

INTRODUCING STORYTELLING

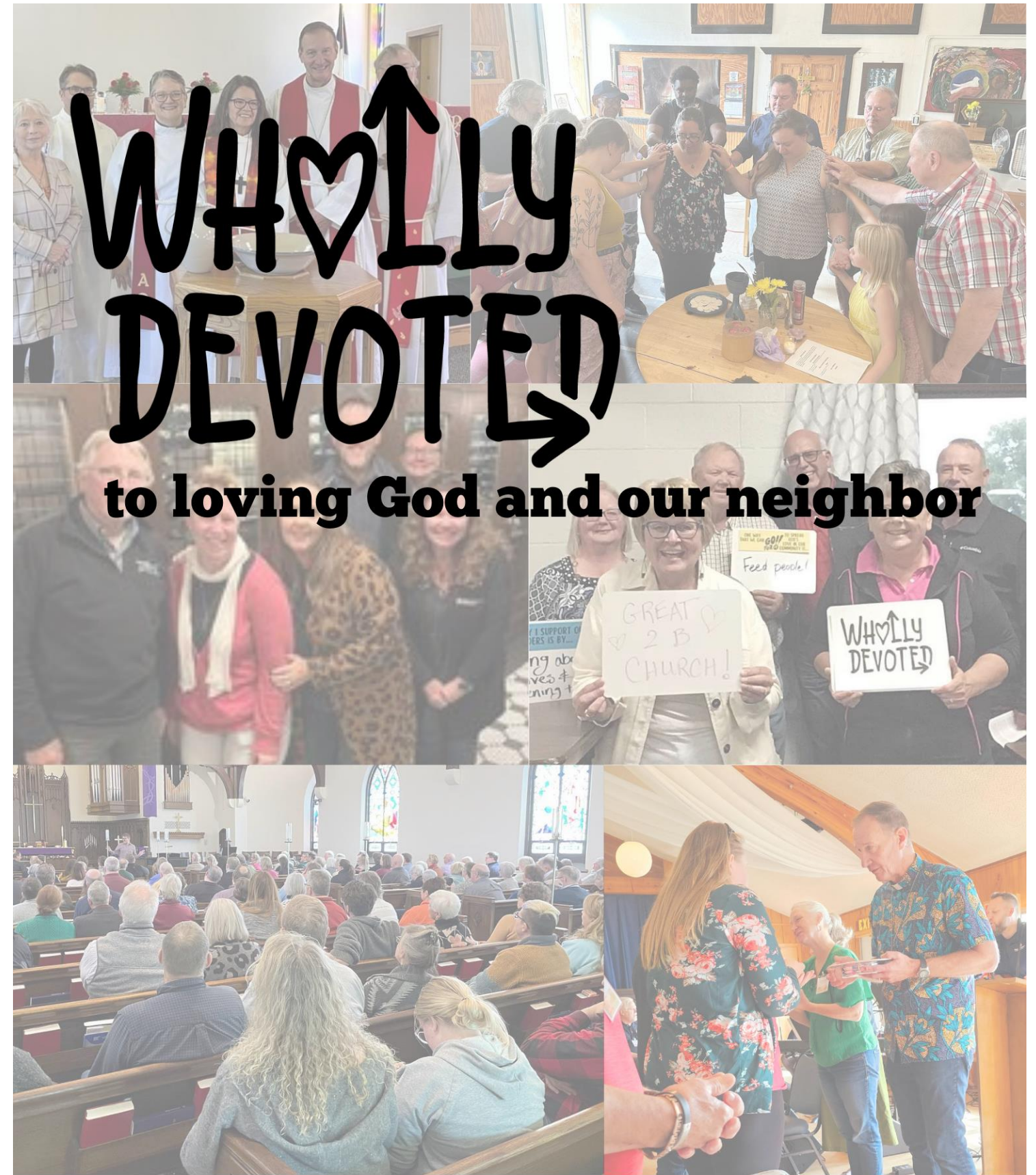


HERE YOU WILL FIND STORIES FROM AROUND THE SYNOD THAT HIGHLIGHT WHERE OUR FAITH, OUR LOVE OF NEIGHBOR, AND OUR CORE VALUES CONNECT. WE ARE NWMN!

Story to share? Contact Pr. Devlyn Brooks at
701.412.8377 or devlynbrooks@gmail.com



We hope you can come visit soon!
nwmnsynod.org



Northwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Annual Report 2023



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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

*“Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.
You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.” Luke 2:30-31*

Dear Beloved in Christ of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod,

This message is written in the season of Advent, a season I have loved since I was old enough to know that there were seasons. There is something about this season’s mix of melancholy and hope, darkness and light, that resonates with me. Children are central to the stories of Advent and Christmas – both in their preciousness and in their vulnerability. Every parent knows the agonizing mix of hope and fear that we carry for our children. As I write this, there is a devastating war happening in the land where the stories of our faith unfolded. And tragically, this war’s devastating cost is landing mostly on children. *“A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children...” (Matt 2:16).* Join me in praying every day for a just peace in the lands of Israel and Palestine and for protection of the children.

As a parent and now grandparent, I know that the most desperate prayers we pray are for our children. When I visit congregation members and leaders across the synod, one deep question is always lurking: “What will our children’s and grandchildren’s experience of church be?” What I have learned is that making it about our kids means making it about faith in Jesus, plain and simple. We must give up needing our kids’ experience of church to be like ours was, and instead pray for and work toward a church where children simply have a deep faith in Jesus Christ and a community of faith that loves them. It’s back to basics! Back to basics often involves letting go of cherished traditions, buildings and ways of doing things that may have worked for us, but now only hinder us from focusing on growing our and our children’s faith.

So, much of our work this last year has and will continue to focus on how to become a church where a child’s faith can grow. This does not mean throwing programs and events at our kids, hoping something sticks. IT MEANS MAKING OUR LIFE TOGETHER ABOUT OUR FAITH IN JESUS and then generously, freely and often, sharing our faith with our children. Jesus-loving adults are the force that shapes the faith of children. This means freeing up communities to expend less energy on “keeping this thing going,” and much more on hearing the gospel, praying, dwelling in God’s word, serving the neighbor and seeking Jesus in our everyday life.

Hence, this year has been filled with hard and focused work of continuing to build out a robust network of support and accountability for lay ministers who serve in Word and Sacrament ministry under the mentorship of a seminary-trained, ordained pastor. Our process for vitality of smaller member congregations, “Rural Revival,” has drawn us deeply into finding right-sized ways of providing word and sacrament ministry tailored to the unique needs of each community. While neither of these efforts look like “youth ministry,” they really are because they free people to be more focused on the basics, more focused on following Jesus. ANY church that is focused on following Jesus is a church that is for the children.

So that is my simple appeal to you as you gather for your annual meetings this year. Let’s make it all about being Jesus-followers sharing our faith with everyone, starting with our children.

Your Partner in Christ’s Mission,

Bishop Bill Tesch

Mission Support

Mission Support is the money your congregation sends to support ministries of our synod, churchwide and local partners in ministry. At the start of each year, congregations pledge a percentage of their offerings toward Mission Support. These funds are used for the synod’s annual mission plan and budget.

Of the Mission Support you give, 47% goes to our Churchwide ministries to start new ministries and accompany existing congregations as growing centers for evangelical mission. These funds also provide the staff and resources for developing new leaders, partnerships with churches around the globe, alleviating poverty, and so much more.

The remaining **53% of Mission Support remains with the synod**, supporting the ministry alongside congregations and leaders, call process, candidacy, conflict mediation, and staff. Additionally, 11% of these funds go to support these ministry partners:

- + Lutheran Campus Ministry of Bemidji
- + Luther Seminary
- + Oak Grove Lutheran School
- + Minnesota Council of Churches
- + The Way
- + Crossroads Campus Ministry at MSUM
- + ELCA Colleges and Universities
- + Lutheran Advocacy - Minnesota
- + Parish Nurse program
- + Peoples Church



What is the difference between the “Mission Support” that congregations give yearly and the money raised through Give to the Max and Giving Hearts Day and other special appeals? Our annual appeals like Give to the Max and Giving Hearts Day are used solely to support new and emerging needs or initiatives that cannot be covered through our annual synod mission plan.

Why does the synod hold these appeals? Isn’t Mission Support enough? One way to think about this is that the annual synod budget, which your Mission Support supports, is an expression of our *long-term* relationships and commitments. The budget represents things we’ve all agreed are essential for us to support over the long haul. As such, the synod budget does not have much “wobble room” and does not change much yearly. Our special appeals, however, allow us to offer grants, programs, and services to support new and emerging needs and ministries. These kinds of programs and ministries are fluid and more responsive to current realities.

How is the Spring Appeal (formerly the Easter Appeal/Synod Assembly Offering) different? The Give to the Max and Giving Hearts appeals support Strategic Plan initiatives. Our Spring Appeal is for missional endeavors in our community and around the world. In 2023, the funds were shared between Care of Creation Grants and our Companion Synod ministry with the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church in India.