

Christmas at Bethany Now Available Online

A full recording of the 2025 Christmas at Bethany concert is now available to [view online](#). This cherished annual tradition features Bethany Lutheran College students proclaiming the timeless message of Christ's birth through Scripture, hymnody, and sacred music.

Pastors, congregations, and families are invited to view and share the concert online via the [Christmas at Bethany webpage](#) or [Bethany's YouTube channel](#), and to enjoy it together during the Christmas season.

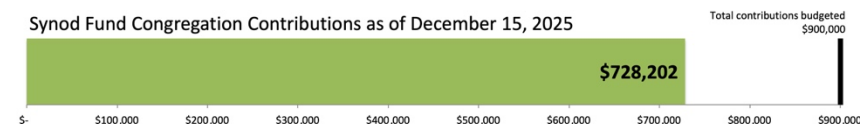
Concert Program

A [digital version](#) of the concert program is also available, allowing viewers to follow along with the Scripture readings and musical selections.

From everyone at Bethany Lutheran College, we wish you a blessed Christmas as you rejoice in the birth of our Savior.

Upcoming Events

January 9 – Synod Review Committee
January 13 – Planning & Coordinating Committee
January 26 – Committee on Nominations
January 27 – Convention Planning Meeting
January 29 – Committee on Archives and History
February 12–13 – Board for Home Outreach
February 17 – Board for Christian Service



To receive this newsletter directly to your email visit els.org/subscribe

ELS Newsletter



Evangelical Lutheran Synod
6 Browns Court
Mankato, Minnesota 56001
elsynod@blc.edu

January 2026

You are forbidden to know the future; but commanded to know what to do now. The Good Samaritan is a prime example of this truth (Luke 10:30–37). He knew love for neighbor required him to give the man left for dead first aid, to provide him shelter. He did not know how long his recovery would take and how long the innkeeper would need to nurse him back to health, but in love he paid in advance. Then he promised he would return and pay for any unexpected expenses that would have been incurred by his neighbor in order to recover. He acted upon what his neighbor needed him to do in the moment.

The priest and the Levite who saw the injured man passed by on the other side and did not stop to render aid. Could they become victims of an ambush too? Would it cost them too much? So, concerned about their futures they ignored the command of God to love neighbor. They forsook their vocation as loving neighbor and served themselves.

We all likely have plans for this coming year and that can be good. However, if those plans thwart doing what God places in our hands in the present to do, then we ignore God's calling in our life. Reviewing last year, you may have made shameful discoveries of such failures. Thanks be to Jesus, our Good Samaritan, who always fulfilled His vocations in love to us all. He sacrificed His holy vocational life to make payment for our unholy lives. By this, Jesus has set you free to serve your neighbors in need, not for salvation, but for the joy of doing what He has called you to do.

Glenn Obenberger

Charter Sunday in Eagle Lake

Eagle Lake Lutheran Church celebrated her Charter Sunday on December 7. The congregation is our synod's newest home mission. Pastor Patrick Ernst served as liturgist for the service, and Rev. Brad Kerkow (ELS Evangelism and Missions Counselor) preached the sermon. Following the service, a photo was taken, an initial voters meeting was held to adopt the church constitution and bylaws and to elect the first officers, ceremonial charter documents were signed, and cake was served. The "charter window" for individuals to join the new congregation remains open until December 31.



Decommissioning

On Saturday, June 20, 2026 at 10:30 a.m., the Friends of Lime Creek Society is planning a decommissioning service for the Lime Creek Lutheran Church building (rural Lake Mills, Iowa). This is the historic location where thirteen pastors, desiring to remain faithful to God's Word rather than compromise, met to reorganize our Synod in 1918. We are inviting convention delegates and anyone interested to attend, as we thank God for the many years He has provided Word and Sacrament ministry in this location and officially close the building. Following the service, a meal will be provided. A charter bus will be available for round trip transportation between Mankato and Lime Creek for \$26.00 per seat. It will depart Bethany College at 9:00 a.m. and return at 5:00 p.m. Please register in advance to attend the service and meal, and to reserve a seat on the bus, at FriendsofLimeCreek.org

Harmony Among the ELS Clergy

[Continued from the December 2025 Newsletter.]

We are blessed in our synod to have pastors trained in a variety of the confessional Lutheran seminaries: our own in Mankato; WELS in Mequon, Wisconsin; LCMS in Fort Wayne, Indiana and St. Louis, Missouri and a few others. Because of this we have different emphases and even theological vocabulary. This especially came to light in the early 2000s when we sought to find unity regarding the Biblical teaching of the office of the Public Ministry. A Presidential Harmony Advisory Council was formed of five ELS pastors. It met almost monthly via zoom from October 2024–October 2025. We discussed the apparent disharmony among the ELS clergy.

While many causes could be observed, the overriding cause was seen as a lack of trust among us, which seems to find resolution with face-to-face conversations. Through such dialogues among us we get to know each other's backgrounds and special interests especially in the pastoral ministry. While unity is always properly sought among us in keeping with our Lord's desire for His Church, we recognize that conformity in all aspects of pastoral work is not an appropriate goal nor reasonable. We will have a variety of approaches in how we serve God's people by faithfully administering the means of grace. However, we need to have ongoing fraternal discussions regarding such variety to underscore our need to trust that all such practices serve to bring Christ to His people in a unified manner. We are all committed to avoid any and all innovations that have hidden agendas which promote self over Christ. *(to be continued in February 2026 Newsletter)*

Presidential Appointments

The following appointments have been made by Pres. Obenberger since June 2025: Doctrine Committee – Dr. Erling Teigen (advisory); Committee for Communication – Rev. Daniel Oberer and Lance Schwartz; Synod Review Committee – Rev. Piet VanKampen (3yrs); Planning and Coordinating Committee – Revs. Brad Kerkow & Peter Faugstad, and Mark Perlwitz & Phil Holz, and Lyle Fahning (advisory); Board of Trustees – Dave Ewert (advisory); BHO – Rev. Timothy Erickson (advisory); Board for Youth Outreach – Jim Sundby was appointed to fill the vacated position of Chris Hoffman and Hans Bloedel (advisory); Committee on Worship – Rev. Patrick Ernst was appointed to fill the vacated position of Rev. James Braun and Rev. Braun (advisory); Doctrine Committee – Rev. Aaron Hamilton was appointed to fill the vacated position of Rev. Jerry Gernander.