



MNO SYNOD REPORT TO CONGREGATIONAL ANNUAL MEETINGS JAN 2024

Grace, mercy, and peace to you in the name of Christ our Saviour.

God continues to nurture, support, and care for our church while also calling us to active participation in what God is doing in the world. For this, I am thankful. I am also continually grateful for the ways in which our congregations and members partner in ministry to live out our baptisms in faithful and life-giving ways, and to make the MNO Synod what it is. Thank you to our lay and rostered leaders who urge us to follow Christ's leading

The following is a snapshot of some of the work that the synod office staff have been doing to further the ministry priorities that Synod Council developed in 2018 and refined in 2022. To see our priorities, go to:

<https://elcic.box.com/v/2022-MNO-Ministry-Priorities>



EMPOWERED
DISCIPLESHIP

- + Participation in the ELCIC summer preaching series
- + Regular Youth and Young Adult gatherings. Ongoing presence at UofM partnered with the Spiritual Care Dept. and St. John's College
- + Bus trip and participation at CLAY
- + Sharing faith formation resources through e-news and social media
- + "Faith in Context" seminars to engage members in reflection on social justice issues through a theological lens
- + Small group ministry leader training material recorded and in production to become training resource
- + Devotions and reflections shared through social media for young adults



COMMUNITY &
CONNECTIONS

- + Canadian Mission Committee renamed to Community Ministry Committee
- + Promotion of National Indigenous Peoples Day
- + Coordination of First Call Program for new pastors that includes all ELCIC synods. 2023 was in-person
- + Growing relationship with the Diocese of Rupert's Land, including joint events and some shared committee work
- + Community Ecumenical Service for Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- + Distribution of grants to encourage congregations and groups to share the gospel beyond their own walls
- + Joint letters on social justice issues with ministry partners and advocacy group
- + Working with congregations to explore shared ministry opportunities



MUTUAL
SUPPORT

- + Presence and participation at the ELCA Global Mission Gathering celebrating the EELC (Cameroon)
- + Connecting with deacons across the church to expand network of support and resources
- + Training workshops for youth leaders to strengthen, support, and network
- + Weekly hybrid meetings with actively serving clergy for information, discussion, and support. Bi-weekly meetings with retirees
- + Improved communication through newsletter, social media, redesigned website and email
- + Curated faith formation resources for congregational leaders
- + Worked with congregations dissolving and/or contemplating shared ministries
- + Synod Council visits to each congregation



FAITHFUL
TRANSFORMATION

- + Increased collaboration between congregations and pastors
- + Training seminars for congregational councils, chairs, and treasurers
- + Visioning workshops with congregational councils to explore purpose and identity
- + Streamlined MNO granting process to make better use of resources. Updated process is coming soon.
- + Provided SOGIE training for Synod Council and committees
- + Small group ministry to offer a new way of growing in faith and building relationships

In addition to the work that addresses our priorities, I want to expand on a few things from the previous year, and some plans for the year to come.

Blessings

Synod Council and staff remain committed to following our purpose as the church - to grow in faith and grow as disciples. In our work we hear countless stories of where this is happening across our synod and we are truly blessed to see how God is at work in the MNO Synod.

A top priority to address discipleship and spiritual formation has been **Small Group Ministry**. SGM is something we see in many other faith traditions and is frequently lifted up to help churches grow healthier. Through regular group connection, our members engage in relationship building, connection, and faithful conversation. SGM compliments Sunday morning attendance, and is proven to be effective at introducing new people to the congregation. We have offered several trainings and heard back from groups about the impact the experience has had. We are finalizing a video-based training module that will allow small group leaders to receive training and support on their own schedule, and to make it easier for congregations to expand their use of small group ministry without adding more tasks to leadership. I strongly encourage you to consider this ministry model to build our spiritual formation and community connections.

MNO ordained our first pastor who completed training through the **Alternate Route to Ordination** - a program designed to raise up local leaders in specific circumstances where a regular pastoral call is unlikely. Congratulation to Rev. Heather Parrot-Howdle and Erikson Lutheran Church.

We are seeing congregations slowly returning to stability and predictability after the last nearly 4 years of Covid. Congregations who are adapting to their changed circumstances and embracing a 'new normal' rather than focusing on the past tend to have less anxiety.

Challenges

Despite a return to more stability, there are congregations who have not been able to continue. Please pray with me as we remember and celebrate the faithful ministry of these congregations who closed their doors: Bethesda Lutheran Church, Kenora, ON; Immanuel Lutheran, Baldur, MB; Glenboro Lutheran, Glenboro, MB.

Ordained leadership continues to be concerning. MNO does not produce many of our own candidates for ministry and fewer pastors and deacons are able to move to MNO for various reasons. In addition, congregations are less able to pay the minimum required compensation for full-time ministry. Our supply roster is stretched thin and many of our retired ministers are finding themselves in part-time employment and/or interim ministry. I am deeply grateful for their ongoing ministry, but the current situation is not sustainable and does not help our congregations beyond meeting immediate needs. I strongly encourage your congregations and leadership to talk about how we can organize in ways that will move us from maintenance to healthy ministry.

This was a very difficult year financially for the Synod office. Many congregations cut or did not forward their benevolence dollars in full. The synod office has no way of increasing revenue beyond the generosity of congregations, so I strongly encourage your congregations to support the ministry of the synod office staff when making budgeting decisions. We appreciate your faithful generosity and look forward to serving our congregations and ministries.

Thank you for your continued prayers. We appreciate and need them in our ministry. Please continue to pray for:

Synod Council

Dallas Kostna
Dan Brunet
Rev. Courtenay Reedman Parker
Martin Kruse
Sandra Tymchyshyn
Sylvia Nilsson-Barkman
Michelle McConomy
Haiden Werboweski
Rev. Jennifer Marlor
Rev. Michael Kurtz

Staff

Donna Jackson
Deacon Michelle Collins
Bishop Jason Zinko

Synod Committees, and partners

Looking Ahead

This part of the report is identical to last year. Our focus as the synod office in 2024 will continue to be *Discipleship*.

I believe this is the most important goal to which our congregations and members could strive. This is, after all, Christ's call to us: to be and make disciples. This means committing ourselves to growing in our own faith through regular spiritual practices, gathering with others who share our faith, speaking about our faith to others, and inviting others into this gift that God has made known to us.

My belief is that most of what causes anxiety and worry in our churches would go away if we paid attention to discipleship above all else. I think we would be more open to reorganizing in healthier ways if our sole focus was discipleship. God's never-ending faithfulness to us would not be so easily overshadowed by our fear of scarcity if we were devoted to discipleship.

I know that there are countless ways to engage in spiritual practices, learning, conversation, and training throughout the year. Between our pastors and deacons, synod office, and partner organizations, you can find ways of diving deeper into your faith this year. Please take advantage of those opportunities. If you really don't know where to start, please talk to your pastor, deacon, or congregational council. Synod office staff will also develop and provide programming and resources to help our members engage in discipleship in 2024 and beyond.

The ministry we do together could not happen without our faithful and dedicated rostered and lay leaders. I am especially thankful for those who have given so much of themselves to lead in congregations without a called pastor or deacon. This is not easy work, but it is ministry that continues to feed and grow the faith of the congregation. We have many people who lend their time, skills, and passion to committees, projects, and ministries across the synod. We could not do this ministry without you. I am so grateful that you have responded to God's gift of grace through your service to our congregations and synod.

We can only be the MNO Synod when we work together as the body of Christ. Your gifts and your partnership allow us to share the Gospel and point to Christ in all we do.

Yours in Christ's Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Zinko', with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Bishop Jason Zinko
Manitoba Northwestern Ontario Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada