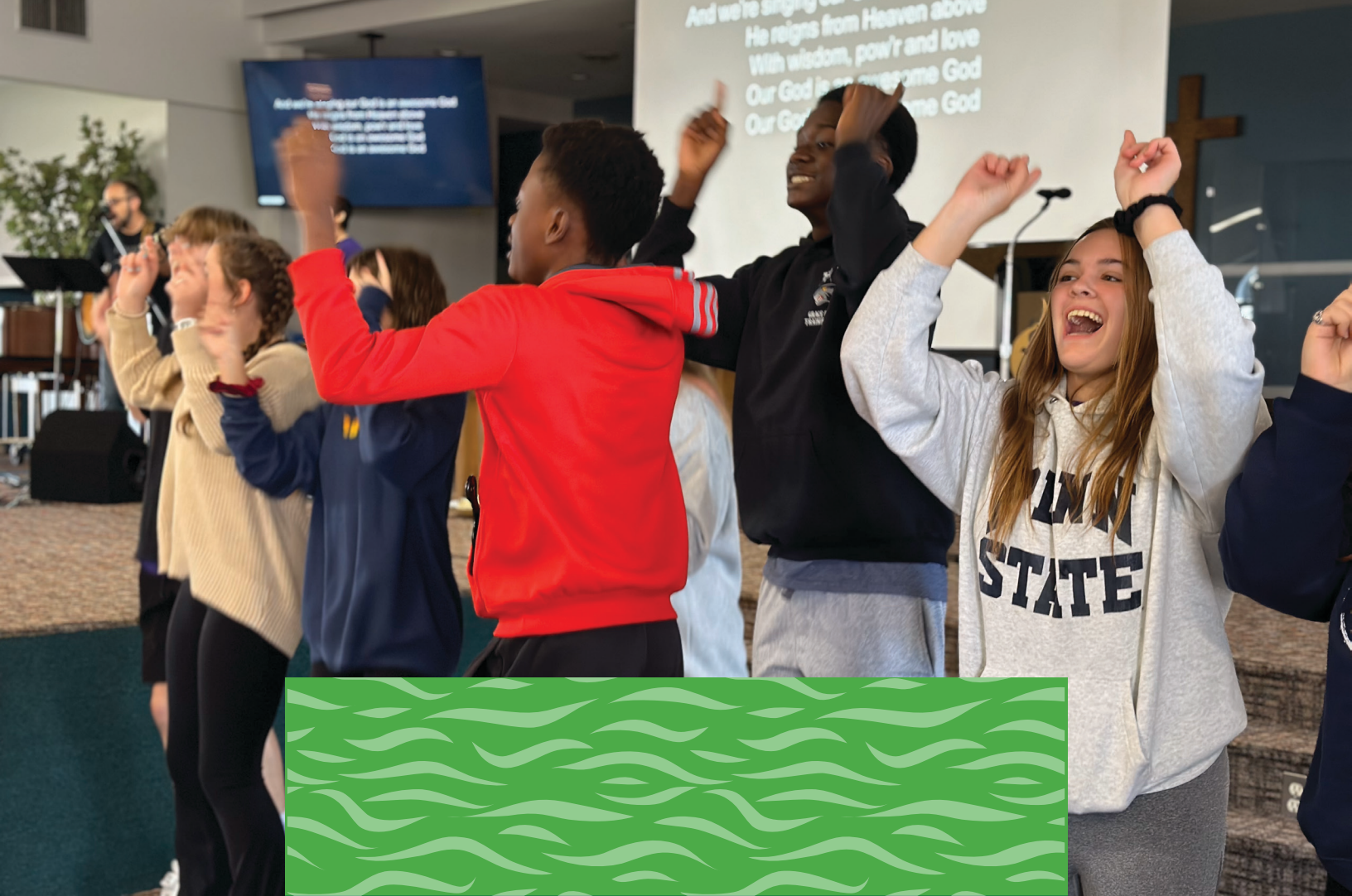
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“I love the LYO because it’s such a positive place. Everyone is welcoming. The retreats are so much fun. They are a great way to build in your faith and make connections with kids your age.”

**Breeze L.,**  
Fellowship & Hospitality Leader Among  
Leaders  
(River of Grace, Manassas)



## Year in Review

By Jennifer Slagle Peck, Synod Vice President

Dear Siblings in Christ,

Blessings to you in the new year, a time of excitement for new adventures ahead and reflection on the joys and sorrows of the past year. As we enter the new year, my personal practice is to identify a word to guide me through the coming year. It often builds on the experiences of the past year and encourages me to focus on something I want to do more (breathe), seek more (community), or give more (grace).

For 2024, I am picking a word that was inspired by my experience at the synod's middle school retreat in November. I arrived at the retreat on the second day, just in time for worship. As I sat (and stood and danced) in that worship service, I was awed by the powerful witness of the middle school students and the Lutheran Youth Organization high school volunteers. Many of the students had just met each other the day before, but it was obvious that they were already fast friends.

During worship, a couple of high school volunteers invited the middle school students to stand up and share a "yay God" moment, that is, a time when they saw or felt God present during the weekend. I looked around and wondered if any brave soul – let alone a middle school aged soul – would stand up and be vulnerable enough in a large group to share a yay God moment. I didn't have to wait long, however, as the middle schoolers immediately engaged and began sharing moments of making new friends, feeling included, trying new things, and feeling loved exactly as they are. My heart burst with joy that my daughter, and so many other students from our synod and from the Delaware-Maryland Synod, were able to share this moment and experience this weekend together.

Witnessing the open sharing of the middle school students – and their joy in recognizing and naming yay God moments – inspired me to reflect on 2023 through this lens and led me to make "yay God" my mantra for 2024.

Here are a few of the **yay God** moments that I experienced on synod council in 2023:

**yay God** for the **22 synod council members** who served during the 2022-2023 and/or the 2023-2024 synod council years. Over the course of many Saturday mornings together, we worshipped, heard stories of joy and sorrow from around the synod, and discussed how to foster faith, connection, and justice. I am thankful for each and every one of these faithful witnesses.

**yay God** for **youth retreats and outdoor ministries**, including Mar-lu-ridge and Caroline Furnace. Each and every retreat and week at camp were surely filled with countless yay God moments and created memories that our children, staff, and adult leaders will treasure forever. I have witnessed first-hand the joy of my own children participating in these events, and I hope you will share these opportunities with youth in your congregation in 2024. I'm pleased that in November, the synod council voted to financially support a capital campaign at each of our camps, which will help provide important updates to the facilities.

**yay God** for the work of all our **synod committees, tables, and teams**, and for the faithful and dedicated chairs and members of each group. The synod's work and impact could not stretch as far without these engaged volunteers. In May, the synod council formed a **Reconciling in Christ Team**, which dove right in and organized the synod's presence in the Washington, D.C. Pride Parade in June. Also in June, the assembly voted to form a **Youth and Family Ministry Committee**, which is in progress. Interested individuals can reach



out to Deacon Julie Stecker for more information! This past summer, the **Climate Justice Team** held meetings to expand its membership and reach. Throughout the year, the **Racial Equity Team** facilitated **Sacred Ground discussion groups** for our synod's rostered ministers and lay leaders, and brought the curriculum to interested congregations as well. The **New and Renewing Missions Table** also faithfully developed and implemented grant programs to foster sabbath for our rostered ministers and partnerships between our congregations. Yay God for this work and so much more handled by the committees, tables, and teams.

*yay God* for our **Racial Equity Strategic Planning Team** who prayerfully considered the results of our racial equity audit and discerned how to take tangible steps to move our systems and our synod toward a more equitable and just future. The team has been working on five focus areas: policies, communications, rostered ministers, culture shifts, and identity groups. I am grateful for this team and for all who helped us complete the first ever synodical racial equity audit. I am also grateful for what we learned through the audit, both in terms of substance and process, and grateful for the continued engagement of this team. The team remains focused

on identifying and implementing process improvements, as well as fostering opportunities to connect authentically and increase cultural competence in our synod.

*yay God* for the synod's updated **welcome statement** adopted by the assembly in June. This statement brings us in line with the current requirements to be a Reconciling in Christ organization, which we have been since 1989, and it will hopefully serve as a guiding light, illuminating who we are and reminding us who we are called to be.

*yay God* for the beautiful array of congregations we have in the synod and the unique ways in which they each gather in Your name and sing Your praises. This past year, I had the privilege of visiting a few congregations in our synod, including the **UMD campus ministry**. Visiting the campus ministry on Sunday night involves sharing a meal with the students before the evening worship, which gives visitors a chance to talk with and get to know the students. Both times I have visited, I have been delighted by the experience. These students are smart, curious, exceedingly welcoming – and they help lead each part of their worship service. Seeing them and realizing that each one of them is going out into the world with the comfort of knowing



they are beloved by God and the authority to share that love with others, gives me so much gratitude and hope. If you are interested in visiting the campus ministry, your congregation can serve a meal and join the students for worship any Sunday evening. Reach out to Pastor Ray Ranker for more information!

*yay God* for the opportunities for people across our synod to gather this past year, including the **Bishop's Convocation in Puerto Rico** in April, the **Synod Assembly** in June, our first ever **Faith in Action Block Party** in July, and a truly amazing and inspiring **Leadership Summit** in October, as well as monthly opportunities to gather in prayer through the **Traveling Prayer Nights**. These events have been a blessing to all involved and have fostered deeper connections among colleagues and friends.

*yay God* for our **talented and dedicated synod staff**. It is not possible to calculate the number of hours these fine folks spend representing each of us, supporting our rostered ministers, and supporting each of our congregations. They celebrate with us when we are celebrating and they walk with us when we are in times of transition, discernment, and (all too often) times of stress. Their work is often not visible,

but it can certainly be felt. I give thanks for their faithful service and witness to the power and transformative nature of God's love.

In addition to these moments, there are countless others I could share from the perspective of the synod council, and I'm sure each council member experienced their own yay God moments. I am constantly in awe of what the synod is able to accomplish together and I look forward to the yay God moments of 2024. Thank you for your engagement and support of your congregation and the synod that connects us as siblings in Christ across the entire metro DC area.

Blessings to you in 2024,

Jennifer Slagle Peck  
Synod Vice President



## Treasurer's Report

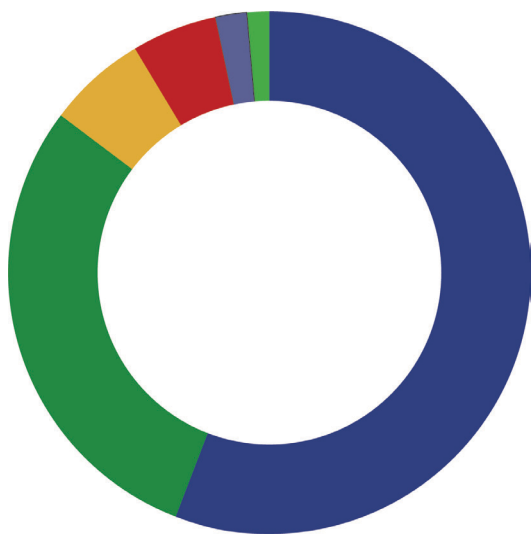
*as of February - November 2023*

Nearly 18 months ago at the 2022 Synod Assembly, we took a leap of faith and adopted a budget that projected a substantial deficit of over \$(116)k. We knew there would be challenges as the Synod and your congregations recovered from the pandemic and learned how to operate in this new world.

We hoped, however, that we could mitigate this deficit, but like many of our congregations, the Synod is facing financial challenges. As of November 30, we are already at the \$(116)k deficit, with two months left in our fiscal year. This deficit would be significantly higher except that the Director of Evangelical Mission position has remained open for the last six months, while the ELCA & synod offices search for the right person for this call. Prior experience suggests that in the final two months of our fiscal year (December and January) we will make up between \$15-20k of the deficit, but that still leaves a substantial shortfall.

The deficit will be covered by using money from designated funds as appropriate and pulling from our unrestricted reserves.

These financial challenges have not stopped us from living into our call as church and doing meaningful, faithful ministry together. What follows is testimony of God's faithfulness and of what can happen when we dare co-participate in the Holy Spirit's movement and invitation.



### How Mission Support is Distributed

- 56% Administration & Operations
- 29.4% ELCA Churchwide Support
- 6.2% New & Renewing Missions
- 5.1% Camps & Campus Ministries
- 2.0% Stewardship
- 1.3% Synod Ministry

	Feb.-Nov. 23	Budget	\$ Over Budget	% of Budget
<b>Income</b>				
40000 - Revenue				
41000 - Congregational Support	\$947,523.92	\$1,450,000.00	(\$502,476.08)	65.35%
41040 - Local Synod Ministry	\$9,183.55	\$2,500.00	\$6,683.55	367.34%
41100 - Other Receipts	\$72,605.55	\$69,700.00	\$2,905.55	104.17%
Total 40000 Income	\$1,029,313.02	\$1,522,200.00	(\$492,886.98)	67.62%
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$1,029,313.02</b>	<b>\$1,522,200.00</b>	<b>(\$492,886.98)</b>	<b>67.62%</b>
<b>Expense</b>				
600000 - Expenses				
60050 - ELCA Churchwide Support	\$336,372.62	\$507,500.00	(\$171,127.38)	66.28%
60100 - New & Renewing Missions	\$70,943.86	\$70,000.00	\$943.86	101.35%
60300 - Stewardship	\$22,868.68	\$44,750.00	(\$21,881.32)	51.10%
60400 - Synodical Ministry	\$14,626.68	\$88,350.00	(\$73,723.32)	16.56%
60500 - Global Mission	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	(\$1,000.00)	0.0%
60600 - Camps & Campus Ministries	\$59,000.00	\$59,000.00	\$0.00	100.0%
65000 - Administration & Operations	\$641,970.70	\$868,574.00	(\$226,603.30)	73.91%
Total 60000 Expenses	\$1,145,782.54	\$1,639,174.00	(\$493,391.46)	69.9%
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$1,145,782.54</b>	<b>\$1,639,174.00</b>	<b>\$1,639,174.00</b>	<b>69.9%</b>
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>(\$116,469.52)</b>	<b>(\$116,974.00)</b>	<b>\$504.48</b>	<b>99.57%</b>





## Mobility & Candidacy: Year in Review

***Pr. Sarah Garrett Krey, Asst. to the Bishop for Mobility and Candidacy***

A few years ago, when the world was in the throes of the early days of the pandemic, many of us communicated that we couldn't wait for things to get "back to normal." Although COVID is still very much a present reality, 2023 has certainly been the year that most closely resembles pre-pandemic life. And still, this year has proved that the church will have to relinquish the idea of getting "back to normal" and embrace the idea of a "new normal," a new reality to which God has called us.

Back in March, I traveled to Minneapolis to attend a gathering of ELCA Assistants to the Bishops (informally called the A2B Gathering). This gathering was a chance for A2Bs from every synod in the ELCA to come together and learn from one another, as well as share insights into what trends we are collectively seeing in the wider church. At this gathering were folks who have served on their synod's staff for mere months (like myself at the time), as well as those who have served as assistants to the bishop for decades.

As a new synod staff person, I was overwhelmed by all there was to learn. And so, I found myself gravitating toward those colleagues who had years, if not decades, of experience who share my same portfolio - candidacy and mobility - in the hopes of gleaning from their wisdom about accompanying individuals and congregations through transitions and discernment. And what I heard from these more practiced colleagues was surprising. While many of them had developed certain best practices in their roles thanks to years of experience, they also expressed that they, too, sometimes felt like newcomers because of the rapidly changing landscape of the church and leadership today. The things that worked well 5, 10, and 20 years ago no longer served them, and they needed to unlearn old ways of doing things in favor of new methods and ideas. With more congregational vacancies and fewer candidates ELCA-wide, and with new ways of doing and being church together in light of the pandemic and ever-changing societal realities, even the veterans among us were simply trying to keep up, adapt, and be resilient.

In the second chapter of Mark's gospel, Jesus warns his disciples not to put new wine into old wineskins. In other words, we cannot expect for new and changing realities to fit into old patterns and ways of being. After all, Jesus reminds us that God is in the business of doing and creating new things for the sake of the world God so loves. In that spirit, I have been encouraged by the new life, new beginnings, and new learnings that I have seen take shape across our synod over the last year.

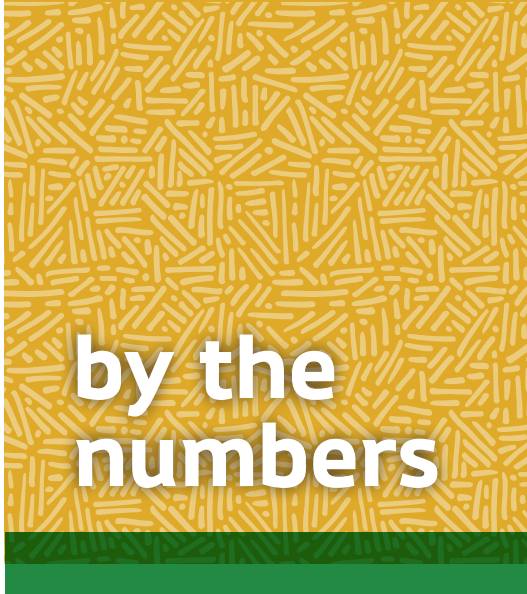
As Assistant to the Bishop for Mobility and Candidacy, it has been a holy privilege to accompany congregations and individuals through discernment, candidacy, and call

processes - all processes that lead to new things. It is a joy to see new relationships come into being between leaders and congregations, and to see candidates for ministry learn new things about themselves, God, and the world through their seminary and candidacy journeys.

In 2023, there have been 10 new calls issued by congregations in our synod, as well as 4 calls to specialized ministry through the synod council. Together, we celebrated the installation of 10 ministers of word and sacrament and the ordination of 3 ministers of word and sacrament. I give thanks to God for these congregations and the leaders who have been called to serve among them. On top of these new calls, there are 12 interim pastors who have faithfully served congregations in transition this year.

We have continued offering 6-month intentional discernment cohorts for individuals who are wondering what or where God might be calling them to, be it rostered ministry in the ELCA or some other way of engaging their faith and serving God. We have had 10 participants this year, on top of additional participants from the Virginia Synod, with whom we partner in this effort. It is a joy to walk alongside discerning individuals who are wondering about what new things the Holy Spirit is stirring up in their lives.

I give thanks for our Metro D.C. Synod Candidacy Committee, made up of synod staff, deacons, pastors, and lay leaders from across the synod who faithfully engage the work of equipping and accompanying candidates for ministry in their formation. I am especially grateful to Don Mullins, who serves as the chair of this committee, and to Julie Jackson who supports the committee and our candidates with her many gifts. The candidacy committee met 5 times this year, entrancing 7 candidates, endorsing 4 candidates, and approving 5 candidates for rostered ministry.



## by the numbers

### **CANDIDACY MEETINGS**

Feb, May, June, Sept, Nov.

- Entranced: 7
- Endorsed: 4
- Approved: 5

### **DISCERNMENT COHORTS: 10**

- Spring participants: 6
- Fall participants: 4

### **MOBILITY CALL VOTES: 6**

Zion, Takoma Park (Feb. 5), Faith, Arlington (Feb. 26); Resurrection, Arlington (April 30); St. Matthew, Woodbridge (June 11), Nativity, Alexandria (July 9); Living Faith, Rockville (Sept. 17), Christ the Servant, Reston (Sept. 17), Bethel, Manassas (Sept. 17), Lutheran Church of the Covenant, Dale City (Dec. 10), and Trinity, North Bethesda (Dec. 10)

### **INSTALLATIONS: 10**

Pr. Kevin Vandiver (Feb. 12); Pr. Alex Stall (Feb. 25); Pr. Kristin Hoyer (May 7); Pr. Frank Smart (May 28); Pr. Drew Parrish (Aug. 12); Pr. Harry Therwanger (Sept. 16); Pr. Stephen Bohannon (Sept. 17); Pr. CJ Valenti (Sept. 24); Pr. Kenny Champagne (Oct. 7); Pr. Samantha DiBiasco (Nov 3)

### **ORDINATIONS: 3**

Pr. Drew Parrish (Aug. 12); Pr. Kenny Champagne (Oct. 7); Pr. Samantha DiBiasco (Nov. 3)



I am proud to be part of a church body that takes seriously the formation of emerging leaders through seminary education, contextual formation, and the candidacy process. And yet, formation does not stop once a rostered minister is approved and ordained. First Call Theological Education is part of the continued support and formation of deacons and pastors serving in their first 3 years of rostered ministry. I am grateful to Pr. Ray Ranker for shepherding our synod's first call group for the last several years, and additionally grateful to Pr. Lauren Jenkins who has agreed to continue in this role after Pr. Ray stepped away to focus on other ministry projects. In November, 10 of our synod's first call deacons and pastors gathered for an annual First Call Retreat at United Lutheran Seminary in Gettysburg where they had a chance to worship, learn, and fellowship alongside the bishops and other first call leaders of Region 8. These leaders bring new life, ideas, and leadership styles to our synod and their congregations, for which I am grateful.

I pray that we continue to be a church of lifelong learners, always striving to learn more about Jesus, the world, and the ways we are called to live and be leaders. Part of that continued learning and evolving is encouraged through the ELCA's commitment to regular boundary and justice training for our leaders. An annual boundary training has long been required for rostered ministers, but the ELCA Churchwide Assembly also voted recently to add the expectation of justice and equity trainings for rostered ministers every 2 years. For many years, individual synods have had to

create these trainings on their own, which is why I am especially grateful that the synods of Region 8 and United Lutheran Seminary have teamed up to create opportunities for both boundary and justice trainings for our leaders. These trainings were offered for the first time this year in both in person and online formats through United Lutheran Seminary. Rostered ministers must be up to date on these trainings in order to engage in mobility processes, but more importantly for their own health, wholeness, and ability to best serve God's beautifully diverse kin-dom. If you are a rostered minister and have not recently completed one or both of these trainings, they will be offered again by ULS March 12-14, 2024.

New beginnings, new learnings, new life - this is what it means to live into the promises of our baptism and to be raised to new life with Jesus each and every day. When so much of what we know about the world and the church is changing rapidly, we remember that Jesus calls us to be adaptable, resilient, and open to the newness of life that God is calling us toward. I am grateful for the many signs of new life in and through the ministries and leaders of the Metro D.C. Synod. And I am reminded that new things do not spring forth in a vacuum, but in community. I am immensely grateful to the village that accomplishes so much for the sake of the Gospel and for God's beloved creation: lay leaders, interim ministers and supply ministers, deacons, pastors, conference deans, synod staff, and all who serve on committees, teams, councils, and tables. Together, may we lean into God's invitation - newness of life in Jesus' name. Amen.

# New and Renewing Mission Table

The Synod's New and Renewing Mission Table (NRMT) exists to direct funding and support to new ministries and existing congregations to find new and creative ways to revitalize their ministries. Here are some ways that the Table has supported the ministries of the Synod this year.

## Mini Sabbath Grants

Sabbath rest and renewal lead to transformational leadership. In support of this Metro DC Synod priority of equipping and developing healthy leaders, the NRMT launched a second round of Personal Sabbath Mini-Grants. Any rostered minister called to a congregation or organization of the Metro D.C. Synod was invited to apply for a Sabbath mini-grant to support personal rest and renewal. Rostered ministers were encouraged to take time off and away, ideally on a Sunday or other primary work days. In 2023, 26 rostered leaders received a mini Sabbath grant.

"The Sabbath Grant allowed my husband to accompany me to the ALCM (Association of Lutheran Church Musicians) conference in Philadelphia. We both love church music and sing in the Adult Choir. It was a joy to learn about the resources and collegiality of the ALCM. It was a joy to participate in the educational sessions, the plenaries, and the special evening music events. We could never predict how much that joy would provide a reservoir of strength for facing a very difficult family situation just 3 weeks later. Thanks be to God for the opportunity to share in a learning, Sabbath time together as a couple." Rev. Betty E. Landis, Saint Stephen, Silver Spring, MD.

"With the help of the Sabbath Grant, I was on a silent, guided retreat at Loyola on the Potomac, a Jesuit retreat house in Maryland. The silence set the stage for a blessed time of rest and renewal. This time helped me establish helpful routines and practices that continue to draw me closer to Christ in daily life. It's been wonderful!" The Rev. Annabelle P. Markey, Community Lutheran Church, Sterling, VA.

## Partnership Seed Grants

Bishop Ortiz encourages leaders and congregations to dream and experiment---together boldly. A priority of the Metro D.C. Synod in the past year has been to empower and nurture vibrant ministries. In support of that, the NRMT held a workshop at the 2023 Synod Assembly and launched Partnership Grants to encourage congregations to seek ways to dream up partnerships



Above:  
The Choral Arts Philadelphia concert  
in the Episcopal Cathedral

Below:  
Sunset at Loyola Retreat House





with local faith communities. These grants allow congregations to dream, experiment, explore, take risks, build relationships, and see what happens.

In this first 'brainstorming' phase, creative configurations were proposed, including partnerships between multiple congregations, partnerships within conferences, and partnerships through a synod table. In 2023, 16 partnership grants were awarded. Phase 2 of this grant is anticipated in 2024. This Second Round of grants will support the partnership ideas that emerge from initial conversations.

#### Mission Support for New Starts & Renewal

- Swahili Congregation: Zone Ministry, Prayer & Retreat Ministry
- King of Kings Dulles-South: Mission Developer Rev. Garrett Wolf - New Start
- La Sagrada Familia: Silver Spring
- Emmanuel, Vienna: Accessibility Grant
- St. Stephen, Silver Spring: Technology Grant
- Reformation, D.C.: Space for Grace Jazz Grant
- St. Matthew's D.C.: Renewing and Revitalizing

The NRMT team is composed of faithful leaders with gifts and hearts for God's mission in the Metro D.C. Synod: Rev. Kirstin Tannas, Chair, Rev. Julie Bringman, Rev. Brett Wilson, Rev. Mike Gutzler, Rev. Katherine Tuttle, and Julie Jackson, liaison to the Synod Staff.

"I wanted to send you a note and thank you again for your support by providing my colleagues and I a partnership grant. Pastors and lay leaders from Faith - Arlington, Peace - Alexandria, Resurrection - Arlington, Holy Trinity - Falls Church, Hope - Annandale and Advent - Arlington all gathered for lunch at Panera in Bailey's Crossroad. We discussed all aspects of youth ministry including how our congregations partnered in the past and how we can develop new ministry in the next program year - including making plans for the National Youth Gathering. I did not take a picture, but the whole group expressed their appreciation and gratitude. Thank you again." -- Rev. Mike Gutzler, Holy Trinity, Falls Church, VA.



## Gifts of Hope Program Highlights

Natalie Cain, Program Director

### New in 2023

- We introduced printed birthday and celebration cards as another way to support Gifts of Hope.
- We created Christmas cards that can be printed at home.
- Our beneficiary organizations were featured in the second season of the Synod Podcast, The World is About to Turn, which aired during Advent 2023.

- Southeast Ministry merged with another nonprofit, Samaritan Ministry of Greater Washington; program materials/online information will be updated accordingly.

### Continued

- Printed catalogs and Christmas cards distributed to churches in the Metro D.C. Synod for Advent.
- Digital cards for various holidays and occasions available to donors.

## Generosity

- FY23 numbers will be calculated in early 2024. Our Advent23 lead donors matched challenge gift donations up to \$9,000.
- Grand total of all fundraising from 1992 through FY22: **\$3,808,194**. Thank you for your generosity!

	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Total amount donated	\$39,338	\$45,600	\$49,002
Total number of gifts	133	131	145
Online Gifts (Square or Tithely)	71%	62%	61%
Gifts by check	29%	38%	39%
Gifts tied to a Metro D.C. Synod congregation	43%	65%	75%
Churches in the Metro D.C. Synod with gifts attributed to them	23	32	28

### Churches with FY22 Gifts of Hope donors:

- Abiding Presence Lutheran Church (*Beltsville*)
- Advent Lutheran Church (*Arlington*)
- All Saints Lutheran Church (*Bowie*)
- Augustana Lutheran Church (*D.C.*)
- Bethlehem Lutheran Church (*Fairfax*)
- Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church (*Fairfax*)
- Christ Lutheran Church (*D.C.*)
- Christ the Servant Lutheran Church (*Montgomery Village*)
- Christ the Servant Lutheran Church (*Reston*)
- Emmanuel Lutheran Church (*Vienna*)
- First Trinity Lutheran Church (*D.C.*)
- Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (*Gaithersburg*)
- Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (*Woodbridge*)
- Grace Lutheran Church (*D.C.*)
- Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (*Falls Church*)
- Hope Lutheran Church (*College Park*)
- King of Kings Lutheran Church (*Fairfax*)
- Peace Lutheran Church (*Alexandria*)
- Peace Lutheran Church (*Waldorf*)
- Prince of Peace Lutheran Church (*Gaithersburg*)
- Resurrection Lutheran Evangelical Church (*Arlington*)
- Saint Luke Lutheran Church (*Silver Spring*)
- Saint Stephen Lutheran Church (*Silver Spring*)
- Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church (*Haymarket*)
- St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church (*Rockville*)
- St. Matthew's Lutheran Church (*Woodbridge*)
- St. Paul's Lutheran Church (*D.C.*)
- Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church (*North Bethesda*)



## Latin America and Caribbean International Companion Synod Consultation 2023

### *Global Missions Team*

Greetings from the Global Missions Team!

During the first week of November 2023, folks from across the ELCA, Lutheran Church in Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean gathered in Houston, Texas, for the 6th Consultation of Global Companion Synods. Global Mission Committee Chair Kathryn Tobias and Synod Staff member Julie Jackson represented the Metro D.C. Synod. Representatives were reunited with partners from its Companion Synod in El Salvador. These consultations allow time to share ministry stories, build and strengthen relationships, identify areas of ministry that foster collaboration, worship, reflect, dream, and join together in common mission throughout the world.

In 2004, the ELCA created the Companion Synod Program and has gathered representatives from close to 150 Synods globally every three years for consultations. These companion Synods gather in person to reconnect and renew. Each gathering is centered around a theme reflecting global ministry partnerships' needs and concerns. The pandemic deeply impacted Companion Synod relationships, and this consultation was the first gathering since.

This year's theme was **Reconnect – Renew – Rise Again**. The consultation explored the Japanese art of kintsugi, a technique used to repair ceramic fractures with resin mixed with gold dust. During our time together, we reflected on the impact of COVID-19. We talked about

how the pandemic fractured our relationships and many aspects of our lives—impacts on ourselves, as members and leaders of churches, and as communities. As we continue to be the church, still living with the fractures of the pandemic upon us and our ministries, we brought back some of those memories collectively sharing, listening to each other's lived experiences, all that we have lost and may still be grieving. As we reflected, we talked about how we can fill those fractures and create something even more beautiful that reflects our support for each other while protecting relationships that strengthen and support one another as we rise again in mission and ministry.

Our time together in Texas was spent at Camp Tejas in Giddings. Camp Tejas gave us a sacred space to be together in community for a time apart from the hustle and bustle of Houston. We were able to enjoy the sprawling acres of outdoor space for hiking, lakeside sitting, campfire chats, worshiping, praying, strategic partnership planning, sharing meals, and sitting around tables laughing, crying, and enjoying the incredible gift of being together again, to reconnect and renew.

Pastor Christian Chavarria and Pastor Guadalupe Cortez represented our companion Synod in El Salvador. The Lutheran church in El Salvador has been partnered with the Metro D.C. Synod, Sierra Pacific, and the Greater Milwaukee Synod. Representatives from all four Synods



joined to create a work plan for the next three years. This plan highlights priorities to focus on through our mission together.

### The ways in which we can continue to support the Salvadorian Synod are:

- supporting the transition and election of a new bishop in 2024,
- strengthening music ministry,
- continuing to explore ways to support equitable pay for rostered ministers,
- strengthening theological education of lay leaders and rostered ministers, and
- participation in the VII Encuentro de Hermandades in 2025.

Following our time in Texas, Pastor Christian Chavarria traveled with Kathryn Tobias and Julie Jackson back to Washington, D.C. While visiting the D.C. area, long-time global mission team member Phil Loar hosted Pastor Christian. Pastor Christian was able to join the Synod Council retreat at King of Kings in Fairfax, worship with the folks of Holy Cross in Herndon, VA, worship with La Comunidad de Santa Maria, the Latine ministry of Augustana Lutheran Church, and find time to take in the National Zoo and National Cathedral! Pastor Christian was very grateful for the hospitality of the Metro D.C. Synod and looks forward to continuing to strengthen our Companion Synod relationship over the next three years.

Plans are underway with the Global Missions Committee on how we can support the priorities and strategic plan of the El Salvador Companion Synod partnership and our partnerships with Slovakia and Namibia. Are you interested in joining in these efforts? Have a passion for global missions? Please get in touch with Julie Jackson so you can be included!





## “A Year in Review” from Mt. Horeb as our Vantage Point

By *Bishop Leila M. Ortiz*

“What are you doing here, Elijah?” is the question the Lord has for Elijah after he is persecuted for his prophetic acts and decides he will lay under a solitary broom tree to die. Elijah declares, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.” Fortunately for him, his prayer would not be answered in the way he would have it. The angel of the Lord comes to him while he sleeps and says, “Get up and eat.” Elijah gets up, eats, and decides that the circumstances have not changed and so he will go back to sleep and wait to die. The angel of the Lord is persistent and comes again a second time. This time the angel touches Elijah and adds to the imperative, “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.”

We began this year in prayer and with this text, 1 Kings 19. During our first Traveling Prayer Night at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, we explored the text, mainly because I had just returned from sabbatical and to reports of leaders who were exhausted, spent, and ready to give up. Their reasons were absolutely legitimate. We had all endured some of the most difficult years of life and ministry. We were grieving, our congregations and ministry settings were no longer what they once were, and neither were we. We were different; our eyes were opened to our frailty and limitations, what was once effective no longer was, and we were forced out of our

comfort zones for the sake of the communities we truly love and wanted so desperately to serve faithfully.

The temptation to figuratively lay under the broom tree and simply give up was great! I understood this temptation firsthand. I also understood the Lord’s imperative, “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.” Time apart in prayer as faith leaders is like bread and water in desert land. And so we’ve come together in prayer each month and have been nourished by the company of like-minded friends and colleagues for the sake of “the journey” ahead; that it may not be too much for us. There is something about coming to the One who holds our days and tomorrows in their hands.

We’ve prayed, and we’ve continued to live into the call God has placed before us, I would dare say, with greater confidence; prayer reminds us that this work of the church is not for us to do alone and that the greatest work has already been done in Jesus, the Christ. Thanks be to God!

And so, Elijah journeys to Mt. Horeb with the nourishment God provides for forty days and nights in the wilderness. Upon his arrival, the word of the Lord comes to him and says, “What are you doing here,



Elijah?" At which point, Elijah takes the opportunity to complain and make clear all that he has endured, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." God was not impressed or moved by Elijah's speech. Instead, he is asked to go stand on the mountain and await, "for the Lord is about to pass by."

We know this text well; there was a great wind, an earthquake, and a fire, and the Lord was not in any of these phenomena. Instead, the Lord was in the sound of sheer silence only to be broken by the question once more, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

This year has been unlike the previous years of our ministry together. Precisely because we are different than we once were, it's been a year of "firsts" and newness.

- We began our year with Traveling Prayer Nights and a series on gratitude that was one of the best attended Leadership Academies we've offered- that makes me smile; that we would know the importance of gratitude and care to learn more.

- We leaned into our partnership with the Delaware-Maryland and Caribbean Synods; our youth ministry is gaining momentum, and our retreats are growing in number and impact.
- We organized our first Town Hall meeting, which was also very well attended and gave room for clear communication as well as healthy and inspired curiosity.
- We enjoyed our First Annual Leadership Summit and were encouraged in our discipleship to journey "on the edge of our understanding; that we might discover Jesus beyond what we believe we know," by Bishop Regina Hassanaly of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod.
- We organized the Strategic Planning Team for our work toward becoming an anti-racist synod, a work that we are called to and in which we have found new awareness and growth in our capacity to have difficult conversations for the sake of the Gospel and our relationship with the neighbor.
- We've produced a new podcast, "The World is About to Turn," that has gained the attention of Lutheran Scholars and the Living Lutheran magazine. We are currently praying over the theme for Season 3.
- We also dared to play and have fun together at the D.C. Pride Parade, during our First Annual Block Party,



and at the Nationals Ballpark for "Faith Day at the Park."

And yet, the question persists for us all, "What are you doing here?" Maybe, like you, I'm coming out of the fog of the last several years. I'm personally starting to see more clearly and have become more curious about the implications of our mission statement: "Inspired by the Holy Spirit we are called to cultivate a bold and boundless love for Jesus and God's beloved creation."

While this has been the invitation the staff and I have presented to you and our congregations, I'm curious about what it would look like for us to live and lead boldly and boundlessly now- after the pandemic, after the fog. Now that we haven't laid under the broom tree and given up, what would it look like not to succumb to the temptation to do worse and simply coast through this season because we feel we have room to do so? What would take us out of our comfort zones (yet again) and thrill our spirits because we know we're following Jesus' lead?

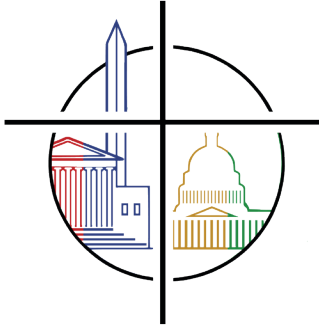
I don't have the answer to these questions for you, particularly; these are for you to ponder and pray over. I do, however, know the imperative that comes from the Lord and points to the journey ahead, the one we

are each called to pursue boldly and boundlessly, the one that requires nourishment of body, mind, spirit, and soul. We must "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey (which we have been anointed and called to travel) will be too much for [us]." And along the way, I am certain, we will hear the question that breaks the sound of sheer silence, "What are you doing here?" We can complain, as did Elijah, but God will always point beyond our frailty and limitations. As God did for Elijah, God will remind us of our prophetic duty and of our role in the liberation and transformation of a people.

In this new year, we will fight temptations and wrestle with the lure of walking away from it all; life and ministry are hard. And yet, in discernment, we will resist, we will pray, and we will rest, not in our own understanding, but in the One who holds our today and our tomorrows in their hands. And when the persistent question arises in our spirits, may we respond, "What are we doing here?! We are boldly, boundlessly, and unapologetically proclaiming Jesus the lover and savior of our church, our world, and our souls... with God's help and in Jesus' name. Amen!"

En Cristo,

Rev. Leila M. Ortiz, Bishop



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