

“We are Church for the Sake of the World”

The Nebraska Synod strategic mission and vision theme for this year is “We are Church for the Sake of the World.” These strategic mission and vision themes are based on ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton’s four emphases launched in 2014. The synod adopted the four yearly themes at its 2015 assembly. This year marks the fourth and final installment of discovering what the themes mean for the Nebraska Synod, its members and their communities.

In discerning what “We are Church for the Sake of the World” (WACSW) means, the WACSW team discovered early on that the focus should be on the existing need for making lasting relationships with our neighbors of differing views, backgrounds and traditions in a changing world. The world that the church exists for the sake of is changing and will continue to change. What does that mean for the church today?

Some tough and relevant questions the WACSW group invites you to ponder this year are:

- How can we invite others to hear and experience the good news of Jesus Christ?
- How are we called to accompany and live among all God’s people?

- How are we called to step into our neighbors’ shoes and honor the image of God in each of us, from all corners of the earth?

As you, your fellow congregants and your community members think about these ideas, consider using the faith-growing, faith-forming and liturgical resources that the WACSW group is developing. The resources include quarterly newsletters, with worship considerations and other topics, and a quarterly podcast that discusses relevant topics such as accompaniment. These resources can help create open dialogue and new perspectives as we continue to consider our identity as a church for the sake of the world.

The resources are available on the Nebraska Synod website. Visit nebraskasynod.org and go to the “News & Resources” tab, then select “Resources/Resource Directory.” You will find the link to the “We are Church for the Sake of the World” page there.

If you would like more information about the “We are Church for the Sake of the World” group or resources, please contact office@nebraskasynod.org. ☒



Church for the sake of the world:

What does it mean?

How do we as a church live into and out from being a global church, from being a body of Christ called to serve the world? The Rev. Justin Eller from the “We are Church for the Sake of the World” working group posed this question during its first podcast.

As part of its overall mission, the Nebraska Synod focuses on developing ministries and growing disciples in the hopes of accomplishing this great task. Ministries such as global mission, justice, hunger and poverty alleviation, faith formation, outreach, stewardship and Mission Field Nebraska allow the synod to serve the world in many ways, changing lives. We also partner with serving arm organizations to reach farther into the community and across the globe.

It is through the synod’s many ministries and the partnerships with the serving arm organizations that we can reach out and embrace different communities and groups. Through our faith formation ministry and our partnership with Nebraska Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (Camp Carol Joy Holling) and Nebraska Lutheran Campus Ministry, the synod reaches youth and young adults. Through our justice, hunger and poverty ministries and our work with Lutheran Family Services and Mosaic, the synod helps those in need and further develops social ministries. With our global mission ministries, we can walk together with our brothers and sisters in other countries. Mission Field Nebraska allows the synod to work with specific worshipping communities, such as ethnic specific and prison ministries. Partners like Immanuel and Tabitha help the synod to better serve the elderly population.

And several other partnerships with our other serving arms allow the synod to respond to God’s call and invitation to do some of God’s work around the world.

Being a church for the sake of the world means walking together with both those in our Nebraska communities and those across the globe. The synod is proud to have global partnerships with the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina and Uruguay, as well as with the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. We provide annual opportunities to travel to Argentina and Tanzania so synod members can participate in accompaniment and grow as disciples while learning about other cultures and worshiping with our global brothers and sisters.

Being church for the sake of the world also means serving God’s world in seemingly small ways, such as being a visible sign of the church in court when accompanying migrant minors through AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities). Or serving in perceived bigger ways, like volunteering your time and money to participate in a synod adult mission trip to help rebuild after natural disasters.

The Nebraska Synod does all this and more, as the church together—with you, your sisters and brothers

across Nebraska, the ELCA and all around the globe. Together we respond to God’s work for us by growing disciples, walking together and serving God’s world.

It is by fulfilling this mission that the synod lives into being a global church and answers the call to serve the world. **L**



Naming and claiming “why”

By Deacon Timothy Siburg

Why do you do what you do? It might seem trite, but that’s one of my favorite questions to ask. When you get past the initial hesitancy and the attempts to brush off the question, you allow yourself and others to open up for deeper reflection about what is motivating them and what is the larger story behind that motivation or reason for doing something. In thinking about this question, you begin to peel back the layers of an onion—whether that’s your personal story, or perhaps the larger and ongoing story of your congregation that is part of God’s work and ongoing story in the world today.



Deacon Timothy Siburg leads a stewardship workshop at a synod assembly.

This question of “why” is one that should be front and center often in the life of the church, but perhaps never more so than in November. (A time when we think about the saints who have gone before us, Christ the King, Thanksgiving and the promises of God with us that we celebrate in Advent.) November is often the heart of budgeting, planning and stewardship seasons in congregations. Though I continue to push and encourage congregations to think about *stewardship all year round*, the fall, and November in particular, is still a popular time for some extra focus on faith, finances and the holistic nature of stewardship.

Asking the question of “why” may also provide the answer, in a roundabout way, to perhaps the most frequent question I hear from congregations. The question often goes like this: **“How can we encourage people to give or give more?”** Though I understand and appreciate the honesty, spiritual concern and sometimes anxiety behind the question,

asking it usually assumes a couple things. By asking it, it’s generally assumed that people should give and they should give to the church.

Instead of living by these assumptions, **start with your “why?”** Specifically think about “Why does your congregation do what it does?” “What are the ministries that you are part of?” “How are lives changed through them?” “How is God’s work done through them?” “And why are you inviting me to be a part of that, and to help support it?”

For instance, **I give to my family’s congregation first because** I believe God calls us all to return a portion of what God entrusts to our care back to support God’s work in the world. I also give because, as my wife and I are both rostered ministers, we could not speak authentically and honestly about stewardship and giving if we were not contributing and leading by example. More so, we give because we see what our congregation is doing and have

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the joy to be able to wonder about what God might be inviting us all into next as the congregation enters its 160th year of ministry next year.

The legacies and stories of God at work are immense, but for us, what excites us most is seeing the growth of disciples, seeing the faith of families coming together to serve God's people, and to honestly and vulnerably wonder what it means to be a child of God in 2019.

We also give because we know that, as a congregation which is part of the Nebraska Synod and the whole ELCA, we do far more good locally and globally than we could ever do on our own—through the portion of our offering that is shared for mission beyond and helps support new pastors and deacons of our church like us, that supports the development of youth and young adults, and that goes round the world supporting the church's work through its many serving arms. **We give because we understand our "why."**

What is your and your congregation's "why?" Purely and simply being able to articulate the "why" is critical. If more people hear the "why" behind all that your congregation does, the more likely they may see themselves as part of God's work in the world and join in it as stewards together.

If you are looking for ideas about how to tell this story, please check out the "Narrative Budget" resource on the Nebraska Synod Stewardship page, join us for upcoming Nebraska Synod Road Show gatherings in 2020, and reach out to me or members of the synod's Stewardship Table for conversation and ideas. **L**



Siburg during a congregation visit.

Deacon Timothy Siburg is director for stewardship with the Nebraska Synod. He lives in the country outside of Fremont with his wife, Pastor Allison, and their daughter, Caroline. He loves to help congregations grow deeper as stewards and disciples, and is always excited to receive invitations to visit, preach and teach across the synod. To invite him into conversation or to visit sometime in 2020, email him at timothy@nebraskasynod.org.