



Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. — Hebrews 12:1-2

September 2, 2025

Today feels like a “therefore” moment. My term as bishop of our synod actually began yesterday — though like thousands of other Michiganders I spent the day enjoying our beautiful state. For me, this included our family’s annual tradition of walking the Mackinac Bridge.

Today is a day to move forward into a new time and a new part of God’s calling. Please note in the passage above the call is not to a solitary person. The language is about community — a *cloud* of witnesses surrounding *us*. Our work builds on the work of those in the faith who have come before us. We thank the outgoing synod staff for their service and leadership and wish them Godspeed — Bishop Craig Satterlee, Cathy Satterlee, Chelsey Satterlee, Pastor Chrisy Bright, Pastor Kjersten Sullivan and Ann Stavros.

Today is a day for us to move forward into a new time and a continued intention of being faithful to Jesus’ calling in our lives. Thank you to everyone who has reminded me that being church is a group effort — led by Jesus! None of us is in this alone.

To that end, I would like to introduce you to the people who will be serving with me on synod staff. As each of them said “yes” to the Spirit’s call to serve in this way, I grew more and more encouraged. Each person brings unique gifts and also a desire to serve the congregations and leaders of our synod in a way that will support the good work that is already happening and help us dream about new ways of being church together in Michigan.

[Rev. Alex Aivars, Director of Technology](#)

[Ms. Shannan Boerema, Director of Communication and Administration](#)

[Ms. Rebecca Bossenbroek, Director of Finance](#)

[Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Bishop](#)

[Rev. Scott Torkko, Assistant to the Bishop](#)

[Rev. Kate Van Valkenburg, Director of Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop](#)

(Please click on the names for a brief bio of these staff members.)

Today I would also like to share with you news about the new synod office location. The lease on the office in Dewitt ended with the end of Bishop Satterlee’s term. This was done intentionally when the

space was first leased in the event that a new bishop was elected and would want to use a different space. I am thankful for that flexibility.

We have arranged for a new synod office space at Faith Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids. We have more space available at a considerable savings compared to our last space and we can also help support one of our congregations. Once we get boxes unpacked, we will give you all a video tour. Thank you to Faith, Grand Rapids, for your willingness to share your space with us!

My first weeks will be spent preaching and leading worship in congregations, meeting with rostered ministers, connecting with congregations who are in times of transition and learning many new processes and procedures.

My installation will take place on September 13, 4 p.m. at Trinity Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids. We hope you can worship with us that day or join via the livestream. Thank you for your partnership in the gospel, for your prayers and words of support and for your call to this office. I am looking forward to running the race together with you as we follow Jesus!

In Christ,

Bishop Julie Schneider-Thomas

North/West Lower Michigan Synod of the ELCA

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