

WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER



STORYTELLING ENGAGEMENT

OCTOBER 2025 Mission Support Memo

Table of Grace: Feeding Body and Spirit

A story from our [Northern Illinois Synod](#)

As you read this story, what inspires you?

Where is the feeding of body and spirit happening in your synod?

As you enter [St. John's Lutheran Church](#) in Rock Island, Ill., on a Wednesday or Saturday evening, you can smell the rich aroma of a homemade meal wafting from the kitchen. The Table Grace Ministries invites you in to feed your body, your spirit and your desire for community.

In January 2023, St John's welcomed a new pastor, the Rev. Jennifer Ohman-Rodriguez. Experienced as a singer, a nonprofit program director and a accomplished writer for Augsburg Fortress and Sparkhouse, she came with a call to speak truth, healing and connection. Initially, this was a time to gather resources, information, but most importantly to gather people and strengthen the congregation from within to support them to go out. Pastor Jennifer was eager to equip and empower lay leaders to do God's work. She connected with the council, ministry leaders and those lay leaders who just seemed to be around all the time. This included connecting more deeply with the many part-time staff and fully supporting the strong worship team. Pastor Jennifer believes firmly that "we start with worship, so we can do the second worship of being Christ in the world."



A few months into Pastor Jennifer's call, a part-time staff member, Samantha Wright — director of [Palomares Social Justice Center](#) and manager of the church's Catalyst Kitchen — said they thought a free community meal would benefit the neighborhood and folks accessing the center, which is housed at St John's and works to promote human potential and community development, especially with immigrant friends. In January 2024, the gathering began with a free, homemade meal open to anyone and, afterward, a contemplative worship with a special liturgy, written by Pastor Jennifer but often led by laypeople, especially choir director Michael Wahlmann. At worship, people sit in a circle of connection where prayer and conversation are intertwined. The community meal was launched with seed money from a dedicated congregant, but Wright has since learned the gift of grant writing and procured a three-year grant from the Better Health Foundation that will integrate the feeding ministry with mental health education, peer support groups and direct behavioral-health services.

Supported by Pastor Jennifer, lay leaders launched another meal, Welcome Wednesday, in January. Constance King, the church's office manager and now its outreach minister, was struck by a liturgy from *A Wee Worship Book* by the Wild Goose Resource Group (GIA Publications, 2015). Her vision was for people to gather in prayer every Wednesday afternoon, do some chair yoga, work on crafts or merely enjoy fellowship, then share a home-cooked meal. The weekly gathering is led by a diverse group of dedicated members. From the beginning, this project has been supported by funds from a variety of partners including ELCA community outreach ministry and the Northern Illinois Synod.

St John's may be an aging congregation with young families who are busy, but its members know the work of the Spirit. They recently sold a house on church property to better fund member engagement. The church still has a large lot with open space, so to care for creation, members in the landscape business have supervised the planting of a corner flower garden to leach out bad soil and attract bees and butterflies. The church has also partnered with [Tapestry Farms](#) in Davenport, Iowa, to plant an orchard that will yield fruit and, again, foster a healthier creation. If you visit, you might even get to taste a peach or see the orchard's flowers adorning the altar and dining tables.



St John's actively lives out its mission "to connect with and care for God's people and all of creation in heart, soul, body and mind within our walls and around our neighborhood." Through Table Grace, they have set the table of God, and all are welcome.

ENGAGE WITH US

[What Does My Offering Do? — ELCA Resources](#)

We are excited to share the updated ["What Does My Offering Do?" poster](#). You may remember past versions of this resource being titled "Mission Support: A Deep Dive." The poster shows how Mission Support impacts three major funding areas of the churchwide organization: "Building Christian Communities in the United States," "Growing the Global Lutheran Church" and "Strengthening and Sustaining the Ministry and Mission of the Whole Church." A QR code at the bottom of the poster directs you to the corresponding video ["What Does My Offering Do?"](#) Soon we will share a version of this resource that is specific to every synod's Mission Support, so be on the lookout!

GRATEFUL

This month, we gratefully celebrate the installation of our new presiding bishop, the Rev. Yehiel Curry, and look forward to the Rev. Lucille "CeCee" Mills beginning as the ELCA's new secretary in November. Both are eager to begin their work connecting with, listening to and engaging with people across the ELCA. Please keep them and our whole church in prayer and remember that, as church, we are connected to each other and our communities.

In gratitude,
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