

## Report from the Director of Communications 2024-2025

Dear Friends,

I can't believe ten years have passed. I'm still learning and trying to get better. Here's a look at the past year.

### 2024 Synod Assembly

Different challenges present themselves when holding an online assembly rather than in person. 2024 brought the opportunity to try new ideas. We held pre-assembly Bible studies and information sessions. These were well attended and viewed. Online assemblies require more pre-production. In 2024, nearly half of the assembly required work ahead of time to make the day work well.

The Synod is blessed to have volunteers helping with writing, social media, and editing text content each year. Since different styles of absorbing information require different approaches, combining the writing with the video content it refers to is most effective.

We offered YouTube for "visitors" to watch the assembly. Viewers watched 811 hours of assembly content from 2,567 unique IP addresses, and 407 hours were from the live assembly stream.

### Website

The eNews effectively drives traffic to the website. 57% of the traffic to the website came directly from links in the eNews. While successful, the eNews only drove people who received it. As leaders of the Synod, please regularly read the eNews and encourage others to sign up to receive it directly. The result means more people are enabled to make informed decisions.

### 200th Anniversary Committee Support

My office has worked with the 200th Anniversary committee throughout the year to create and distribute video stories. Fifteen videos help tell about the rich history of the South Carolina Synod.

### Technology

We are in the final stages of a significant technology transition. We needed to replace two drives in our aging on-prem servers throughout the past year. Our failing drives catalyzed moving to a cloud-based workflow with data now being saved in three places rather than two. The new solution will allow us to work on our laptops from anywhere. When there is an internet connection, the computer will sync with a secure cloud solution, and a recently installed, on-site, Network Attached Storage (NAS) device will sync and back up the cloud. This triangle completes a best practice of securing data in three locations in case of a major failure.

### Resourcing Congregations - Church Communications Roadshow

Our Church Communications Roadshow occurred on Saturday, February 1, at Redeemer, Columbia. We partnered with Church Communications Group for this information-packed day. Approximately 68 people from 25 congregations from across the state, in addition to staff from LDR Carolinas, South Carolina Lutheran Retreat Centers, and the North Carolina Synod, had the opportunity to learn about: Branding and Messaging, Story Telling, Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube), Crisis Communications, Strategic Communications Planning, eMail, Blogs, Written Communications, and Google & SEO (How people find you.)

Here is some of the feedback I received.

"This is the best education event I can remember the synod providing." "Please have more of these classes." "The presenters were clear and precise." "I learned more in this one day than years of searching on YouTube." "The complete day was well organized and executed - perfect."

On a personal note, I'm thrilled to see so many valuing good communication in this way. We are working to finalize follow-up opportunities.

*But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? - Romans 10:14-15a (NSRV)*

Grace and peace,  
Neal

Sign up for our eNews. Join the conversation on social media. Subscribe on YouTube. Stories or news to share? Contact me at [neal@scsynod.com](mailto:neal@scsynod.com) or 803-509-8325.



**Director for Stewardship**  
**2025 South Carolina ELCA 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) *Abundance: Creating a Culture of Generosity* by Mike Ward, Fortress Press [2020]
- 2) *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]
- 3) *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 symposium for graduating seniors and rising 4<sup>th</sup>-year 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.

The LTSS/Region 9 Council for Stewardship Education collaborated to offer two Treasurer’s Workshops on February 23 and March 3, 2025. The council also collaborated with Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary to offer an Explore Course in Stewardship during the Spring semester.

**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, Paul Walters, between August and November 2025. While the total cost is \$600, the synod provides \$300 to each congregation participating. The following congregations participated in 2024: St. Paul, Columbia; St. Paul, Aiken; St. John’s, Spartanburg; and Grace, Prosperity.

**Mission Interpretation  
2025 Mission Support Video**

The theme of the 2025 Mission Support Video is *Like titled* “Our Heritage, Our Hope”, based on Psalm 100, “God’s faithfulness to all generations.” The South Carolina Synod celebrated the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Synod during 2024-2025. The video features three stories: 1) Supporting Mission Yesterday: Ladies Sewing Society 1825 St. John, Charleston and Women’s Foreign and Home Missionary Society since 1891 2) Supporting Mission Today: Iglesia Evangelica Luterana de Colombia and 3) Supporting Mission Tomorrow: Lifeline Fund and Fund for Leaders ELCA. The video is sent to rostered ministers and Congregation Council presidents and vice presidents along with a Mission Moment devotion.

### **Lifeline Fund**

Through a “scaling” grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., synods in Region 9 participated in the *Faith + Finance + Freedom* initiative. This is a part of the *National Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders*. The South Carolina Synod entered this partnership in June 2019, appointed a Lifeline Distribution Team and agreed to collaborate by raising matching funds.

As of January 15, 2025, the Lifeline Fund, has provided \$222,729 to education lenders and eliminated 96 years of education debt for eleven rostered ministers and a significant portion of the debt of five other rostered ministers.

The team renewed the contract with Pr. John Mocko as Program Coordinator, Lifeline Fund, South Carolina Synod, in the amount of \$150.00 per month for the calendar year 2025. Pr. Mocko receives applications, makes available to applicants Financial Management Education through LSS of Minnesota, and make payments to education lenders.

The Lifeline Fund Sustainability Plan challenge is to raise \$25,000 each year over the next five years. Almost \$12,000 has been given in the last 12 months. Consider joining others to make a difference by relieving the education debt stress and burden of our rostered ministers. Go to [scsynod.com](https://scsynod.com). and select Give, Lifeline Fund. 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. St. Peter’s, Pawley’s Island, conducted a successful NCS in 2025.

### **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 2024 to April 2025 included: seventh year, St. Matthew, Charleston; sixth year, St. John’s, Beaufort; fifth year, Grace, Rock Hill; fifth Year, Ebenezer, Columbia; third year – St. Michael, Greenville; second year, Pisgah, Lexington; second year, St. John’s, Walhalla; second year – King of Glory, N. Myrtle Beach. The first-year congregations included: Bethlehem, Irmo; 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]. 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>

#### **Caring for Creation Task Force.**

The Caring for Creation 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. A “Resolution on Communal Stewards of God’s Creation” was adopted the SC Synod Assembly on June 8, 2024. 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, 2024, was recorded and shared online. Dr. Powell presented additional interactive studies via Zoom on May 14, 21, and 28. Links to the videos are available.

#### **Thank You**

First, we give thanks for those with whom we share faith in Jesus Christ. Second, we give thanks to God for your 2024 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 <https://scsynod.com/congregational-vitality/> and select Stewardship.

Rev. Ozzie Herlong, Director for Stewardship  
South Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
[ovherlong@aol.com](mailto:ovherlong@aol.com)

**Directors for Evangelical Mission (DEM)**  
**2025 South Carolina ELCA Synod Assembly**

In February 2024 when Pastor James Henricks went on paternity leave, Pastor Rick Carter, Assistant to the Bishop, and Bishop Ginny Aebischer began covering the role of SC Synod Director for Evangelical Mission together. We have found that the work of DEM aligns clearly with our Synod Vision: *“Every Person in South Carolina experiences God’s love and grace,”* and Mission: *“Equipping church leaders to develop impactful faith communities and disciples of Jesus.”* We have enjoyed working together, and with the other members of our Staff and leaders throughout the Synod to integrate this ministry into what we do every day to resource and bless the leaders and people of the South Carolina Synod.

The role of the DEM is to participate in resourcing the Synod Mission strategy with an emphasis on Congregational Vitality, outreach and leadership. ELCA DEMs serve as the bridge for information and resource sharing between the ELCA and the Synod. This role includes working with the Synod Congregational Vitality Network to build up resources that can assist all our congregations, but also working directly in the area of New Starts and Missions. We support and walk with our Mission Developers, Synodically Authorized Worshipping Communities and Outreach Ministries. Our work is designed to help congregations engage their communities so that more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love in their faith life. We are delighted to have this opportunity to engage in this work on behalf of the SC Synod.

We are both learning the many new processes that are used by the ELCA in this current season. We have already made progress in our work with our Mission Developers by hosting individual meetings with each of them, gathering them twice since May 2024 in Round Tables, and completing Grant requests and budgeting to fund them appropriately as they continue their work in mission over the next 12-18 months.

We have entered into an Agreement for Exploration with Pastor Ashley Twitchell to learn what options and possibilities might exist for Outreach Ministry in the Greenville area. We do not presume outcomes, but are excited to learn what it might or could look like.

With our Congregational Vitality Network, we have participated in The Fresh Expressions Workshop and look forward to sharing information about this Ministry broadly over the next year and to involve as many congregations of our Synod that would like to learn more and participate.

Our partnership in this work with one another and with the ELCA affords us the blessings of offering a number of events, workshops, speakers and more to share resources across the Synod. This has included support for Council Training Events, Communications Workshops, Lombard Peace Center Workshop on Tools for Transforming Conflict, bringing Tod Bolsinger (author of *Canoeing the Mountains*) to be a keynote leader for a Fall Rally Event, exploring Small Town and Rural Ministry. We are working to listen carefully and to follow our Synod’s Strategic Plan in offering resources. This has been an opportunity to explore the ways the role and support for DEM ministry can assist in all of this.

We ask for your prayers and your engagement in this work with us. In particular, we ask for your prayers for our Missions and Mission Developers: Community Lutheran Church, North Charleston (Rev. Josh Knutson); Cristo Rey, West Columbia, Pelion and Gaston & Sagrada Familia (Rev. Jorge Leone & Pastor Mark Buchan); El Mesias & Nuestro Salvador (Rev. Martin Lopez and Candidate

Fredy Gonzalez); Restoration Chapel, Greenwood (Rev. Chris Christopher); Exploration in Greenville (Rev. Ashley Twitchell).

*Bishop Ginny Aebischer & The Rev. Rick Carter, Assistant to the Bishop*

**Coordinator of Children, Youth and Family Ministry**  
**2025 SC ELCA Synod Assembly**  
**Deacon Deborah Poole**

Although this was a year of change, I find myself feeling excited about this ministry and eagerly looking forward to the opportunities with our elementary, middle school, and high school age youth. I have found comfort in this Bible verse from Romans which also serves as the 2024-2025 theme: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:1-2) God always has a plan for us and I want our children and youth to see that reflected in all that we do. I appreciate all the wonderful youth and adult volunteers and fellow synod staff that help make it possible to serve the children, youth and families of our synod.

Here are a few highlights from 2024:

- The Winter Retreat was held in February for middle and high school youth. The theme was "Wish" and revolved around John 15:1-8; staying connected to God, like the vine and the branches.
- Spring into Action is a service camp that give us the chance to worship God by serving others. We visited a senior community and hosted campers from Camps Huggs and Gift.
- Camp Hugg was held in June. Staff included 20 SC Lutheran youth and 5 adults. 18 campers participated. Our theme was "Together We Win" and focused on the Summer Olympics. We enjoyed a week of fun and fellowship including a visit to the zoo, swimming in the new Kinard pool and kayaking on the pond.
- Camp GIFT was held on Labor Day weekend. About 20 young adults with special needs attended. We enjoyed hanging out at the pool, doing crafts and skits, and kayaking on the pond. Our highlight event was a "glow party" on Sunday night!
- Graceworks is our local servant camp for Midlands Rising 6th graders through recently graduated 12th graders are invited. It's also a camp for adult volunteers who want to support and encourage these young people in Christ-like service. The theme for 2024 was RIPPLE.
- The ELCA Youth and Young Adult Gathering was held in New Orleans, July 16-20, 2024. 27 congregations from SC were represented and more than 250 adults and youth attended.
- Training for Adult Leaders – Safety procedures, working with differently-abled youth, and leading difficult conversations.
- Cabinet Meeting – For the first time, applications to fill positions on the cabinet were utilized. Teams were formed and plans made for 2024-2025 events.
- Youth Day at Newberry College – Worship and different service activities were followed by an afternoon of football fun!
- Two Gather groups (Young Adult Ministry) have been formed – one in the Charleston area and one the Midlands area.

**New Resources for Congregations:**

- A partnership with Youth Ministry Consultants. Through this partnership, we were given an unlimited access code to receive live and on-demand training, access to coaches, cohort discounts, etc. They also have resources specifically for small youth ministry.
- A mental health curriculum will be ready by May 2025 for Mental Health Month.

Thank you for your continual support, love and generosity in the lives of our children and youth and this ministry. We look forward to all the ways in which we can shine wherever we are this year.

Peace,

*Deacon Deborah*