

## Report of the Director of Communications for 2023

Nine years. Time flies. I am continuously blessed to work with deeply spiritual and highly skilled colleagues. Thank you to the Bishop, Synod Council, and members of the South Carolina Synod who continue to support the development of a top-tier, modern communication program.

I am working to update the website. The website's infrastructure was approaching three full years of data, slowing and making the site less effective. The website continues to grow in visitors, and we continue to see a growth in mobile users. The new website will focus on mobile users' ease of use.

Our eNews list continues to perform well. More people than ever are opening our emails and clicking through to the content.

Our social media presence has been a beacon of growth for us. Since my tenure began, we've nearly quadrupled our page likes. I sincerely thank all who have joined us on this journey. Instagram has been an excellent platform for growth. The use of imagery and video is critical. If you're active on social media and still need to follow our accounts, I invite you to join us.

<https://facebook.com/scsynod>  
<https://instagram.com/scsynod>

<https://twitter.com/scsynod>  
<https://pinterest.com/scsynod>

Speaking of video, the growth of our YouTube channel has been phenomenal. We've doubled our subscribers and quadrupled our watch time this year. The videos that have led the way include:

- A History and Context for the Israel-Hamas War | Rev. Bobby Morris
- Our Lutheran F.A.Q. series with The Rev. Emily Hartmann, Assistant to the Bishop
- Regular viewership of our Sunday messages in Spanish with The Rev. Jorge Leone and The Rev. Mark Buchan
- Our Synod Assembly Live Streams
- Lutheran Living in South Carolina Video Magazine

Again, I invite you to subscribe to our channel for exciting and educational content.

<https://youtube.com/@scsynod>

Late in the Summer of 2022, I completed digital marketing certification programs from the Digital Marketing Institute and the American Marketing Association. My education continues. Recently, Newberry College has started offering online certification classes. I am now working on a Certification in Business Communications.

Our investment in equipment and software continues to connect leaders and members from around the synod. Zoom continues to be a handy tool for meetings and events (e.g., the Inclusiveness Network Book Study). Our ability to have the needed equipment helps to bring more engagement through high-quality audio and visual content. I continue to study and update our technology plan to meet our current and future needs within our budget effectively.

Respectfully submitted,  
Neal F. Fischer, Director of Communications

## Report of the Director for Stewardship 2023-2024 2024 South Carolina Synod Assembly

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](http://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](http://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](http://embracingstewardship.com).
- 4) *Abundance: Creating a Culture of Generosity* by Mike Ward, Fortress Press [2020]
- 5) *Church Finances for Missional Leaders: Best Practices for Faithful Stewardship*, by Bonnie Ives Marden, Wesley's Foundry Books, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church [2019]
- 6) *Six Weeks of Money* is an ELCA stewardship resource that helps people grow a healthier relationship with money. It's for people of all ages and situations.  
<https://start.sixweeksonmoney.com/courses/elca>

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

The Senior Class Symposium for graduating seniors and rising interns was held on March 15-16, 2024, in-person and livestreamed, which offered seminarians first call orientation, an opportunity to learn about the benefits available from Portico Benefit Services and Stewardship Resources available through the Mission Investment Fund. There were seven seniors and interns participating, seven were in person and there were no participants online. Pr. Cathy Schibler, Deacon Jerry Johnson and Pr. Danielle DeNise served as presenters.

Joint Ministries of Region 9 and the LTSS/Region 9 Council for Stewardship Education collaborated to offer two Financial Management Education Workshops, one for Candidates for Rostered Ministry and one for First Call Rostered Ministers in Region 9 led by Kim Miller of LSS Financial Counseling.

### Networking Congregations for Growing Stewards

*Building a Culture of Generosity* guides congregations through fall stewardship appeal

The purpose of offering *Building a Culture of Generosity* (BCG) is to walk along with congregations with a basic stewardship resource led by GSB consultant, Mike Ward between August and November 2024. While the total cost is \$600, the synod provides \$300 to each congregation participating. The following congregations participated in 2023: St. Paul, Columbia; Colony, Newberry; St. Peter, Pawley's Island; Redeemer, Charleston and St. James, Graniteville.

### Mission Interpretation 2024 Mission Support Video

The theme of the 2024 Mission Support Video is *Like Good Stewards* based on I Peter 4: 10 "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received."

The video features three stories: 1) Pathways to Leadership tells the story of some of the paths to rostered ministry; 2) Partnerships tells the story of Christ Community, N. Charleston, St. Michael, Moncks Corner, and the South Carolina Lutheran Men in Mission; and 3) Lutheran Disaster Response tells the story of The Rev. Ruth and Ray Sipes, Coordinators for the Carolinas.

The video was sent in January 2024 to rostered ministers and Congregation Council presidents and vice presidents along with a Mission Moment devotion. Link to *Like Good Stewards* YouTube Video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBp\\_MxmBhvE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBp_MxmBhvE)

### **2023 South Carolina Synod Ministry Toolbox**

The South Carolina Synod offered two sessions of Ministry Toolbox. Pr. Ozzie Herlong conducted a workshop titled *Finances as Faith Formation*, at All Saints, Mt. Pleasant, on October 28, 2023, and at Messiah, Mauldin, on November 18, 2023.

### **Lifeline Fund**

Through a “scaling” grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., synods in Region 9 are participating 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 this partnership in June 2019, appointed a distribution team and agreed to collaborate by raising matching funds.

As of November 29, 2023, the South Carolina Synod has paid \$203,673 to education lenders and eliminated 93 years of education debt for eleven rostered ministers and a significant portion of the debt of four other rostered minister. The Lifeline Distribution Team, meeting on November 29, 2023, set aside in reserve \$25,576.00 for four rostered ministers to be awarded in 2024.

Phase 3 of *Faith + Finance + Freedom* in Region 9 was completed on December 31, 2023. Beginning in 2024 the South Carolina Synod will present to the Synod Council a proposed Lifeline Fund Sustainability Plan to continue the work of education debt re-payment for rostered ministers. The proposed plan calls for raising at least \$25,000 a year. In March 2024 a gift of \$10,000 was received from an individual donor toward the \$25,000 goal. The South Carolina Synod has entered a contract in 2024 with Pr. John Mocko as Program Coordinator. Pr. Mocko receives applications, makes available to applicants Financial Management Education through LSS of Minnesota, and make payments to education lenders.

One rostered minister wrote: “I am writing with a humble heart filled with gratitude for receiving the Lifeline debt reduction grant. My soul is rejuvenated by this generous opportunity to be given a fresh new start in a new call, new state, and new opportunities to grow in faith and generosity too. God has provided generous givers to the Lifeline Fund and for that I am eternally grateful.”

The application for Lifeline Fund education debt repayments is found on the North Carolina Synod website under *Faith + Finance + Freedom* at this link: <https://form.jotform.com/200215181602035>

### **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 some financial support to congregations who use a Guest Leader and incorporate a catered Celebration Luncheon.

### **Planned Giving, ELCA Foundation**

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

### **Stewardship for All Seasons**

The South Carolina Synod offers 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 during May 2023 to April 2024 included: Sixth Year -St. Matthew, Charleston; Fifth Year - St. John, Beaufort; Fourth Year – Grace, Rock Hill: Fourth Year - Ebenezer, Columbia and Second Year – St. Michael, Greenville.

The first-year congregations in covenant with the synod during May 2023 to April 2024 included: Pisgah, Lexington; St. John, Walhalla; Zion, Lexington; Pilgrim, Lexington; Redeemer, Newberry; and Pilgrim, Lexington.

The new congregations in covenant with the synod during May 2024-to April 2025 include Bethlehem, Irmo; St. Paul, Aiken; Holy Spirit, Charleston; and St. David, West Columbia.

Because of the partnership with the South Carolina Synod the cost is reduced for first year congregations and returning congregations. A congregation entering the first year can expect 50% of the cost to be paid by the synod. Congregations participating in the second year and beyond can expect one-third of the cost to be paid by the synod. Congregations are asked to contribute back to the synod through Mission Support. Working with other congregations not only makes it more affordable, but also brings energy to the process. A covenant between the synod and the congregation is available on the synod website. Congregations approve participation in March and April and select teams. Congregations began May 16, 2024. and continue through April 2025. Use this contact for more information: Rev. Ozzie Herlong Cell: (803) 360-1877 or Email: [ovherlong@aol.com](mailto:ovherlong@aol.com)

Rev. Mike Ward is the leader for Stewardship for All Seasons. Mike is the author of *Abundance: Creating a Culture of Generosity*, Fortress Press [2020]. For several years the South Carolina Synod has partnered with congregations. This is an opportunity to hear about Stewardship for All Seasons (SAS) and consider thinking about stewardship development in your congregation. In SAS congregations form clusters and cohorts which facilitate learning and make it more affordable? To learn more about Stewardship for All Seasons view this interview with Mike Ward: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=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.

### **Bible Study**

Dr. Mark Allen Powell, author of *Giving to God: The Bible's Good News about Living a Generous Life*, presented a series of bible studies on the 2024 assembly theme, *Like Good Stewards*. The first session on May 7<sup>th</sup> was recorded and shared online. Dr. Powell presented additional interactive studies via Zoom on May 14, 21, and 28.

### **Thank You**

First, we give thanks for those with whom we share faith in Jesus Christ. Second, we give thanks to God for your 2023 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](http://www.scsynod.com). Select *Deepening Discipleship Table* and choose *Stewardship*.

Rev. Ozzie Herlong, Director for Stewardship  
South Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
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## Report of the Director of Evangelical Mission 2023-2024 2024 South Carolina Synod Assembly

It has been wonderful being your DEM this past year. Anything I report is thanks to the many hands that make it all possible and through your support. Some highlights from this past year include:

**Our Mission congregations.** Thanks to your continued support, the mission developers serving in our synod have worked building new communities of faith where people are finding life-changing relationships with God. The work they do is truly amazing.

**Our Congregational Vitality Team.** Over the past year, our congregational vitality team has held several events, ranging from having better council meetings to how to leverage online tools to get more people to your church's events.

**Outreach and evangelism.** I've worked with several congregations on their outreach strategies for the communities around them (and, shameless self-plug, I'd love to work with your congregation, too). We've seen new community events and new visitors to the congregations I've worked with, thanks to the work and commitment of the congregations' volunteers and their openness to new things.

**Congregation reports.** Nobody loves filling out forms A and C, but this past January each pastor and congregation should have received a report with some information based on last year's form A. Thanks to great feedback, it'll look different next year, but I plan to continue making sure the information you give us comes back to you in a meaningful and useful way.

**Innovation cohorts.** A group of pastors and I connected with the ELCA innovation lab to learn, reflect, and apply what we had learned to specific projects in our congregations.

**Ministry Toolbox Days.** In October and November, we held events for congregations full of presentations on different topics helpful for ministry in the congregation. Over 100 people attended between the two events, and we are hopeful these kinds of events will continue into the future.

As always, I'm available for conversation. I'd love to walk with you and/or your congregation as you meet the people who have a church home with you, but just don't know it yet.

Pastor James Henricks