

September/October 2026

THE VINE



Pastor Kris' Chronicles

Stewardship

Many larger churches in the PC(USA) and ELCA typically hold annual stewardship campaigns in the fall for the purpose of putting congregational giving front and center. Both denominations I think have tried to move toward a more balanced year-round emphasis on stewardship in the broader sense.

Stewardship is about way more than money. It's how we care for the land and resources. It's about how we use our money and resources. One of the best talks I ever heard on stewardship was from Dr. Mark Allen Powell. Dr. Powell was a professor at one of the Lutheran seminaries before his retirement.

He used the text of the rich young ruler. That's the one where Jesus says to the young man, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Dr. Powell's take was that this passage really summed up what our relationship to our possessions should be. It all belongs to God he said. How we use all of what we possess matters for the good of God's world. Our call may not be to sell everything and give it to the poor, or give it all to the church. But our call is to respond in gratitude and generosity to God for all that God has given us. To steward everything we have for the good of the world.

That should always be in front of us. But for many congregations, that fall campaign remains a cornerstone of financial planning for the next fiscal year.

The typical stewardship campaign revolves around a four-week theme and culminates with the final Sunday where folks are asked to fill out a pledge card for the next year. Those pledges are often the source of budgetary planning. They are also often a source of great stress. I am not sad that smaller churches typically don't do this and that I haven't had to be involved in one for 16 years.

Having said that, in more than one recent council/session/board meeting, the issue of tight finances has come up.

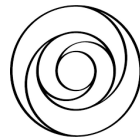
The ELCA resource for stewardship this year is entitled *The Joy of Generosity*. It's a 50-page handbook that has suggested scripture and preaching tips, midweek messages to send out, how to tell stories about the church's ministry, bulletin inserts, and projection slides.

At the conclusion is a pledge form and a suggestion for each household to consider increasing their annual giving by 1% of their income. There's a table that indicates how much that is.

We don't do anything like this at any of the four churches. And yet, when costs for everything go up, they go up for the church as well. Of course, those costs are hitting people in their everyday lives as well, so I realize that increasing gifts to the church isn't an option for some. But if it is for you, and you haven't increased it in a while, maybe prayerfully consider doing so.

Seeking the Spirit Within

By Virg Unverferth



As I'm writing this newsletter, I am reflecting on the sermons given by Pastor Kris and Diane on the first commandments where they talked about worshiping no other Gods and to observe the Sabbath. Both of these have to do with our relationship with God, but our lives get in the way of that. We live in a world where success, money, and power are worshiped, but they require us to keep busy and chaotic schedules so that they can be achieved. Few have time to pray or do devotions at home and many can't make time for church on Sunday because of continued obligations or a need to sleep in because they are exhausted. I became a certified spiritual director in May, but none of us need any special training to connect with God's Spirit inside all of us. We all ultimately desire that, but it takes practice. My spiritual director, who I meet with monthly, gave me a book of 34 different spiritual practices. The following one seemed appropriate this month. You can read it like a Lectio Divina in which you read it 2-3 times, focusing on any words or phrases that jump out at you. What is God saying to you in that word or phrase?

Busy Meditation by Meta Herrick Carlson

Remember the Sabbath.

It is not a suggestion, but rather the first of all commands,
for God knew we would need this rhythm of rest
in the beginning and every generation since.

You are surrounded by generations and expectations
that will never tire of asking more from you,
filling your days with obligation that is both rich and weary,
that tempts you to forget you are mortal.

God, grant us the courage to rest, to resist the idols of busy and best,
to learn to stand ourselves long enough to hear you call our name,
to notice what you are making, even without our help and hindrance.

Bless our deep breaths, our long sighs, and our fearful fidgets
so that we trust your presence in our nothingness and
learn to believe the world will keep spinning and
it is enough to just be your people.

If you have questions about how meeting with a spiritual director may further enrich your faith life, please reach out to me. 402-326-0122

Nebraska Synod Council News – by Mike Unverferth (Bethlehem)



The Synod Council met for two days on August 7 and 8.

After introduction of new council members who were elected at the Synod Assembly in June, we all took part in a study related to a planned update of the ELCA social statement on Human Sexuality. This is part of a multi-year process that began at the 2022 Churchwide Assembly and was partially completed at the 2025 Assem-

bly. The primary objective of the second step is to attempt to address some of the issues related to the “bound conscience” section of the original social statement. If you would like more information about this process please let me know.

We also had a brief session to explain the duties of Synod Council members. One important point to remember is that Council members are not “delegates” from their congregation or mission cluster, though we are elected geographically by cluster. We are expected to act in the interest of the Synod and the entire Church as a whole and not for our individual congregation. Another expectation of Council members is that they will try to visit 2-3 other congregations in their cluster each year. I will be visiting Christ Lutheran Church in Louisville on September 13.

The main action item on the business agenda was to approve a new Designated Fund for distributing the operating surplus from fiscal year 2025. This surplus was about \$182,000. The decision was made to:

- Provide support to congregations toward the 2027 Youth Gathering. This would cover part of the tuition (\$100) for each youth attending.
- Support “Broken Open” grants of \$500 per congregation. The application was sent out to all congregations who attended the 2026 Synod Assembly. If you have an idea for how to break something open talk to one of your congregation council members.
- Support Seeking the Spirit Within in 2027 and 2028 to help with continued expansion.

Joint Steering Committee Report

The Joint Steering Committee met on August 9 with Amy Woods from the Nebraska Synod ELCA.

Updates were given for the Tech Team as well as worship, spiritual care, and some preliminary children’s ministry plans.

Mike Unverferth has been certified as a PMA. The Nebraska Synod guidelines indicate PMAs should be paid at a higher rate than our lay preacher rate. The guideline is \$250 for one service and \$75 for a second. That would be \$325 total, or \$162.50 per congregation. The JSC recommended this increase when Mike preaches.

Amy Woods will begin meeting with the Joint Steering Committee on September 20 to start the Synod Discovery and Invite process. Discovery and Invite is a discernment process to guide the shared ministry to discern who they are and what sort of leadership is needed. It is a preliminary step in the process of putting together a congregational profile. They can only go so far before I actually leave, but we are getting a bit of a head start on the process.



The Homestead Presbytery met at Camp Calvin Crest by Fremont for their quarterly meeting on August 15. I attended this along with Proetts and Sabatkas. The meeting had an educational component in the morning on how to truly listen to one another. The afternoon included reports from the different Presbytery Teams.

There was also a report from the 2026 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA.) This was held June 22 – July 2 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This is the equivalent to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly. The Presbyterian Church does not have bishops so business is conducted by moderators. Moderators are usually pastors, or teaching elders although ruling elders I think can be also. (I'm still learning.) You can learn more about actions taken at General Assembly on their website: <https://pcusa.org/about-pcusa/church-structure/general-assembly/general-assembly-gathering>

Here's a few nuggets on the Presbyterian Church.

Czech Presbyterian belongs to the Homestead Presbytery which is Eastern Nebraska. Homestead Presbytery belongs to the Synod of Lakes and Prairies. The Synod is comprised of the Plains states and the western part of the Upper Midwest – Minnesota and Wisconsin. The General Assembly is the equivalent of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Homestead Presbytery Teams

- **Companions for the Journey**—assist pastors and congregations in ministry
- **Ministries for Extraordinary Times**—This team will incorporate the work and function of Program & Grants, New Worshipping Communities & Church Vitality, and the Disaster Response Team
- **Permanent Judiciary Commission**—Discipline related issues
- **Reconciliation and Trust**—restore and rebuild relationships and trust within the Presbytery
- **Steering the Ship**—facilitate effective communication across the Presbytery and coordinate the work of the Presbytery in support of the Presbytery mission. This is the team that will assist with pastoral leadership transitions

I did talk briefly to Pastor Edward Yang who is the leader of the Steering the Ship team. We will stay in touch and bring the Presbytery process into the discernment mix but it sounds like that part may come in after I leave.

Adult Education Schedule

Time: 11:45

Place: First two at Bethlehem then will make up a rotating schedule

Light lunch will be provided

September 13 – Discussing difficult topics as Christians

September 20 – Our Journey with a Transgender Child

September 27 – Revelation overview #1.

October 4 – Revelation overview #2

October 11 – Revelation overview #3

CP session meeting is this week so may need to start a bit later.

October 18 –Break – Bethlehem council after worship

Starting October 25 - Israel Then and Now

Biblical Israel and how we got where we are now. 1-2 sessions

Next – Nationalism, Christian Nationalism and the dehumanization of “the other.” 1-2 sessions

Next – Capitalism and Christianity

Woven through all – how can what we learned today help us love our neighbor?

There will be no sessions from Thanksgiving to the New Year. We can finish up in January if need be.

Bethlehem Backpack packing schedule

We will be packing backpacks for the Raymond Central Backpack program. Packing days will be Sunday immediately following worship at the Methodist church in Ceresco on the following dates:

- November 30 (this is a 5th Sunday worship which will be at Grace)
- February 14
- April 4

Upcoming Events

Bethlehem Potato Bake—September 27 from 5—7 pm at the Davey Community Center. Come enjoy some fellowship and a baked potato loaded with your favorite toppings. Proceeds to the Gathering Place campaign to Build a Bigger Table. The Gathering Place is a part of the Community Action Partnership of Lancaster and Saunders County. They provide a free hot evening meal seven days a week.

Important information

Pastor Kris: phone 402-499-4993; krisbo90@gmail.com

Online worship info:

Bethlehem Facebook livestream <https://www.facebook.com/bethlehemdavey>

Zion Facebook livestream <https://www.facebook.com/ZionIthaca>

Grace Facebook livestream <https://www.facebook.com/gracelutheranwahoo>

Website: <https://www.vine4.org/>

Regular Sunday Worship Times

Bethlehem Lutheran—10:30 am—communion first and third Sundays

Czech Presbyterian—10:30 am—There will be no worship on the third Sundays from Easter to the beginning of Advent.

Grace Lutheran—9:00 am—communion second and fourth Sundays

Zion Lutheran—9:00 am—communion first Sundays

Pastor Kris preaches at Bethlehem and Zion the first and third Sundays and Grace and Czech Presbyterian the second and fourth Sundays. Fifth Sundays are a joint worship

Preaching Schedule

September 6

- Grace/Czech Pres—Kevin Whitcomb
- Bethlehem/Zion—Curtis Olson

September 13

- Grace/Czech Pres—Pr. Kris
- Bethlehem/Zion—Virg Unverferth

September 20

- Grace only—Leah Whitcomb
- Bethlehem/Zion—Pr. Kris

September 27

- Grace/Czech Pres—Pr. Kris
- Bethlehem/Zion—Mike Unverferth

October 4

- Grace/Czech Pres—Kevin Whitcomb
- Bethlehem/Zion—Pr. Kris

October 11

- Grace/Czech Pres—Pr. Kris
- Bethlehem/Zion—Megan Patent-Nygren

October 18

- Grace only—Kevin Whitcomb
- Bethlehem/Zion—Pr. Kris

October 25

- Grace/Czech Pres—Pr. Kris
- Bethlehem/Zion—Miranda Kliment

Zion Pork BBQ August 16, 2026

