

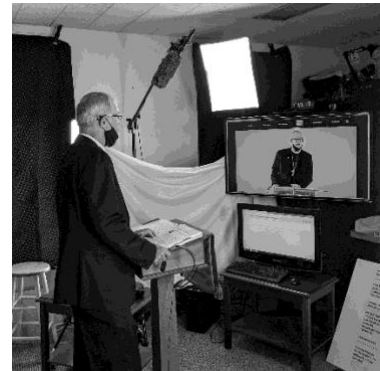
**Director of Communications Report
South Carolina Synod Assembly
2021**

What a year. 2020 and into 2021 has been filled with challenges and opportunities. Through the synod's YouTube and Facebook outlets, we've supplied over seventy worship services in English and Spanish since the pandemic started. From March into July there were an additional sixty prayer gatherings online. This was made possible through the use of online communication platforms (Zoom and Skype) and the synod's consistent investment in equipment and technology. Thank you to the Bishop, Council, and members of South Carolina Synod who continue to support the development of top-tier communication.

Here are some quick statistics about the growth of video consumption through the synod's YouTube and Facebook outlets over the past year. Over 26,900 unique individuals watched over 4,300 hours of video from the synod. Subscribers to our YouTube channel tripled and our Facebook page likes increased by 30%.

Some of our other Social Media insights include the rapid growth of our Pinterest page. We've added 8,100 new followers and have gone from just under 300 to over 1,400 monthly views of our page. And, we've doubled our Instagram account followers during the last year. Twitter remains very useful during events.

Our synod assembly was held online and hosted from the synod office. The stream originated from my office/studio space using Zoom and the Lumi voting platform. Again, thank you for supporting communications and the infrastructure to make this possible.



This past year saw continued growth of our website. We had 22,660 unique visitors to our website. That was over 3,000 more unique visitors than our previous high of 19,285. I continue to update the synod's website to make it more informative and easier to use on mobile devices. We've reached the point of 50% of our site visitors using phones and tablets.

Some information about *The South Carolina Lutheran* magazine. We continue to lose subscribers. I've done all I can to keep our costs in check. With the continuing trend of fewer paying subscribers and costs not decreasing, we are losing money. The magazine, as it has been, is no longer sustainable. With the blessing of Synod Council, we will be moving the magazine to a video format. This will be available through YouTube, Facebook, and our website. We will move some content, that is not conducive to a video format, directly to our website. We will continue to publish a print publication annually. With that, it is more important than ever to be on *The South Carolina Lutheran eNews* list. If you are not, I would urge you to sign up through our website. If you know someone who doesn't have online access, please consider printing out the eNews for them.

In the past year, the staff has been amazing to work with. I am deeply grateful to my colleagues as we've had to learn new ways of doing things. They've shown great grace and compassion when things didn't go perfectly. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,
Neal F. Fischer
Director of Communications

**Director for Evangelical Mission
South Carolina Synod Assembly
2021**

Declare his glory among all nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!

Psalm 96:3

The theme for annual assembly this year is, "To Boldly Go...to Proclaim." The message is certainly clear from our author of Acts, "Lord,...grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness" (Acts 4:29). It is not only in Acts that we find this declaration but throughout the scriptures. Take the verse from Psalm 96, "Declare" says the writer to all listening, declare God's glory and marvelous works to all. The year of 2020 will certainly be known for many things especially the COVID-19 pandemic, but it will be known to many as a year of innovation. This is most certainly true among our congregations in South Carolina. With boldness our congregations continued the proclamation of the Gospel through whatever means of communication available. God's Word proclaimed to all peoples around the globe through live streaming and recorded videos of worship and faith formation classes. The transforming message of the Gospel was heard for the first time for many and others a reconnection to the life giving message of Jesus. I believe all of our congregations became Missional Congregations in 2020!

Your Churchwide Office and SC Synod also remained focused on proclaiming the promise of the Gospel message as well. New mission starts, vitality training and innovation became a priority to make certain that we not languish in sharing the Good News.

Our mission congregations continued with strength and resilience during 2020. Christ Community Lutheran of North Charleston and St. Michael, Moncks Corner, created a new partnership that is focused on supporting one another in ministry and sharing the gifts of a new mission developer, Pastor Joshua Knutson. Parroquia El Mesias and Nuestro Salvador joined to create a stronger LatinX ministry in Mauldin and Greenville. With confidence the SC Synod worked with these ministries to bring Pastor Martin Lopez into the pastoral team along with Cindy and John Valentin. With an entrepreneurial spirit and most importantly a passion for Jesus, Pastor Jorge Leone learned with everyone that church never closed! With diligence and consistency, each week worship was recorded and made available to Cristo Rey, West Columbia, Gaston, Pelion and Sagrada Familia. Innovation continues with the hope for a new ministry in the Greenwood area that is the collaboration of SC Synod Congregations and Lutheran Services of Carolinas, to establish a recovery residence with pastoral services and worship opportunities for those seeking recovery.

We are church together and with boldness we declare God's glory and marvelous works through our Lord and Savior Jesus to all the peoples!

In Christ,
Reverend Richard T. Carter
Director for Evangelical Mission

**Director for Stewardship
South Carolina Synod Assembly
2021**

God calls us in Holy Baptism to be disciples. Everyone who goes to the font is called to discipleship. One of the ways we live out our discipleship is stewardship. Stewardship is about all the ways we live out belonging to God. "The goal of our Stewardship ministry is to help God's people grow in their relationship with Jesus through the use of the time, talents, and finances God has entrusted to them (*us*)."

(*Ask, Thank, Tell* by Charles R. Lane, page 11)

Stewardship Education for Congregations

South Carolina (SC) Synod stewardship strategies focus on stewardship education, annual response, year-round planning, mission interpretation, missional spending plan and the encouragement to individuals and families to participate in planned giving. Here are a few of the resources available:

- 1) *Rediscover Macedonia* theme materials for education, response and living the mission were launched as a website in July 2012, and are available to all congregations at no cost at www.elca.org/macedonia
- 2) *Stewards of God's Love* is a tool produced by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) for doing year-round stewardship ministry in your congregation. Copies of this resource are available at <http://resources.elca.org> or www.ELCA.org/growingstewards.
- 3) *Embracing Stewardship: How to put stewardship at the heart of your congregation's life* by Charles R. Lane and Grace Duddy Pomroy, published in 2016, can be ordered at embracingstewardship.com.
- 4) *Abundance: Creating a Culture of Generosity* by Mike Ward, Fortress Press [2020]

**Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary
Region 9 Council for Stewardship Education**

A **Stewardship Symposium** titled *Living into a Culture of Abundance*, featuring Mike Ward, CFRE and author of *Abundance: Creating a Culture of Generosity*, was held in an online meeting January 29, 2021. The symposium focused on *Building Blocks for Generosity, it starts with a good story* and *Best Practices in Creating a Culture of Generosity*. The symposium was sponsored by the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary/Region 9 Council for Stewardship Education. While the symposium was a public event, the symposium also gave seminary students an opportunity for personal growth and learning in the practical applications of stewardship in congregations. There were 188 persons participating in the online event including 21 seminarians. There were 16 congregations from the South Carolina Synod with rostered ministers or lay persons participating. The playlist link is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UEewbHXwFI&list=PLZapPS4bCOJAwHhkEQW7LDSFAWa9D90sn>

A **Senior Class Symposium** was held online, January 16, 2021, which offered seminarians first call orientation and an opportunity to learn about the benefits available from Portico Benefit Services and Stewardship Resources available through the Mission Investment Fund. There were nine seniors and interns participating.

A **First Call Theological Education (FCTE) Stewardship Gathering** (held every three-years) is scheduled to be held at Lutheridge, Arden, NC on February 7-9, 2022. The gathering will include rostered ministers, bishops, and leaders from the six synods in Region 9 ELCA. The gathering will be an opportunity for personal growth and learning in the practical applications of stewardship in congregations.

It was an honor to serve as President of the LTSS/Region 9 Council for Stewardship Education during the year 2021. I continue to serve on the council as secretary during 2021.

Networking Congregations for Growing Stewards

Ventures in Growing Stewards is offered in clusters of four to six congregations and involves pastors and lay persons in a series of four workshops over a one-year period. It includes study of biblical and theological foundations, year-round stewardship, annual response, and development of a missional spending plan (narrative budget).

In 2020 congregations were unable to participate in-person for the gatherings of *Ventures in Growing Stewards* due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Since *Ventures in Growing Stewards* is not yet available for online presentation, *Beginning a Culture of Generosity* (BCG) was offered online to congregations with Mike Ward, leader. BCG guided congregations through the fall stewardship appeal and helped stabilize

current year giving to 2019 (pre-coronavirus) levels, with the potential for modest growth above that level for 2021. BCG seeks to: 1) stabilize and grow financial giving, 2) teach Biblical stewardship principles, 3) help members discover generosity, and 4) begin building a foundation for a generous culture. Congregations participating included: St. Michael, Moncks Corner; Christ Community, North Charleston; Epiphany, Rock Hill; Living Springs, Columbia; Lord of Life, Bluffton; Pisgah, Lexington; Christ, Hilton Head; University, Clemson; Shepherd of the Sea, Murrells Inlet; Crossroads, Indian Land; Christ Mission, Columbia; and Hope, Vance.

Mission Interpretation

A synod video titled *Listen, God is Calling!* was developed in 2020. Using the scripture verse, “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened for you,” the video focuses on stories of congregations and individuals listening to God’s call in and through ministries: Stewardship for All Seasons, St. John’s, Beaufort; Leadership for Faithful Innovations, St. Andrew, Columbia; a deacon and a pastor in First Call Theological Education; Homeless Veterans in the Woods at Christ Community, North Charleston; and Parroquia El Mesias, a new Latinx Mission, Messiah, Mauldin. A synod video along with a Congregation Council devotion was sent to every congregation inviting a conversation on Mission Support. Each congregation was asked to consider 10% of Regular Giving by Members or an increase of 10% over last year’s Mission Support submitted. This is an annual plan to engage congregations in a Mission Support “ask” that is biblically based, attainable, relational, and based on being the church together.

Shepherd Callers

Shepherd Callers are a group of persons in the synod who make telephone calls to key congregational leaders to establish caring connections and to deepen relationships. The callers invite the lay chairs of congregations to use the synod video and devotions.

Expand Ways of Giving in Congregations: Moving toward Stewardship in the Digital Age

Walking together with congregations to move into stewardship in the digital age, an Electronic Giving Pilot Project is scheduled to begin in 2021 with five congregations. Tithe.ly is a preferred vendor of the ELCA. The synod will pay the cost of the tithe.ly fees and transactions for a one-year period. The project will also focus on how digital giving can be an act of worship rather than a transaction. A tithe.ly representative will walk along with congregations to help them learn about *Powerful Digital Church Tools of 2021 for Modern Day Worship*. Tithe.ly will offer their tools free for a one-year period to participating congregations.

New Consecration Sunday

New Consecration Sunday offers congregations an effective financial response method to build a culture of generosity. This approach to financing the operational ministries of a congregation teaches stewardship from a spiritual perspective. Directed toward raising the level of stewardship rather than toward raising the church budget, *New Consecration Sunday* (NCS) focuses on the question, “What is God calling me to do?” rather than on the question, “What does the church need in order to pay its bills?”, *New Consecration Sunday*, Program Book, by Herb Miller. The SC Synod provides significant financial support to congregations who use a Guest Leader and incorporate a catered Celebration Luncheon.

Planned Giving, ELCA Foundation

The SC Synod is in partnership with the ELCA Foundation to provide the Regional Gift Planner for the Carolinas, Stephanie Burke, to strengthen the financial health of our congregations, institutions, and the synod. View the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qE8YZ5uz24k>

Synod Communicators

Congregation Councils of the SC Synod are invited to appoint a Synod Communicator to share stories of God’s mission in two directions. First, the communicator is asked to share the stories of God’s mission in the SC Synod and the Churchwide Organization in the congregation. Second, the communicator is asked to share stories of how the congregation is reaching out with the love of Christ in the community. Neal Fischer, Director of Communications, receives the stories submitted by communicators and publishes the stories in synod communications.

Stewardship for All Seasons

For several years, the SC Synod has offered to partner with congregations in *Stewardship for All Seasons (SAS)*. This process is about *Guiding Congregations into Year-round Stewardship Development*. The returning congregations in covenant with the synod included: St. Matthew, Charleston; St. Luke, Summerville; All Saints, Mt. Pleasant; and St. John, Beaufort. First year congregations in 2020 included: Reformation, Columbia; Ebenezer, Columbia; St. Andrew, Columbia; and Grace, Rock Hill. The Rev. Mike Ward, a partner with Gronlund Sayther Brunkow (GSB), is the leader of SAS. The synod provides a portion of the cost for the congregations covenanting to share 10% of their increase with the synod through Mission Support. SAS is a Growing in God's Mission Appeal Initiative. View the video: <https://youtu.be/SvjnUH4ap0c>

Lutherans Restoring Creation

A part of the strategy of the Stewardship Network includes the *Caring for Creation Task Force*. This task force seeks to foster the concept and application of creation stewardship within our synod. Working with Lutherans Restoring Creation, the team aims to offer resources and generate dialogue from a Lutheran perspective with the SC Synod, its congregations, and individuals. The Rev. Kris Litman-Koon, Pastor, All Saints, Mt. Pleasant, serves as convener for the task force.

Lifeline Fund

Through a "scaling" grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., synods in Region 9 are invited to participate in the *Faith+Finance+Freedom* initiative. This is a part of the *National Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders*. The SC Synod entered into this partnership in June 2019, appointed a distribution team and agreed to collaborate by raising matching funds. Grants to rostered ministers for education debt relief, and grants to congregations for stewardship education are now available. See the SC Synod Website for an application form. As of March 2021, the South Carolina Synod has eliminated 24 ½ years of education debt for five rostered ministers. The application for Lifeline Fund education debt repayments is found here: <https://form.jotform.com/200215181602035>

Thank You

First, we give thanks for those with whom we share faith in Jesus Christ. Second, we give thanks to God for your 2020 Mission Support. Mission Support is the portion of your regular giving by members that your congregation shares with your synod and churchwide ministries. God is making a difference in the lives of our neighbors, congregations, synod ministries and people around the world through your Mission Support dollars.

I am available to congregations to assist in equipping steward leaders in year-round stewardship, conducting an annual response, developing a missional spending plan or meet with pastors to share the best stewardship practices and principles.

For additional stewardship resources, go to the South Carolina Synod website, www.scsynod.com. Select *Deepening Discipleship Table* and choose *Stewardship*.

Rev. W. Osborne Herlong Jr., Director for Stewardship
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