

# WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER



## STORYTELLING ENGAGEMENT

### March 2025 Mission Support Memo

#### Partners in Relationship

A story about our South-Central Synod of Wisconsin,  
by Karen Kretschmann and Victoria Flood

As you read this story, what inspires you?

Where in your synod are you fostering relationships?

“Welcome to the Grove” was the word on Feb. 22 in the [South-Central Synod of Wisconsin](#). We were gathering not as the whole synod or as a couple folks but as a collection of folks seeking to connect. That’s what’s beautiful about a grove: it’s not a large forest to get lost in or a couple trees that do not offer shade but a group of trees, often fruit trees, gathered to share their root systems and provide a space of wonder. That is exactly what happened on this day in February at the Partners in Relationship: 2025 LEAD Conference. This theme emphasized the value of collaboration, connection and shared vision in ministry and offered space to explore how vital ministry can happen in the name of Christ.

The event was offered in partnership with [New Heights Lutheran Church](#) in Mazomanie, Wis. (about 40 minutes west of Madison). New Heights is a congregation that has faithfully focused on renewal and revitalization for over 15 years, growing to acquire an elementary school in 2022 that is now a center for congregational ministry and community gathering. This is [the Grove](#). Entering the Grove on the day of the event, one felt a sense of vitality, welcome, laughter and joy.



There were displays by global partners and synod teams, and lots of goodies. People sat at tables meeting each other stood at cocktail rounds reconnecting, and there was a buzz everywhere. Over 150 people across the synod had registered, and most showed up! The day started in the open sanctuary with worship full of praise music, a good word from Bishop Joy Mortensen-Wiebe, prayers with the Rev. Rob Nelson of New Heights and kind of messy communion lines, but no one minded.

One highlight of the day was a virtual visit from the Rev. Emily Harkins, pastor of [the Dwelling](#) in Winston-Salem, N.C., a congregation that proclaims that there is holiness in whoever enters, whether they have no shelter, suffer from addiction, are lost in who they are or seek a more just place to gather. They proclaim, “This church is for the wanderers, the seekers, the questioners, the doubters. The ones that feel worthy and more importantly the ones that do not. This is the place where God and God’s people meet,” just where they are.<sup>1</sup> Pastor Emily most eloquently reminded us that partnerships are vital, sometimes surprising, and that “the call to partnership is never neutral.”

This continued throughout the day, with conversations about our immigrant neighbors from Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, lessons from New Heights Lutheran about all the ways its partnerships in the community have flourished, plus 13 workshops offered in the afternoon. Folks were challenged to explore rethinking youth and children’s ministry, funding ministry, moral foundations, grief, neuroscience and relationships, justice and advocacy ministry, and reorienting our church announcements from desperation to invitation.



All this happens through our partnerships in participation, financial support and Mission Support. The eagerness to learn, share and grow in relationship was mutual — not neutral — on this day of being church together.

1. [www.thedwellingws.org/](http://www.thedwellingws.org/)

## ENGAGE WITH US

### Mission Support Memo Insight — We Need Your Feedback!

As we mentioned last month, we are extremely grateful that you have accessed “Mission Support Memo,” and we need your insight to make sure each issue is a valuable tool for our congregations, our synods and you. For the last two years, this memo has been a key resource for our team to share ministry stories and resources from across our church that we all support together through generous Mission Support. Please provide your feedback to ensure that this resource meets your needs.

[Click to complete the short survey.](#)

Thank you for taking the time to enhance this work we do together.

## GRATEFUL

One of the most valuable activities of our Congregation and Synod Support Team is partnering with bishops and synods in learning opportunities. Over the last several months, we have visited synods including the Sierra Pacific Synod and Florida-Bahamas Synod to build connections and share resources with new synod staff. We have participated in learning events for synod rostered and lay leaders in Wisconsin, Illinois and Michigan and have gathered at retreats to engage synod council leaders in storytelling. We have connected online to explore stewardship resources, highlighting the Generosity Project and “6 Weeks on Money.” All these connections allow us to be church together and share how Mission Support is vital to our work across the ELCA. Over the next few months, we will also be busy representing the churchwide organization at synod assemblies and even helping with bishop elections. We are extremely grateful to work with partners in these and so many other ways. Please invite us to your synod — we are eager to connect!

In gratitude,

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