



METROPOLITAN
WASHINGTON, D.C.
SYNOD ELCA

2024

YEAR IN REVIEW





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Dear Siblings in Christ,

On Reformation Sunday, Jesus' words pierced our hearts anew: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." As your Bishop, I have witnessed this promise unfold among us in profound ways. The truth we encounter is both sword and balm—cutting through our illusions while healing our deepest wounds.

What follows is not just an accounting of our year, but an invitation to holy candor. Together, we will examine truths that expose our complicity in broken systems and celebrate truths that sing of God's persistent grace. Each truth offers liberation—freedom to serve boldly, love authentically, and lead faithfully in this time and place.

I ask you to read what follows with an open heart. Some truths will challenge us; others will inspire us. All of them, received in humility, can set us free.

Truths That Challenge Us

The Weight of "We've Always Done It This Way"

The familiar refrain "we've always done it this way" has become more than a crutch—it has made us bound to a reality that has long left us. This attachment to past practices actively suffocates our ability to respond to God's urgent call. I believe, and you may, too, that the Spirit beckons us toward adaptive, prophetic, and embodied faith that aligns with Christ's gospel for this precise moment in history. Yet we remain devoted to comfortable patterns that deny the very transformation we claim to seek.

The Treadmill of Institutional Insanity

We have become trapped in a cycle that defies both reason and faith—repeating failed strategies while expecting new results. Like hamsters on a wheel, we mistake endless motion for meaningful progress. This is more than inefficiency; it drains our vitality and threatens our future. I don't believe God's vision for the beloved community was ever endless, exhausting repetition, but rather Spirit-led transformation that dances with divine possibility.

The Gulf Between Our Words and Actions

We proclaim "welcome," "justice," "grace," and "love" as our core values, while our actions whisper a different truth. When we examine our practices honestly, we find our true values: control, comfort, tradition, and self-preservation. Our "welcome" extends only as far as conformity allows. Our "justice" work stops at the edge of discomfort. Our "grace" has been replaced by crushing perfectionism. Our "love" comes with footnotes and conditions, offered to some of God's children but withheld from others. This misalignment between our aspirational and operational values, between proclamation and practice, betrays our sacred calling to those we are entrusted by God to serve and love.

Truths That Give Us Hope

Resilience Is Holy

Amid the aforementioned truths, God has revealed a truth that blazes with promise—our resilience is holy ground. Consider what we have faced together: a global pandemic that threatened to empty our sanctuaries but instead emboldened our communities of faith to remain together in mission. Grief that wounded our

“I don’t believe God’s vision for the beloved community was ever endless, exhausting repetition, but rather Spirit-led transformation that dances with divine possibility.”



hearts but expanded our capacity for compassion. Trauma that shook our foundations but strengthened our resolve. Systemic evil and institutional oppression that tested our courage and proved our commitment.

Here in the Metro D.C. Synod, this holy resilience isn’t just visible—it’s undeniable. We have endured multiple hardships simultaneously and have not merely survived these challenges; we have discovered depths of faithfulness we never knew we possessed.

The Power of Holy Partnership

God’s promise that we are not alone has manifested in profound new ways. Like early Christians discovering the power of connection beyond Jerusalem, we have forged holy partnerships that expand our witness and deepen our impact. Our collaboration with the Delaware-Maryland Synod exemplifies this truth—together, we have created a youth ministry that crackles with Spirit-led energy. Our young people aren’t just participating; they’re leading us with prophetic clarity into God’s preferred future.

These partnerships extend beyond formal agreements. New communities have blossomed in unexpected places. Congregations that once operated in isolation now share resources, wisdom, and mission. Colleagues who previously worked alone have found strength in collaboration. Every new connection reveals God’s abundance hiding in plain sight.

The Gift of Decline

What appears as decline is revealing itself as divine intervention and invitation. Dropping attendance numbers and shrinking budgets have stripped away our false security in metrics, compelling us toward deeper discipleship. Like the wilderness wanderings that shaped God’s people, this season of numerical reduction is pressing us to rediscover our identity.

Our dwindling numbers serve as prophetic pressure, forcing us to distinguish between the essential and the peripheral; between what is and what should be. We are reminded and learning—sometimes painfully, always purposefully—that our worth lies not in our statistics or our performance. Our worth and value is in Jesus, as it always has been and always will be.

As such, we're invited to engage the basics that sustained the early church and are calling out to us today: prayer that shapes our days and our relationship with Jesus and neighbor, Scripture that is alive and speaking into our daily living and our ministries, theological reflection that transforms our minds and does not let us conform to this world, and authentic, beloved community in Christ Jesus. In my opinion, all other ground truly is sinking sand.

This truth speaks hope into our first hard truth as the option to continue as we always have is no longer available to us. However, what is scarcity according to the metrics of this world is an invitation in God's economy— it is an invitation to walk and lead by faith; to release what is passing away; to embrace our calling anew.

Living Into Our Freedom

Beloved in Christ, these truths—both challenging and hopeful—aren't meant to burden us but to inspire us. They invite us to be free and live into a new way of being church together. As your Bishop, I see this freedom active among us. I see it when congregations dare to experiment with worship, knowing that authenticity matters more than perfection. I witness it when church councils prioritize mission over maintenance. I celebrate it when congregations collaborate rather than compete. I give thanks when our young people speak prophetically and we lean in to listen.

As such, I believe the Spirit is leading us further toward:

- Freedom to try, fail, learn, and try again
- Freedom to be honest about what's working and what isn't
- Freedom to focus on depth of discipleship rather than width of programming
- Freedom to trust that God is with us, especially today
- Freedom to be the church that is emerging, not just the church we remember

An Invitation to Holy Adventure

As we move forward together, I invite us to embrace four holy practices that can help us live into this freedom all the more abundantly. First, let us practice holy letting go. Like hands releasing a trapeze bar to catch the next one,

we're invited to release what no longer serves God's mission. This isn't about loss—it's about making space for what God desires to bring to life in and through us.

Second, let us practice holy experimentation. Every congregation has permission to try new things. Some will work beautifully; others won't. Both outcomes are valuable when we learn from them together. Your synod staff stands ready to support your holy experiments with resources, guidance, and encouragement.

Third, let us practice holy partnership. The days of lone-ranger ministry are behind us, thanks be to God. Let's continue discovering the joy of collaboration across congregations, across denominations, across all the boundaries we once thought defined us.

Fourth, let us practice holy depth. As numbers and budgets shift, we're freed to focus on what truly matters: deepening our life in Christ through prayer, Scripture, community, and service. These basics are fertile soil from which all authentic ministry grows.

Blessing for the Journey

Dear ones, truth sets us free. This freedom may feel daunting at times, but we don't walk this path alone. We have each other, we have faithful partners, we have the witness of those who've gone before us, and most importantly, we have the presence of the Living Christ.

May we continue in Christ's word.

May we live and lead as Jesus' disciples unafraid of and inspired by the truth.

And may we boldly claim and embody the freedom we have in Jesus for such a time and place as this... with God's help and in Jesus' name.

Amen.

En Cristo,



The Rev. Leila M. Ortiz
Bishop

LETTER FROM THE COUNCIL

Dear Siblings in Christ,

This fall, Bishop Ortiz invited the synod, and each of us, to engage in an intentional year of discernment. This invitation is an encouragement to reflect on where we have been, where we are, and where our collective and individual callings are leading us in 2025. An opportunity to pause and ponder is always a blessing as we move into a new calendar year, but it is especially critical for us—as a synod and as people of faith—to consider who we are and what the world needs of us in this moment. A moment in which many of our siblings have been disrespected and dehumanized. A moment in which war in our world is disrupting lives and causing people to live in constant fear. A moment in which many are uncertain whether they are safe in our country and more yet are wondering whether they are safe inside our church walls.

When I joined the Synod Council in the summer of 2020, one of the first items of business we discussed was how to respond to the racial reckoning facing our country. We spent much time considering what to say and what to do. We did not want empty promises. We did not want to share platitudes. We did not want to pat ourselves on the back for saying something but doing nothing. Instead, we hoped—we prayed—that we might demonstrate that the church can boldly stand up against injustice. That the church can name our collective and individual sins. That our calling to love one another does not mean that we have to accept mistreatment of our siblings in the name of keeping the peace. That even if standing up for injustice makes people uncomfortable or calls people (calls us!) out for hurtful words or actions, it is still the right thing to do. For we know that silence may not rock the boat, but it is not neutral. Silence merely sides with the status quo. And where the status quo is entangled with systems that were designed to be discriminatory—and systems that remain discriminatory to this day—silence is, in fact, a ringing endorsement of those systems and acceptance of those injustices.

Since the summer of 2020, the Synod Council has conducted its work by focusing on our Baptistal covenant to strive for peace and justice



throughout the world. We do this by focusing on how our statements and actions further, or detract from, matters of justice including racial justice, gender justice, and environmental justice. We also do this by focusing very intentionally on building community. We believe that knowing each other allows us to care for each other and work toward a more equitable world.

As we look ahead to 2025, I invite you to consider how you can lean into this holy work of seeking justice and building community. Maybe you are called to join the Synod Council or engage with one of the synod's teams like the Middle East Peace Team, Reconciling in Christ Team, Racial Justice Team, or Creation Justice Team. Maybe you can make time to participate in Sacred Ground, a film-based series and discussion group that hundreds of people in our synod have experienced and have found to be transformational. Maybe you are feeling called to [support the synod financially](#) to facilitate the work of synod staff and committees to care for our congregations, our leaders, and our community.

This new year will bring our community and our world many layers of uncertainty, but also many opportunities to use our time and talents to be the helpers and to make the world a better place. Take deep breaths. Pause and ponder. Where are you being called to be? Where are you being called to lead?

I hope and pray that you will find connection within the synod and that you will hold the synod and each other accountable for our collective commitment to seek equity and share God's love with all.

Blessings to you and your congregation,

Jennifer Slagle Peck
Synod Vice President

Candidacy & Mobility

*G*race and peace to you in the name of Jesus.

This year, I had the privilege of spending Holy Week—Maundy Thursday through Easter Sunday—with Pastor David Trott and Peace Lutheran Church in Bermuda, a congregation of our Metro D.C. Synod.

As a pastor, I am quite used to being busy during Holy Week, a time when a congregation might have anywhere between 2 and 8 services within the span of 4 days, depending on how they approach Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. But I think the Holy Week I spent in Bermuda might have been the most whirlwind of any Holy Week I've experienced since being ordained.

I arrived on Thursday afternoon with just enough time to take in the sights around my hotel and sit down for a quick bite overlooking the clear blue waters of Grotto Bay. Then, it was

off to Peace Lutheran Church for a Maundy Thursday dinner, worship, and foot washing. The morning and afternoon of Good Friday were centered around a massive ecumenical production called “Walk to Calvary,” which is an immersive, dramatized experience where hundreds of people gather to follow the journey of Jesus and the disciples from the Last Supper, to Jesus’ betrayal and arrest, to his trial, and ultimately to the crucifixion. It took several hours to make the entire pilgrimage, and it was a powerful experience to see so many different denominations come together to tell the story. This cast included our own Pr. David Trott (King Herod and angel at the tomb) and his son, Amiel (John, the beloved disciple), had been in rehearsals for months in preparation, and the end result was a production that was both beautiful and painful to watch in its depiction of Jesus’ sacrificial love and suffering.

After the “Walk to Calvary,” there was time to eat and briefly rest after much walking before



Candidacy & Mobility continued

heading back to Peace Lutheran for their Good Friday service, which ended in solemn silence and darkness. On Saturday, Pr. Trott, his wife Camille (a member of our Metro D.C. Synod Candidacy Committee), and I took a walking tour focused on the African Diaspora Heritage Trail. We sat at the feet of a local elder who shared the rich history of Bermudians of African descent who forged great legacies in the face of persecution and injustice.

I went to bed early on Saturday because Easter Sunday began with an outdoor sunrise worship service and continuation of the “Walk to Calvary” experience, complete with an empty tomb and joyful shouts of “He is risen!” We worshiped together with Christians of many denominations and backgrounds as the sun rose over Ordnance Island. Following the sunrise service, we returned to Peace Lutheran for their Easter Sunday service, during which I was invited to preach on Jesus’ resurrection promises. By the time we concluded worship and joyful fellowship at Peace, there were a few hours of afternoon light and warmth left, and since I had an early flight back home the following day, I decided to return to the hotel and spend a little time at the beach.

By the time I found myself in the cool waters of Grotto Bay, it finally hit me just how exhausted I was after a busy few days experiencing the emotional rollercoaster ride that is Holy Week—from shouts of “Hosanna!” to shouts of “Crucify him!” to shouts of “He is risen!” I, along with Christians around the globe, had yet again ridden the ebbs and flows of joy and sorrow, hope and pain, death and new life, all intermingled together in a short span of time.

For a long while, I let myself just float in the bay being carried by the gentle ebb and flow of the waters. In and out went the waves. Up and down, I floated. Ebbs and flows.

This year, in so many ways, has been a series of ebbs and flows, ups and downs—sometimes a true rollercoaster of highs and lows. And through it all, I have been reminded of the words of the prophet Isaiah: “The grass withers; the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” Through every season, through every cycle, through every up and down, ebb and flow, we are carried by the steadfast word and the steadfast promises of our God, who names and claims us as beloved.

It is the steadfastness of Christ’s promises that I cling to and that I encourage our congregations, rostered ministers, and seminarians to cling to amid the uncertainties, the ups and downs, the ebbs and flows of transition and change. As the wider church experiences major flux and responds to ever-changing trends and needs, the faithfulness of these congregations and leaders gives me deep hope for the church’s future.

In 2024, there have been 6 new calls issued by the congregations of our synod, as well as 4 calls to specialized ministry through the Synod Council. Together, we celebrated the installation of 6 Ministers of Word and Sacrament and the ordination of 2 Ministers of Word and Sacrament. We have been blessed by the ministry of 11 interim pastors, who have faithfully accompanied congregations in seasons of transition. I am deeply



Candidacy & Mobility continued



grateful for the deans of our 6 conferences, whose leadership in collegiality and care for one another remind me of the power of community in Christ.

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 8 participants from Metro D.C. Synod congregations this year, plus additional participants from the Virginia Synod, with whom we partner in this effort. Walking alongside discerning individuals wondering what new things the Holy Spirit is stirring up in their lives is a joy.

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 in 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; Pastor Kate Costa, who serves as the chaplain to our candidates; and Pastor Julie Jackson, who supports the committee and our candidates with her many gifts. The candidacy committee met 4 times this year, entrancing 6 candidates, endorsing 3 candidates, and approving 3 candidates for rostered ministry.

2024, in terms of the work of transitions that I have been called to, has not been a steady, constant stream, but rather a year of ebbs and flows, stops and starts, ups and downs. That can be challenging for those of us who like to keep things moving and moving fast. Perhaps that is why we are called to lean on God's Word and promises that are steadfast and consistent. May we allow ourselves to be carried by the ebbs and flows, knowing that it is Christ Jesus who holds us fast in the waters of baptism, where we are claimed and held forever. Amen.

Respectfully Submitted,
REV. SARAH GARRETT KREY
ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP FOR MOBILITY AND CANDIDACY

Conference Deans

MARYLAND CONFERENCE

Rev. Eric Randolph

MONTGOMERY CONFERENCE

Rev. Kari Parsons & Rev. Betty Landis

D.C. CONFERENCE

Rev. Lauren Jenkins

POTOMAC CONFERENCE

Rev. Jeanette Surita-Vazquetelles

FAIRFAX CONFERENCE

Rev. Mark Edwards

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

Rev. Tony Prinsen



Evangelical Mission

When I began my call as Director of Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop at the beginning of this year, Bishop Ortiz asked that this position focus on vitality and stewardship. Throughout the year, I have had the honor of working with many congregations, clergy, and laity as they have visioned ways of making their congregations more vital and to strengthen their local stewardship. I have also had the joy of working alongside our amazing synod staff to accompany congregations in times of discernment and to work on a financial strategy for the Metro D.C. Synod. The work has truly been holy work and I am grateful for the opportunity to be in ministry together.

Reflecting on this past year, there are a few areas I would like to highlight and uplift:

Vitality

- Created a First Call Pastor's Coaching Cohort—seven first call pastors meet with church vitality coach Jim Griffith and me monthly for coaching and support.
- Offered the “Six Wow's Every Guest Should Experience” workshop with Jim Griffith.
- Led multiple council retreats and met with various councils, clergy, and congregations to provide support for goal setting and envisioning how to become more vital in areas of evangelism and discipleship.

Racial Equity Team

- Continued the work for justice and equality in the synod.
- Recruited and launched Sacred Ground groups and provided prayer petitions.
- Developed a “Response to Christian Nationalism” resource tool kit.
- Led three Crucial Conversations Leadership Academy sessions.

New and Renewing Mission Table

- Continued to provide grants to offer support in areas of vitality, growth, sabbath rest, partnerships, and building and technology upgrades.
- Specific grants awarded through the Table include New and Renewing Mission grants, Partnership grants (two phases), Faith Mission Fund building grants, and sabbath renewal grants.



“I give so much thanks to our synod for the opportunity to apply and to receive a partnership grant. This grant allowed members at Living Faith Lutheran Church and Christ Lutheran Church (Bethesda), to participate in a 6-week book study. Through the grant, we were able to purchase books for all of our participants. Each week we gathered, folks were invited to read two chapters and bring their ideas and questions to the Zoom gathering. Each week we learned more about each other, we learned more about Jesus’ teachings, and we learned more about how they apply in our polarized world today. The book opened up opportunities for us to do some deconstructing in our life of faith; for example, most folks have been taught throughout their life that Jesus’ teachings were focused on getting into heaven, however, the book invited us into a discussion about Jesus’ sermon on the mount that points to Jesus’ focus of ‘on earth, as in heaven.’ Together, members were invited to bring their questions, concerns, and hopes for moving forward in our communities of faith.”

—Pastor Samantha DiBioso, Living Faith (Rockville)

Evangelical Mission continued

- Created a new “Vitality and Growth Coaching Grant” to coach any clergy or congregation wanting to make their congregation more vital.

Stewardship:

- Created a year-round mission support process.
- Worked with Bishop Ortiz and synod staff to create the 2025 Bishop’s Appeal: Bold and Boundless Love: A Lasting Inheritance that will support the Local Ministry Fund and the newly established Racial Equity Fund.
- Offered a two-part stewardship workshop, “Stewardship for Today and Stewardship for Tomorrow.” The workshop included:
 - “Turning Tippers into Tithers” Led by church vitality coach Jim Griffith
 - “Legacy: What Will You Leave Behind?” Led by ELCA Regional Gift Planner, Rev. David Shank
- Stewardship and Mission Support Table recruited three new members, including Table Chair Pastor Kate Costa.
- Created the new Stewardship Coaching Grant. This grant provides coaching support to any congregation that wants to work on their local congregational stewardship.
- Began coaching congregations interested in increasing the vitality of their local stewardship.

Over the past year, I have been amazed at all of the ways our congregations have continued to reach people for the kingdom of God through their faithful witness and outreach. The vitality and stewardship work is ongoing, yet our congregations are dedicated to this gospel work. The stories I have witnessed have encouraged me, and I continue to be in awe of the dedication in our communities.



“With the grant [from the Stewardship and Mission Support Table], we bought into the Building a Culture of Generosity program with BSG Fundraising. The stewardship chair and I are participating in their online coaching. Following their guidance, we have been collecting stories about the congregation’s impact on our members and sharing those stories of generosity. We introduced the campaign to the congregation last Sunday in a congregational meeting. We have received commitments from 3 members, who have collectively promised \$10,000 as a challenge gift if 26 members increase their Statements of Intent by any amount... I’m excited and energized by the way this is generating enthusiasm for me and others.”

—Pastor Kari Parsons, Christ the Servant (Montgomery Village)

I look forward to seeing all the ways the Holy Spirit will continue to inspire our congregations to cultivate a bold and boundless love for Jesus and God’s beloved creation!

REV. JASON SHANK
DIRECTOR OF EVANGELICAL MISSION & ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP



Youth+Family Ministries

As part of my internship, I took over as the Metro D.C. Synod Youth+Family Coordinator effective August 12, 2024. This ministry follows the school year rather than a calendar or fiscal year, so this information is for the first third of the 2024–2025 Youth+Family year. We are just getting started on what is needed to transform this ministry into one that meets the needs of youth and families in the Metro D.C. Synod by creating more local Youth+Family connections.

To oversee this transformation, a committee was created by sending out invitations to those involved in creating the Youth+Family Committee Expectations and youth leaders from throughout the synod.

The newly formed Youth+Family Ministry Committee met for the first time on August 28. Members include youth—Amelia, Breeze, Cora, Izzie, Nolan, and Ren from 5 different conferences, lay leaders Alyssa Cobb, Bailey DeLuca, Carrie Pritts, and Valerie Mayer from 4 different conferences, and Pastors Grace Casola and Eric Randolph from 2 different conferences. We do not yet have representation from the Potomac conference.

To revamp the ministry, we created a three tiered plan. The first tier focuses on maintaining the current partnership with the Delaware-Maryland Synod. The second and third tiers are Metro D.C. specific. While there is a lot of emphasis on events, the primary goal is to provide a foundation for congregations with active youth programs and those without to connect and attract more youth participation; ultimately sharing the love of Christ and how that applies to their lives. Another goal is to strengthen youth leadership by involving them in every component of the ministry.

1) Joint Synod Partnership. The synod will continue for another year with the joint synod Youth+Family Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO) partnership with Delaware-Maryland. Pastor Laura Sinche leads Youth + Family in the DE-MD Synod.

2) Conference Play+Pray Events. The committee is organizing conference Play+Pray events fully funded by Youth+Family for all who attend. All events are at fun venues where youth can come together regardless of having a youth program at their own congregation. The youth engage in play, like bowling or laser tag, and then have a time of devotion with a bible study created by the committee. Youth are encouraged to bring a friend to help create a comfortable environment for trying out something new. The youth on the committee are being empowered to contact venues, create the devotional, work on communications, and lead the bible studies at the events.

3) Congregational Connections. The committee is utilizing the New and Renewing Mission Table Partnership Grants to encourage congregations to partner with each other to create programs and events that allow congregations with few youth and/or no paid staff to develop a youth program. Each congregation that pairs with another congregation can receive \$100 for the initial conversation and up to \$1000 for anything they create together.



YOUTH+FAMILY 2023-2024

PARTICIPATION

- 142 youth in grades 3-12
- 54 adult leaders
- 29 Lutheran Youth Organization members
- 31 LYO adult mentors and event staff

EVENTS

- **Seekers (Grades 3–5):** 69 participants including Bishop Ortiz, 5 LYO youth and 11 youth from 5 congregations in the Metro D.C. Synod
- **Middle School (Grades 6–8):** 76 participants including 1 adult and 25 youth from 5 congregations in the Metro D.C. Synod
- **High School (Grades 9–12):** 60 participants including 12 youth from 7 congregations in the Metro D.C. Synod
- **Youth Gathering (ELCA):** 101 participants including 60 adults and 141 youth from 18 congregations in the Metro D.C. Synod; 16 Multicultural Youth Leadership Event participants

YOUTH+FAMILY 2024-2025

(through December 2024)

EVENTS

- **LYO Organizing Event at Mar Lu Ridge (August 16–18):** 36 participants including 11 youth and 3 adults from the Metro D.C. Synod
- **Youth + Family Zoom Update (September 17)**
- **Maryland Conference Play+Pray Event (October 19):** Participants included 9 youth from 3 congregations
- **Middle + High School Event (November 15–17):** 228 registered including 47 youth and 20 adults from 11 congregations in the Metro D.C. Synod

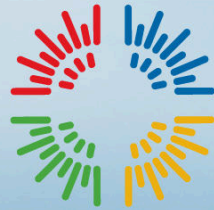
Along with the three tiered plan, Youth + Family is visiting congregations and having team members create connections with their conferences to determine who key leaders are and how many youth in which age categories they have. We want to know from the congregations, leaders, and youth what would help them engage in youth ministry in their context, with the wider synod, and with joint synod programming. We would love to help you dream up ideas on how to use the grants to further your ministry.

We also purchased the ELCA Youth Gathering curriculum to share with all of the congregations in the synod. Contact me for information on how to log in for this incredible resource.

Many exciting things are in store for Youth+Family throughout the 2024-2025 year. I invite you to check out our website <https://www.youngfaithmatters.com/metro-d-c-synod-youth-family-ministry> to learn more about all the exciting opportunities being offered for Youth+Family ministry in the Metro D.C. Synod. The committee is always interested in learning more about what would help you to better engage. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or ideas.

In Christ,
KATHARYN WHEELER
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP
AND INTERN





METRO D.C. SYNOD
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN
CHURCH IN AMERICA

*Called to cultivate a bold and boundless love
for Jesus and God's beloved creation.*

The Metro D.C. Synod Gets a New Look!

The Metro D.C. Synod launched a new visual identity for the synod in August. Visuals and how we digitally represent the Church tell a story about who we are as the body of Christ and the God we believe in. As such, the Synod Council prioritized refreshing the synod's visual identity to:

- present a visual impression that is more inclusive of all Metro D.C. geographical areas and the diversity of people within the synod's congregations and the communities served.
- simply illustrate the synod's priorities and how God is at work in the world through consistent visuals and voice.
- provide clear communication guidelines to support the synod's commitment to racial equity, social and economic justice, environmental care, and the affirmation of all God's people.

The synod partnered with local communications firm, Evoke, along with six lay and rostered leaders to articulate the unique personality of the synod and direct the final visual identity. The synod's new visual identity includes logo variations, colors, and written guidelines complementary to the ELCA's refreshed parent brand.

The arrangement of the new logo prioritizes "creating space"—to discover, to belong, and to serve. The bold lines embody the diverse and faithful people of the synod commuting in and out of the church and the world as servant leaders inspired by the work of the Holy Spirit. The negative space between them creates the cross of Christ in which we are rooted. As the synod is most commonly referred to as the Metro D.C. Synod, the primary logo uses this name. A variation of the logo with the synod's full name, Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod, is also available.

A variation of the logo with the symbol portrayed in a custom multi-color gradient will be used intentionally to reflect the synod's commitment to Reconciling in Christ initiatives and to welcoming and affirming all of God's beloved children.

The new visual identity goes well beyond logos. All synod communications, from emails to event graphics to the website, have been updated as well. The synod's new visual identity serves as a visual reminder of our call as a synod to cultivate a bold and boundless love for Jesus and for all God's beloved creation. May we celebrate our new visual identity and continue to live into our call as church together.



METRO D.C. SYNOD
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN
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Stewardship and Mission Support Table

Generosity is contagious! The Stewardship and Mission Support Table (SMST) distributed \$4150 in Stewardship Grants to be used in 2024. Here's what one pastor said about the power of their grant:

“Growing our budget by more than \$10,000 was not something I really even believed was possible or likely. We will do more than that. Through this process I have realized how frequently my own dreams or ideas for the congregation were stifled by the ever-present refrain ‘but we can’t afford it.’ Breaking out of that thought pattern really was like the mind blown emoji for me. I’m excited and energized by the way this is generating enthusiasm for me and others. Sorry, I am gushing about all of this, but it really is pretty awesome. That’s my story of generosity and I am so grateful for what a difference it (and the Holy Spirit) has made.”

The SMST also provided two workshops this year for congregational growth: “How Mission and Vision Drives Your Generosity” at the Synod Assembly and “Stewardship for Today and Tomorrow” in August, coordinated by Pastor Jason Shank. Both workshops were well attended, with approximately 200 people from 49 congregations across the synod participating in total.

For FY 2024 we received 35 Statements of Intent, and so far (early in the process) have received 9 for FY 2024. Our goal is 100% participation, and so we will be working this year to connect with and support every congregation.

Mentoring information and more stewardship resources are available on the synod’s website at <https://metrodcelca.org/stewardship/> or by emailing stewardship@metrodcelca.org.

PASTOR KATE COSTA, CHAIR



New and Renewing Mission Table

The synod's New and Renewing Mission Table (NRMT) exists to direct funding and support to new and existing congregations seeking new and creative ways to revitalize ministry.

As congregations discern new and vibrant ways to live out mission, the NRMT is here to partner in this Spirit-filled work.

The New and Renewing Missions Table

- Supports leaders and congregations who want to engage in holy experimenting in their context for the sake of the gospel.
- Provides grant funding through a number of different sources.
- Has a diverse team of leaders who have experience with revitalizing ministry in their own locations and are happy to help.

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. The NRMT is encouraging all rostered leaders to make Sabbath a regular practice and rhythm of ministry. To support this, mini-grants are available for those who haven't yet received a grant and those who are ready for another mini Sabbath. In 2024, 14 Mini Sabbath Grants were awarded.

Partnership Seed Grants

Bishop Ortiz encourages leaders and congregations to dream and experiment—boldly together. Partnership grants provide resources and support to start a conversation with another leader/congregation to discern ways to partner in ministry. Phase 2 grants are offered to support bringing the idea to life. Partnerships grants are for congregations of all sizes, ages, and locations. Start the conversation—dream and experiment! In 2024, 3 Partnership Grants were awarded.

Youth+Family Partnership Grants (New in 2024)

Building Youth+Family Ministry in the Metro D.C. Synod through Partnership

The New and Renewing Mission Table (NRMT) and Metro D.C. Synod Youth+Family (Y+F) Committee are partnering to provide grants for congregations to create events for their youth to gather together. Recognizing the difficulty of engaging youth today due to having small numbers of youth in the congregation, lack of congregational youth coordinators, and decreased funds to create fun activities, the NRMT and Youth+Family want to help. Grants are available for congregations that pair with at least one other congregation to create a youth event for any age range, inside a church building or out in the community.



“This trip was all about identifying and being intentional about what sabbath means to me. I spent time considering what makes me happy—books, gardens, photography, nature, labyrinths, good food, meditation, music, and movies were all high on that list. I also realized that both the process of planning and of traveling restored my soul. As I prepared, I loved asking people if they were given such an opportunity where they would choose to go and why. I am incredibly grateful for people who recognize, encourage, and sponsor times of respite. I hope that I can pass it forward. Thank you!”

—Katharyn Wheeler

New and Renewing Mission Table continued

“People are assigned to small groups, and meet each day with each other to share their reflections on the bible teachings and stories from their lives. My group included people from Germany, Poland, The Netherlands, Canada, and myself from the United States. Thankfully for me, our common language was English. The small group was one of my greatest pleasant surprises at Taize—we really shared our faith and our lives together in ways that encouraged us all for the journey.”

—Rev. Julie Bringman



Vitality and Growth Coaching Grants (New in 2024)

Vitality and Growth Coaching grants are available for rostered ministers to receive coaching in areas of vitality and growth within their local context and congregation. These grants aim to promote leadership development among rostered ministers which will lead to vital congregations and transformed communities.

- Coaching for First Call Rostered Leaders
 - In 2024, 6 grants were awarded, 7 leaders participated
- Coaching for All Rostered Leaders, Vitality & Growth
 - In 2024, 2 grants were awarded

NRMT Synod Assembly Workshop

NRMT hosted a workshop during the 2024 Metro D.C. Synod Assembly to raise awareness of the resources and support that the table provides to support Sabbath, Transformational Leadership, and Growth and Vitality ministries. Participants learned about the available grants, heard impact stories from grant recipients, engaged in small group conversations about holy experimentation, and were equipped with the tools to apply for a grant. As a result, additional congregations applied and received grants.

THE NRMT TEAM IS COMPOSED OF FAITHFUL LEADERS WITH GIFTS AND HEARTS FOR GOD’S MISSION IN THE METRO D.C. SYNOD: REV. JASON SHANK, ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP-DIRECTOR FOR EVANGELICAL MISSION, REV. JULIE BRINGMAN, REV. BRETT WILSON, REV. MIKE GUTZLER, REV. KIRSTIN TANNAS (CHAIR) AND NEW IN 2024 REV. ERIC RANDOLPH AND REV. SAMANTHA DIBIASO, WITH GREAT SUPPORT FROM REV. JULIE JACKSON, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT FOR CANDIDACY AND MOBILITY.

NEW & RENEWING MISSION GRANTS AWARDED

- **All Saints, Bowie:** Technology for Worship
- **Epiphany, Burtonville:** Invitational Signs
- **Georgetown, DC:** Community Accessibility & Engagement
- **Holy Trinity, Falls Church:** Safety & Security Upgrades
- **King of Kings, Dulles:** South-Mission Developer
Rev. Garrett Wolf
- **La Sagrada Familia, Silver Spring:** Mission Renewal
- **Lutheran Church of the Covenant, Dale City:** Church & Community Shared Space Repair
- **Nativity, Alexandria:** Ministry Expansion
- **Peace, St. Charles:** Environmental Stewardship

Racial Equity Team

Over the past year, the Racial Equity Team has continued their efforts to focus the synod on the needs of Racial Equity by offering guidance and resources in a variety of ways. This work has included:

- Sacred Ground Small Groups, a 12-session spiritual journey focused on Indigenous, Black, Latino, and Asian Pacific Americans as their histories intersect with European American history and provides historical information on how racism has impacted the ELCA and Episcopal Churches.
- A three-part Leadership Academy webinar, Crucial Conversations: Techniques for When Opinions Vary, focused on recognizing when a conversation becomes crucial and introducing ways to prepare your heart by mastering your story, making it safe to state your path while exploring others, and moving to action while facing tough subjects in conversation.
- A resource “toolbox” of Christian responses to Christian nationalism which is available on the Metro D.C. Synod website

- Prayer petitions focused on equity to be used by congregations each month
- Book grants of \$250 awarded to help congregations build racial equity libraries

The Racial Equity Team also updated their purpose statement to better reflect the work of the team:

The Racial Equity Team leads, coordinates, and develops resources and actions for the congregations of the Metropolitan D.C. Synod to confront racism and white supremacy in our society, communities, and ourselves; freeing us to live out our baptismal promises by centering equity and justice in our Church and the world.

The team has committed to continuing the work of this statement in the year to come so that equity and justice may become a reality in our synod, congregations, and communities.





Global Missions Committee

The primary work of Global Mission Committee (GMC) is to build and care for our synod's relationships with Companion Synods in national Lutheran churches overseas and relationships facilitated through our partners in the ELCA's churchwide offices. Our companion relationships are with the Lutheran churches in Namibia; the Lutheran church in El Salvador and the Lutheran church in Slovakia. In addition, the committee has been the synod's link with Lutheran churches in Palestine through the Middle East Working Group. The Metro D.C. Synod Global Mission Committee met on April 20, 2024 in person and September 21, 2024 via Zoom.

El Salvador

Pastor Christian Chavarria of El Salvador, Kathryn Tobias, and Julie Jackson from the Metro D.C. Synod participated in both the April meeting and the Latin America and Caribbean International Companion Synod Consultation in Houston, Texas. At the April meeting, Pastor Christian reported on the planned transition to new leadership in the Salvadoran Lutheran Church following the conclusion of Bishop Medardo Gomez's 38-year tenure. The election was planned for Fall 2024. Sadly, Obispa Emerita Abilena de Gomez, wife of Bishop Medardo Gomez, passed away during the service of the election. The General Assembly is now scheduled for December 5, 2025, with installation of the new bishop still planned for January 12, 2025, at Resurrection Church in San Salvador. Prayers for Bishop Gomez and for the Lutheran Church in El Salvador are ongoing.

Namibia

Namibia-ELCA companion synods continue to discuss how to support Paulinum Seminary in Windhoek. The ELCA holds quarterly Namibia Network Zoom meetings with the four US Namibia companion synods—Metro D.C., NE Iowa, SW Washington, and New Jersey, as well as others involved or interested in Lutheran relationships with Namibian Lutherans. At

the November 8 meeting, the group discussed sending a delegation from the synods to the installation of the Rev. Hilda Ndatale-Eenyofi Nghaangulwa as bishop of the Eastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), which will take place February 16, 2025. A delegation is planned to include Bishop Leila Ortiz and the Rev. Dr. Elijah Mwitanti, as well as Bishop Tracie Bartholomew from New Jersey and several others.

Slovakia

Metro D.C. Synod congregations supported the visit of Nina Mihokova, daughter of Bishop Peter Mihoc of Slovakia, as she attended the New Orleans Youth Gathering followed by a sojourn at Mar-Lu-Ridge camp this summer. The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia has been a part of sending humanitarian help and supporting refugees in nearby Ukraine.

Middle East

Pastor Mark Brown, chair of the Metro D.C. Synod's Middle East Working Group, reported on the current efforts to address the ongoing and worsening tragedy in Israel/Palestine and on the signing of a letter by Bishop Eaton along with 200 other church leaders supporting a ceasefire in the region.

Ministries in Need of Information, Development, and Energy

As we work toward growth in the spirit and in our global relationships, we are considering other ways in which the GMC can support the work of our synod's other global connections. We continue to pray and give thanks for the community of Lutherans and all the beloved of God around the globe.

In Jesus' name,
KATHRYN TOBIAS, CHAIR



Local and Global Impacts

Gifts of Hope is an alternative gift-giving program and ministry sponsored by the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Gifts of Hope is open to all people and helps people in need regardless of their faith or religious affiliation.

Operating since 1992, Gifts of Hope has raised and disbursed almost \$4 million to church camps, local ministries, international companion synods, and local social service agencies affiliated with the Synod. These funds have helped the homeless, the hungry, the young, the elderly, immigrants, refugees, jobseekers, seminary and college students, and those seeking to improve their lives.

Advent24 Lead Donors

This year, donations for the challenge gift will be matched up to \$4,100! Many thanks to our lead donors for their generous support: John and Bonnie Priebe, Bruce and Nancy Morrison, and an anonymous donor.

Generosity

Thank you for supporting 32 years of more meaningful giving! Financial information from FY23 was included in the report at the 2024 Synod Assembly, and financial information for FY24 will be included in the 2025 Synod Assembly report. Gifts of Hope thanks Good Shepherd Lutheran (Gaithersburg), Emmanuel Lutheran (Vienna), and Thrivent Financial for funds that helped offset catalog and card printing costs.

Beneficiary Organizations

New in 2024: Gracing Spaces



New in 2025: Georgetown Ministry Center



TREASURER'S REPORT

Annual Operating Budget

The Synod carries out its work using two different sources of funds. Our annual operating budget is funded primarily by the mission support dollars provided by our congregations, supplemented by receipts from Synod Assembly registration fees and investment income. These “new” dollars received each year pay for the ongoing operations of the synod, including staff salaries and benefits, other professional services, and operating expenses such as the work of the tables and teams, the Synod Assembly, the Bishop’s Convocation, administrative expenses, and other synod events.

The budget approved by the Synod Assembly for 2024 anticipated a balanced budget. As of October (75% of the way through our fiscal year), we show a deficit, primarily due to less than expected congregational mission support.

	Feb – Oct 24	2024 Budget	% of Budget
Revenue			
Congregational Support	\$819,747	\$1,275,000	64%
Other Receipts	\$89,934	\$102,500	88%
Total Revenue	\$909,681	\$1,377,500	66%
<hr/>			
Expenses			
ELCA Churchwide Support	\$281,839	\$446,250	63%
Synod Program Support	\$76,813	\$85,598	90%
Administration & Operations			
Ordained Staff	\$348,745	\$468,366	74%
Office Staff	\$167,571	\$232,625	72%
Synod Operations	\$120,959	\$144,350	84%
Total Expenses	\$995,927	\$1,377,189	72%
<hr/>			
Surplus/(Deficit)	\$ (86,246)	\$311	



TREASURER'S REPORT

Use of Designated Funds

The Synod is also fortunate in having significant Designated Funds—money that was given to the synod in past years and set aside for specific purposes. These funds are substantial and are used to support many of the ministries and programs carried on within the Synod. The following table shows the balance in these funds as of the beginning of the year and the activity in each fund this year. Over \$245,000 has been spent this year in demonstrating God's love in our area.

	Opening	Income	Expense	Balance
Congregational Mission Fund	\$609,094	\$102,390	\$(94,231)	\$617,254
Faith Fund - Seminarian Support	\$8,994	\$0	\$(8,994)	\$0
Faith Fund - Mission Support	\$141,513	\$0	\$(23,000)	\$118,513
Campus Ministry	\$25,519	\$0	\$(25,519)	\$0
Latino Ministry	\$7,069	\$0	\$(7,069)	\$0
Slovakia Companion Synod	\$10,185	\$0	\$(1,470)	\$8,715
Namibia Companion Synod	\$10,811	\$8,190	\$(12,132)	\$6,868
El Salvador Companion Synod	\$5,672	\$0	\$(1,134)	\$4,539
Global Mission General Fund	\$1,251	\$0	\$0	\$1,251
Bethany Fund	\$320,903	\$0	\$(27,500)	\$293,403
Youth Ministry	\$233,771	\$683	\$(39,381)	\$195,072
Stewardship Education	\$2,752	\$0	\$0	\$2,752
Bishop's Discretionary Fund	\$2	\$22,527	\$(803)	\$21,725
Building Puentes	\$27,946	\$921	\$(4,050)	\$24,817
Disaster Accompaniment Fund	\$116,003	\$11,402	\$(402)	\$127,003
Totals	\$1,521,486	\$146,112	\$(245,686)	\$1,421,912



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