

As your congregation prepares for its annual meeting, it joins hundreds of congregations around the state and throughout time—particularly throughout the last 150 years. Since 1871, there's been an entity known as "Nebraska Synod," and throughout all those years, it's been a collection of congregations and members committed to making the Gospel known here on the prairie and around the world. And through its many expressions and partner ministries, it's joined that Gospel proclamation to concrete, life-changing, world-impacting ministries of service.

As part of the Nebraska Synod, you are a link in a chain of heritage that goes back a century and a half, and that reaches endlessly into the future. Be sure to read all the stories on this report cover to catch just a small glimpse of how you're partnering with God and with 90,000 other Nebraska Lutherans to make the world a better place, and to make the Gospel better known.

For all the ways in which you are part of the Nebraska Synod—for your gifts, your efforts, your prayers and your faithfulness, please hear my personal thanks, and the sincere gratitude of all those whose lives you touch, and of all of us who get to be your partners in this incredible work. God bless you!

Bishop Brian Maas



Celebrating 150 Years

The Nebraska Synod is 150 years old, founded on the solid foundation of Christ our Rock and Cornerstone. And yet we are hardly a uniform building. Once you start looking into our past, you realize we are a true mix of different cultures, backgrounds, theological convictions, and worship practices. Peeling back the layers of our history, you can see how the Holy Spirit has blended our unique stories into one spiritual house of living stones. Let's reflect on our shared history and see what has changed over the years...and discern where God is taking us into the future.



Growing Disciples

Then

In the late 19th century there were already Lutheran denominations on the East Coast. But the Nebraska Synod was founded in 1871 specifically to serve the new Lutheran migrants who had settled here several decades earlier. The earliest Lutheran missionaries in Nebraska were sent here not to convert the people of the frontier, but to gather up and organize ethnic Lutherans who had already moved out here into congregations. Our Lutheran congregations grew in the past primarily because new immigrants kept arriving and families had many children. A few of the Lutheran missionaries in Nebraska during the 19th century were Pr. Henry Kuhns and Pr. S. G. Larson.

Now

Does this old model of Lutheran mission make sense for the 21st century? Should we try to chase after Lutherans who move to a different town and then organize a congregation? Certainly since the 1980s and 90s the ELCA, and the Nebraska Synod, has been living into a paradigm shift and asking different questions. Who are our neighbors? How can we best go out and meet new people? How are we called to share the Good News of Christ in a pluralistic world?

- Emmaus
- PMA Program
- Seeking the Spirit Within

Walking Together

Then

If you look at our Nebraska Synod family tree, it is easy to get confused by the many different predecessor bodies. There were dozens of Lutheran denominations here that eventually merged to form our ELCA Nebraska Synod today. The biggest reason for all these smaller Lutheran silos had to do with ethnicity and language. The Germans, Swedes, Danes, and others all had different denominations. To make it even more complicated, these ethnic groups often subdivided further because they disagreed on certain points of doctrine (for example the Danish Lutheran churches around Blair were a separate group from the Danish Lutheran churches around Dannebrog due to theological disagreements). But after the World Wars, many Lutherans felt the call to talk together and see if these differences might be bridged for the sake of a more unified church and witness. While there have continued to be church fractures over the decades, the 20th century saw far more church mergers.

Now

Not many of our congregations speak German, Swedish, or Danish anymore but we do have more languages and cultures joining our Lutheran family! Spanish speaking Lutherans, Dinka speaking Lutherans, Nuer speaking Lutherans, and more are blessed additions to our synod. And while in the past, differences over worship practices sometimes divided Lutheran groups in Nebraska, our congregations reflect a variety of traditions (music styles, formal vs. informal, Holy Communion every Sunday or once a month, etc...) while still holding fast to our unity in Christ. In addition, all of that work Lutherans did talking to another meant that we developed a talent for ecumenism (constructive dialog between Christian denominations/groups). That is why today we can work quite closely with Episcopalians, United Methodists, Presbyterians, United Church of Christ, and more.



Serving God's World

Then

The Lutherans of Nebraska have always passionately dedicated themselves to helping their neighbors in need. But in previous centuries, these causes took different forms. The various predecessor bodies of the Women of the ELCA (Ladies Aid Society, Woman's Missionary Society, etc...) were perhaps the most successful and determined in their fundraising efforts for various ministries, even though they often met with opposition from male pastors and laymen who felt their very existence as an organization on a synodical level signaled growing support for women's emancipation. Nonetheless, their God-given persistence has very rightly outlived their critics. Another popular cause among the Swedish Lutherans of the early 20th century was their vigorous support for the Anti-Saloon League. Concerned by the effects of alcoholism on the family and community (no effective treatment

existed back then for alcohol addiction), they organized themselves politically to shutdown local bars. But perhaps more enduring was the work our Lutheran ancestors did in support of the sick (Immanuel Deaconess Hospital), the disabled (Bethphage Mission and Martin Luther Home), children and families (orphanages in Fremont and Omaha), and communities effected by disaster (local outreach efforts).

Now

The Nebraska Synod today is just as committed to living out our faith in Christ by serving our neighbors in need. But the context of how we go about that work is very different.

- Micah 6:8 Group
- ELCA World Hunger
- Lutheran Family Services
- Lutheran World Relief
- Lutheran Disaster Response ... And more!





Your Mission Share in Action

In the Nebraska Synod and the ELCA, we believe that we are the church together. Together we grow disciples, walk together, and serve God's world. One of the major ways we make this reality is by sharing our resources to support the ministries that no one congregation could do by itself.

Your congregation's undesignated Mission Share offerings to the Nebraska Synod make possible a variety of ministries to which we are called into together. Your Mission Share matters, makes a difference, and literally changes people's lives. The more that is shared beyond the congregation with the larger church means the more that ministry like this can happen:

See Your Mission Share at Work In Ministries Such As...



ELCA Partners

54.1% of all Mission Share is used to fund ministries in partnership with ELCA Churchwide. As the church together we are engaged in efforts to combat poverty and hunger, assist people in times of disaster and stand in accompaniment with global mission partners.



Nebraska Synod Ministries and Partners

21.3% of all Mission Share offerings are passed along to Nebraska Synod ministries and our Serving Arm Partners. As the church together we provide direct financial support to Oaks Indian Center, Lutheran Family Services, Lutheran Campus Ministries and Nebraska Outdoor Ministries and many more.



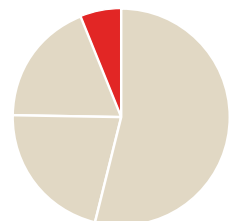
Services & Ministries

18.6% of all Mission Share offerings are used to support Nebraska Synod specific services and ministries. As the church together we are able to assist congregations with calling pastors and conflict resolution, provide leadership development opportunities as well as faith formation programing.



Administration

6% Only six cents of every dollar contributed to Mission Share is used for administrative expenses and direct overhead costs in the Nebraska Synod. This is a tremendous stewardship of the resources with which God has blessed us to carry out the mission to which we have been called.



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