

Children, Youth & Family Ministry 2026 South Carolina ELCA Synod Assembly

We've been busy building community, sparking faith, and having a whole lot of fun along the way. Here's a look at the big wins and bright spots from 2025-2026!

Our CYF Ministries Team gathered to map out an epic calendar of activities for 2025-2026. The theme for the year was "Let your Light so Shine." (Matthew 5:17).

The Elementary School Retreat was held in October. 26 children and adults came together to learn more about following Jesus. It was pure joy!

The Middle School Retreat was held in March after being rescheduled due to bad weather. 17 youth and adults engaged in learning more about praying and Bible study, serving and worshipping, music and games and laughter!

The High School Retreat was May 15-17 at the Coastal Retreat Center. Youth and adults (numbers were not available) engaged in deep dives and big questions around the theme of discipleship.

We secured an ELCA Children's Ministry Grant! CYFM Leaders gathered at Camp Kinard in March to explore "Nurturing Spirituality in our Children." Dr. Dawn Rundman from Augsburg and Sparkhouse was our speaker. It was a special time to recharge and refocus.

Summer Activities included Camps Hugg and Gift. Lots of fun was had by all! Graceworks is a week of service for youth.

We concentrated on child safety! We co-authored a Resolution on Child Protection for the 2025 Synod Assembly, led workshops for congregations to keep our spaces safe, and hosted specialized safety training led by Deacon Lexanne Kimball of Pinnacle. We also continued our commitment through the Safe Gatherings program.

The mental health of our children and youth is of great importance. We hosted a book study of "The Anxious Generation"

We presented Advent and Lenten devotions, plus a Youth & Children's Bible Reading Plan to help families dive into the Word together. Our e-news and weekly newsletters offer resources, stories, and updates to keep our community connected.

Officially appointed **Lydia Broam** as the Young Adult Representative for the South Carolina Synod. We love seeing our young leaders step up!

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 let our light shine.

Peace,
Deacon Deborah Poole
Coordinator for CYF Ministry

Report from the Director of Communications 2025-2026

Dear Friends,

It has been a busy year since my last report. One filled with new tools and new opportunities.

Video Work

The last twelve months have been busy and full of blessings. From April 2025 through the end of March 2026, **the Synod produced 587 hours of video content**. For context, the previous year produced 195 hours of video content, **creating a year-over-year increase of over 200%**.

This content includes live events (Synod Assembly), resource event recordings (Stewardship, Leadership, and Mental Health), book studies, weekly Spanish sermons, and special series. One of our series, ***On the Road With Jesus***, looks at how we read the Bible and how that relates to interpreting relevant conversations today, including Human Sexuality and Women in Ministry. ***Grace in Action: Who We Are and Why It Matters*** examines some of the claims and questions raised about members of the ELCA. This twelve-episode series is meant to invite members and friends into a discussion of what we believe.

Resourcing Congregations - Church Communications Cohort

Our Church Communications Cohort served **twenty congregations in the South Carolina Synod**. The Synod partnered with Missional Marketing, the parent company of Church Communications Group, which led last year's Church Communications Roadshow. This seven-week cohort covered: Strategic & Creative Planning, Branding & Messaging, Setting Communicative Goals, Stories Matter, Social Media, Email & Digital Marketing, Websites & SEO, and How to Build Your Team, Team Culture, and Crisis Management. This cohort helps fulfill our mission statement: **Equipping Church Leaders to Develop Impactful Faith Communities and Disciples of Jesus**.

Christmas Eve Project

Our 2025 Christmas Eve Media Campaign achieved extraordinary success, delivering results in just 24 days that our partners at WIS-TV typically achieve over a **three-month advertising effort**. The project reached over 150,000 impressions (158,983), serving as digital invitations to worship shared across the internet and local news platforms. Of these, roughly 32,000 impressions were delivered through precision-targeted display and audio ads, which were highly effective because they focused on people whose digital habits—including frequent use of Bible-themed apps—indicated a high interest in faith-based content.

Beyond the WIS-TV coverage area, **engagement was remarkable**: 4,159 individuals watched our video invitation from start to finish via geotargeted Facebook ads. This high completion rate proves that the invitation resonated deeply with the community, particularly among women aged 65 and older and **a balanced audience of men and women in the crucial 45–54 age bracket**. By utilizing a mix of television and targeted digital media, we successfully reached a massive audience of seekers both within and beyond our immediate local area, demonstrating an efficient and powerful stewardship of Synod resources.

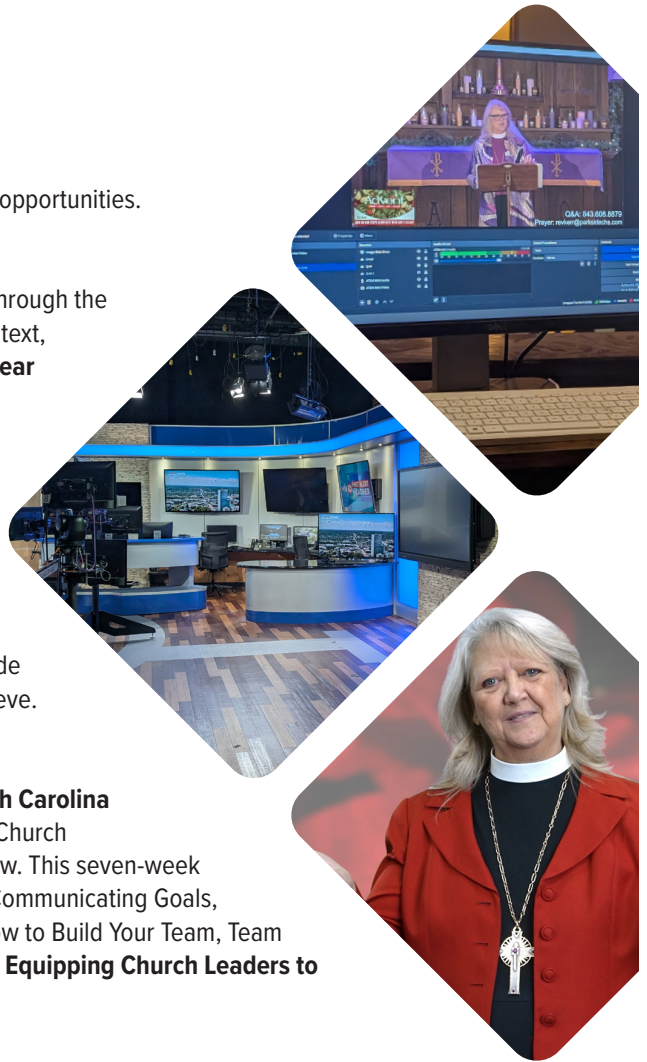
Technology

We have completed the transition from on-prem servers to Office 365 cloud services. The technology replacement plan, a rotation of replacement hardware, helps us avoid a massive spike in equipment replacement spending by replacing a few items each year. This office continues to provide technical support (website and email) to Lutheran Disaster Response Carolinas as part of our partnership.

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 or 803-509-8325.



Director for Stewardship 2026 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 through 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) *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.
- 2) *Abundance: Creating a Culture of Generosity* by Mike Ward, Fortress Press [2020]
- 3) *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]
- 4) *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>
- 5) The recording, slides, and other materials you may need to move forward with your Narrative Budget is provided at this link: [Generous Stewardship: God's Story and Our Story | ELCA South Carolina Synod](#)

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 2026. While the total cost is \$625, the synod provides a \$300 discount to each congregation participating. Use code SCBCG2026 for the discount. The following congregations participated in 2025: Crossroads, Indian Land; Reformation, Lancaster; St. Paul, Mt. Pleasant and St. Johannes, Charleston.

Mission Interpretation 2026 Mission Support Video

The theme of the 2026 Mission Support Video is titled *Created to Create: Building, Innovating, and Stewarding the World in a Way that brings Glory to the Creator*. The video is grounded in the Scripture: Ephesians 2:10, Paul writes, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." The video includes three stories:

- Building Capacity: Shepherd of the Sea, Garden City and Trinity, Georgetown Free Food Distribution
- Innovating Together: Parkside Church at Historic St. Barnabas- a Union Congregation
- Stewarding the Church: Today and Tomorrow: Children's Ministry

The video is sent to rostered ministers and Congregation Council presidents and vice presidents along with a Mission Moment devotion.

Lifeline Fund

Through a 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 SC Synod entered this partnership in June 2019, appointed a distribution team and agreed to collaborate by raising matching funds.

As of January 15, 2025, the South Carolina Synod, Lifeline Distribution Team, has paid \$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. One rostered minister wrote: "With my seminary education debt paid off we moved into a new house at my new call. We are now able to give back to our church as never before. We now give to organizations that have impacted our lives. It has impacted my view of the wider church – I feel more

supported. This gift has changed my personal stewardship and I feel the freedom to preach and teach giving out of abundance.”

A Sustainability Plan was approved by the Synod Council 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 April 2026 a gift of \$5,000 was received from an individual donor toward the annual goal of \$25,000. The South Carolina Synod has entered into a contract in 2026 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. As of March 31, 2026, the fund has a balance of \$40,000 to be awarded to rostered ministers with family education debt.

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) Program Book by Herb Miller 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?” The SC Synod provides a complete set of materials and 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, the Regional Gift Planner for the Carolinas, works 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 first year and returning congregations in covenant with the synod beginning on May 15, 2025 and continuing through April 2026 included:

Returning Congregations

Eighth Year – St. Matthew, Charleston
Seventh Year – St. John’s, Beaufort
Sixth Year – Grace, Rock Hill
Sixth Year – Ebenezer, Columbia

Fourth Year – St. Michael, Greenville
Third Year – Pisgah, Lexington
Second Year -Holy Spirit, Charleston

First Year Congregation

Mt. Horeb, Chapin

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 13, 2026, and continue through April 2027. Use this contact for more information: Rev. Ozzie Herlong cell: (803) 360-1877 or email: 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 SAS view this interview with Mike Ward: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvjnUH4ap0c>

Bible Study

Dr. Mark Allen Powell, author of *Giving to God: The Bible's Good News about Living a Generous Life*, has provided the synod a series of four video bible studies which are available on the synod web site.

Congregations Participating in Stewardship Program Offerings: Five Years

In a study conducted in the fall of 2025, it was reported that 74 of 137 congregations or 54% of congregations participated in one or more of the programs offered in the South Carolina Synod in the last five years, 2020 to 2025. The number of congregations participating in Stewardship program groups include New Consecration Sunday (5), Stewardship for All Seasons (22), Building a Culture of Generosity(13), Narrative Budget(16), Treasurer's Workshop (45) and Planned Giving, ELCA Foundation (8).

Thank You

First, we give thanks for those with whom we share faith in Jesus Christ. Second, we give thanks to God for your 2025 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.
Or <https://resources.elca.org/?categories=stewardship>

Rev. Ozzie Herlong, Director for Stewardship
South Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
803-360-1877
ovherlong@aol.com

Lutheran Campus Ministries 2026 South Carolina ELCA Synod Assembly

Campus Ministry is one of the premiere ministries of the South Carolina Synod. While young adult participation in the church continues to wane, our campus ministries are hotspots of engagement, formation, connection, and service. Hundreds of students continue to experience deep connection to God and each other in these communities, and it's an area of our church that is experiencing growth and new life. Students in these ministries are being met by God in ways that are life-giving for them now, and life changing as they prepare for wherever God is leading them after college.

Our synod has many robust student communities all across the state, in a way that is not necessarily true throughout the whole ELCA. This is a testament to the quality of our campus ministers and the generous financial support of this Synod. The South Carolina Synod currently offers financial support to six campus ministry sites: The Citadel, Clemson University, College of Charleston, Lander University, University of South Carolina, and Winthrop University. This report will highlight the work that God is doing at a few of these sites.

At Clemson University, students have a community dinner every Wednesday where they can enjoy a homecooked meal and a rotation of events like crafts, bible study, and guest speakers. While this is their signature ministry, students also participate in University Lutheran's Sunday morning worship. This year, one of them was from an LCMS church, and since Pastor Megan Boatwright was new in August, the student didn't realize there was a female pastor at the church. "While I can't remember a single word I said in my sermon that particular Sunday, she said it was life-changing for her hearing a woman preach the gospel for the first time," said Pastor Megan. "She said being part of LCM Clemson has expanded her understanding of God's work in our world and in her life in ways that her home church wouldn't be happy with, but now she's excited to forge her own path and find her own voice in our church because it affirms people just like her."

At the College of Charleston, students gather weekly for their Wednesday Shenanigans, a consistent time of connection and community. But one of the hallmarks of this academic year was their service trip to Mexico. They've partnered with an organization called Lantern Hill that supports the community through providing healthy meals for kids and support to get them through school. "My favorite thing about this trip was getting to form an unlikely friendship with Manuel, despite language and cultural barriers," said student Lilly. "It was a true testament to a relationship built on kindness and joy of the purest kind. This experience truly reminded me that living in Christ's love allows for all barriers to come down!" This relationship with Lantern Hill is ongoing, so the students will be continuing to visit, help, learn, and deepen their relationship over the coming years. "It was an amazing experience for us to learn, to create new relationships, to see the love of God reflected across borders, languages, and cultures," said Pastor AJ Houseman. "We are already greatly looking forward to visiting Lantern Hill next year."

At the University of South Carolina, the student community has their own worship on Sunday nights and pizza, devotions, and fellowship activities on Thursday nights. But this year they also decided to set up on campus for several hours each week and interact with passing students in various ways. Sometimes it was offering art therapy, or donuts and devotions, or pie-a-pastor, or a sign that says "Tell Us About Your Favorite Pokémon." But the favorite has been "Ask A Pastor" where Pastor Jesse Canniff-Kuhn sits and invites anyone to come and sit down and ask any question. "People have so much on their brain and on their heart, and sometimes they just need an invitation to share and explore and wonder together," says Pastor Jesse. "It's really great to have a community of students to be connected to and work with week in and week out. But there's also so much value in our ministries showing up on campus and having small moments with random students. There's no telling what the seeds that are planted in these interactions could grow into, but I believe that God is using these chance encounters to bear fruit in people's lives, and fruit in our world."

The work that these and our other South Carolina Campus Ministries are doing would not be possible without the love, prayers, and financial support of the South Carolina Synod. Investing in the young people in our church is essential for the vitality of our church *now*, and in the future. Thank you for caring about these students.