

# Roberto Lara

Assistant to the Bishop for Communications and Development



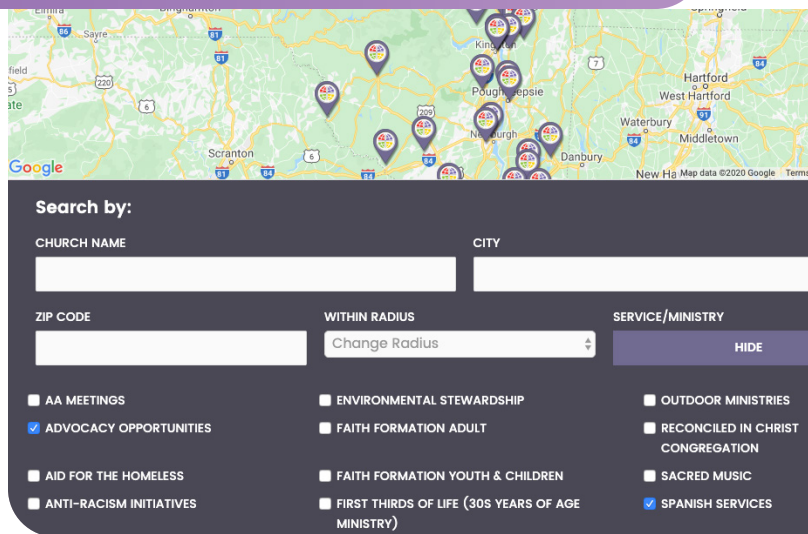
The most important goal of the MNYS Communications & Development team is to proclaim the good news and our Church's mission, and to spread the radically welcoming and inclusive message of the Gospel. The ways in which we achieve these goals will determine the positive impact we will have on our communities

and **the future we will ensure for the Lutheran Church.**

By focusing on our approach, advocacy strategies, and a rebranding of Christianity, our evangelism is very influential and impactful.

## EVANGELISM AND ADVOCACY EFFORTS—REWRITING ARCHAIC MODELS

We, as church, often have an imperialistic approach to how we help others. We tend to believe that help goes in one direction only: WE, the privileged, are here to help YOU, the underserved. But I believe this is incorrect on several levels. **We can improve this model of generosity, and we have done so by enveloping ourselves in advocacy initiatives.** In 2018 and then again in 2019, the Metro NY Synod participated in several advocacy opportunities across our territory. From the march against the separation of families, to the WorldPRIDE March last year, and more recently the Climate Change Strike in NYC, we have made an effort to be present and share our radically welcoming view of the Gospel. These efforts provided us great visibility across NY media channels, and immediately after each effort, we noticed something extremely significant: The number of **new visits** coming to our website almost **tripled**, every time we, as a Church, publicly participated in advocacy efforts and visibly engaged with the community. And even more importantly, a



large percentage of those new visits were directly to our "Find a Church" page. **These new visits represent potential new members for all our congregations in the Metro NY area.**

**This is when we realized...our advocacy efforts were in fact also an evangelism strategy.**

*Our advocacy efforts were, in fact, our most successful evangelism strategy.*

This is why we redesigned and optimized our "Find a Church" page, to help in finding potential new members for our congregations, and have a better journey when trying to find a new church community. **Our "Find a Church" page enables the user to find a congregation based on location, radios and ministries**

**offered. You can visit our "Find a Church" page, here: [mnys.org/locations](https://mnys.org/locations)**

A recent publication from the Public Religion Research Institute indicated that one third of Americans under the age of 30 claim no religious affiliation. This is the first generation in U.S. history with such a high number of people identifying as unaffiliated<sup>1</sup>. The top three attributes young Americans (ages 16 to 29) associate with present-day Christianity are of being anti-gay, judgmental, and hypocritical<sup>2</sup>. This leads us to believe that **Christianity has, in fact, a branding problem.** So, one of our priorities during the past year was to **give visibility to our inclusive and welcoming message, using as our primary editorial hook, our advocacy efforts.**

*"But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?"*

—Romans 10:14

# MNYS COMMUNICATIONS & DEVELOPMENT

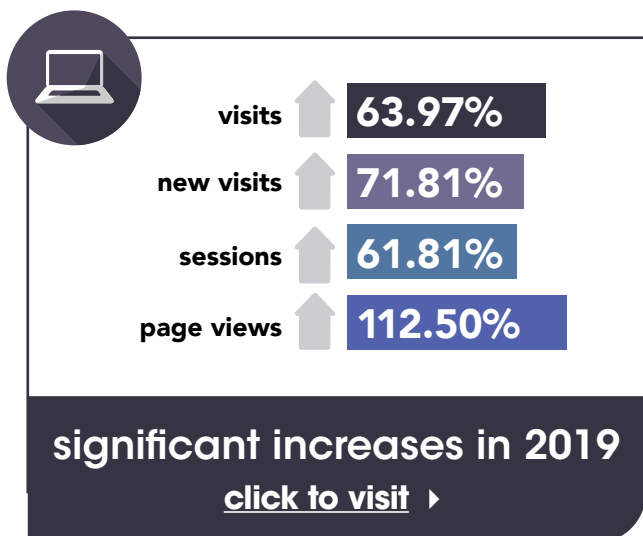
## Report for the 2020 Synod Assembly

### EVANGELISM IN THE MODERN DAY

Through communication, we are the ultimate evangelists, and digital channels have become our best option to share our welcoming message due to their higher ROI. See the results below:

## MNYS.ORG WEBSITE

During 2019, we garnered significant activity coming to our website, with strong average increases in our Visits (↑63.97%), New Visits (↑71.81%), Sessions (↑61.81%) and Pageviews (↑112.50%) rates; when compared with the same period, in 2018.



One of our priorities during the past year was to give visibility to our inclusive and welcoming message, using as our primary editorial hook, our advocacy efforts.

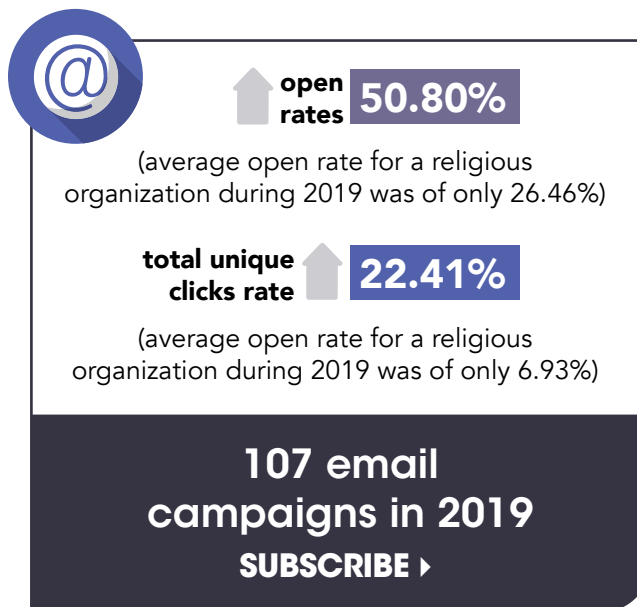
## EMAIL PROGRAM

Our MNYS email program deployed an average of 107 email campaigns during 2019, with very positive results:

Email open rate is the percentage of the total number of subscribers who opened an email campaign. These rates can vary depending on the subject line and the relevancy of the subject matter for subscribers, but a healthy open rate is typically in the 20-40% range. A strong open rate suggests that our audience is engaged and connected with us, the golden goal for any non-profit organization.

Our email program open rates remained very strong during 2019, with an average of 50.80%. The average open rate for a religious organization during 2019 was only 26.46%, according to the database of ConstantContact.

Email click-through rate is calculated by the number of subscribers that have clicked on at least one link in an email marketing campaign. During all the quarters of 2019, our CTR remained very strong, with an average of 22.41%. The average CTR for a religious organization during 2019 was only 6.93%, according to the database of ConstantContact. This higher CTR may be attributed to our communications best-practices when sharing content related to our Bishop's Election during the first and second quarters, our advocacy efforts during the summer (third quarter), and our stewardship/mission support campaign during the last quarter of the year.

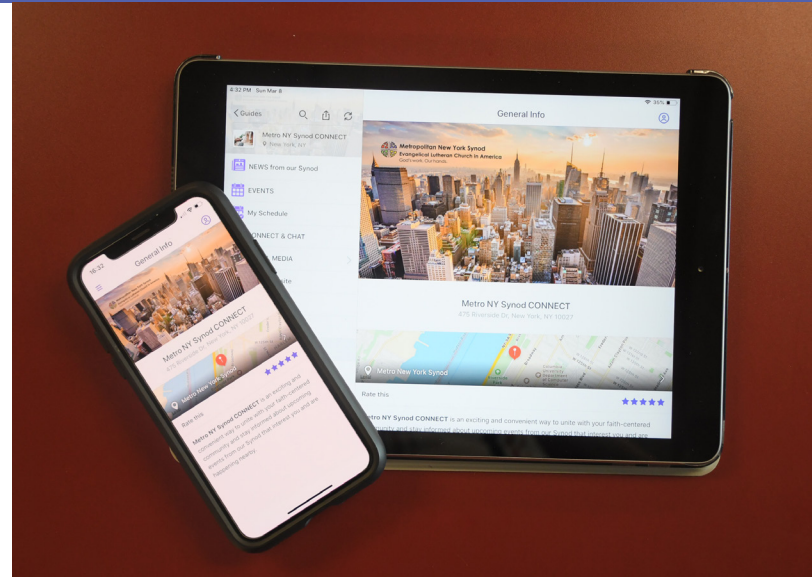
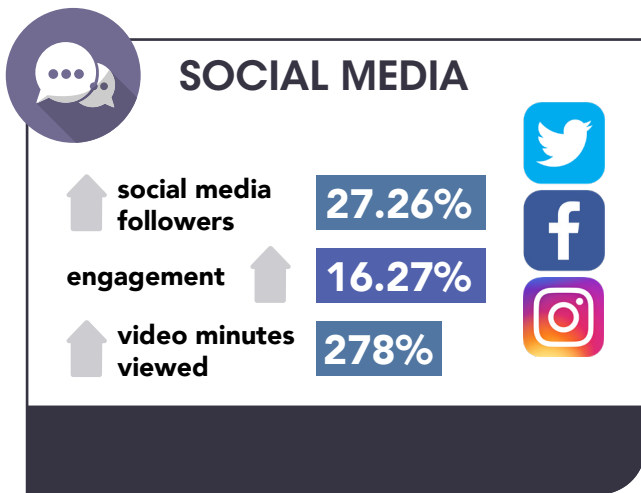


# MNYS COMMUNICATIONS & DEVELOPMENT

## Report for the 2020 Synod Assembly

### MNYS SOCIAL MEDIA

**We keep growing!** Our list of followers increased by 27.26% during 2019. MNYS posts reached an average of 1,200 people per day, an increase of 16.27% when compared with the previous period. Video rates on social email also suggested very strong levels of engagement, with 118.1K minutes viewed (a 278% increase when compared with previous period).

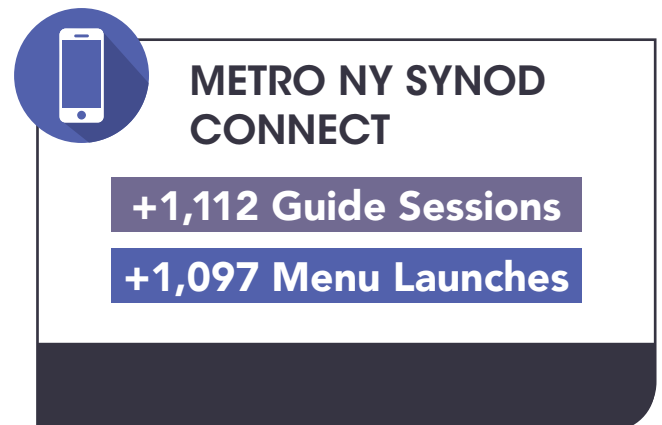


### METRO NY SYNOD CONNECT—OUR MOBILE APP

In April of 2019 we launched our mobile app “Metro NY Synod CONNECT,” helping us reach the younger members of our congregations. You can download the app by visiting the stand-alone mobile app of the “ELCA” and searching “Metro NY Synod CONNECT.”



**mnys**  
we are church  
**together**






**CNN US** LIVE TV

### The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America just became the country's first 'sanctuary church body'

By **Daniel Burke**, CNN Religion Editor  
 Updated 1:52 PM ET, Thu August 8, 2019



Girl pleads with official during ICE arrests 02:57

**(CNN)** — The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which represents nearly 3.5 million Christians, voted Wednesday to become the country's first "sanctuary church body," according to church officials.

**news12** BROOKLYN TOP STORIES WEATHER FEATURES CRIME EVEN

### Newly elected Park Slope bishop plans to advocate for LGBTQ+ community



Posted: Jun 12, 2019 7:59 AM EDT  
 Updated: Jun 12, 2019 10:05 AM EDT

**PARK SLOPE** - A newly elected bishop within the Lutheran church clergy has progressive plans to advocate for the LGBTQIA community.



## EVANGELISM THROUGH PR OPPORTUNITIES

During 2019, *PR strategies enabled us to communicate with external audiences*, helping us to give visibility to our radically welcoming view of the Gospel, and to *reach out to potential new members for all our congregations in the larger Metro NY area*. During 2019, MNYS efforts were featured in the following media outlets:

- CNN ▶
- News 12 Brooklyn Online ▶
- ABC 7 (32,460 UVPM) ▶
- WRCB TV (119,310 UVPM) ▶
- KITV ABC 4 (315,842 UVPM) ▶
- Living Lutheran Twitter (11.6k followers) ▶
- KTVZ 21 (317,101 UVPM) ▶
- WBAP (68,488 UVPM) ▶
- Living Lutheran (150,582 UVPM) ▶
- Living Lutheran (150,582 UVPM) ▶
- Black Christian News (N/A) ▶
- WJBC (43,020 UVPM) ▶
- sNEWSI ▶
- Max 94.1 ▶
- KXLY (193,453 UVPM) ▶
- WGOW 1150 AM ▶
- KVIA ABC 7 (578,309 UVPM) ▶
- 790 KABC ▶
- 105.9 WMAL ▶
- Newsday ▶
- **NY1 News All Day**  
 MNYS Migrant Children NYC  
 Toy Drive Gift Wrapping event on  
 January 5th
- **Telemundo**  
 MNYS Migrant Children NYC  
 Toy Drive Gift Wrapping event on  
 January 5th

# Living Lutheran

## Reaching kids through God's love

*Synod launches children's app*

By Jeff Favre | February 19, 2020



The Metropolitan New York Synod's Children's App was designed to engage and educate kids in the welcoming love of God.

The Metropolitan New York Synod is encouraging children to deliver sermons, write new hymns, design stained-glass windows and even officiate at weddings.

## Evangelical church releases app for children where they can marry LGBT couples

LILY WAKEFIELD | NOVEMBER 7, 2019



Metropolitan New York Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church created the app to teach children that religion can be inclusive. (MNYS Children's app/ Google Play)

**An Evangelical Lutheran Church in New York has released an app for children in which they can create LGBT+ characters and marry them**



## EVANGELISM IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION— MNYS CHILDREN'S APP

*During 2019, we launched the MNYS Children's App.* The MNYS Children's App is our new and original app for kids. Available now for iPhone, iPad, and Android. The MNYS Children's App is completely free! The app is available in the Apple Store and Google Play.

As children virtually enter the open doors of the Lutheran church, kids of all backgrounds, who speak any language, can enjoy this entirely visual interactive experience. *The MNYS Children's App is a joyful experience designed to engage and educate kids in the beauty of the accepting and welcoming love of God.* Featuring six different games, children can:

- compose a piece of music at the organ with the help of a jazzy band of mice that accompany kids on the drums, bass, guitar, and piano
- play a game of memory that showcases various cultures
- marry a couple at church of the ethnicity and gender-identity combination the child chooses
- color a variety of stained glass church windows
- spot the difference in various Biblical illustrations
- simply read through various pictorial Bible stories

# MNYS COMMUNICATIONS & DEVELOPMENT

## *Report for the 2020 Synod Assembly*

These games are fun and creative, enabling children to embody the radically welcoming inclusivity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

- Culturally, ethnically and LGBTQIA+ welcoming
- Easy, child-friendly navigation
- Colorful and playful illustrations that bring Lutheran values to life
- Touch-activated activities
- Engaging content that keeps children returning
- Creative activities that enjoyably tune children's skills in music, image recognition, artistic expression, and problem solving
- Fun challenges that enable children to learn and grow

**“For Lara, embracing the app and other new technology is crucial to the future health of the church. ‘Our annual membership rates are going down. This is not just in the Lutheran church, it’s across all denominations,’ he said. ‘All of these new technologies, all these new devices, all these new ways to connect and communicate, they offer opportunities for us. And instead of seeing those as just communication channels, we need to see them as evangelism strategies waiting for us to use them to reach out to new generations.’”**—Living Lutheran

Our children's app has also opened great PR opportunities, giving the church the visibility to reach out to new communities nationwide, thus becoming an **excellent evangelism tool for the entire Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**. Some of the digital media outlets that featured our MNYS Children's App, were:

- Living Lutheran ▶
- Advocate UVPM: 2,119,590 ▶
- PinkNews UVPM: 3,021,211 ▶
- Curve UVPM: 59,492 ▶



## EVANGELISM IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION— MNYS CHILDREN'S APP

According to *The Balance Publication*, people trust printed marketing materials more than online resources. In addition, according to the USPS, people still like receiving their mail. Perhaps this is why our beloved quarterly print magazine, "The Lutheran New Yorker," is still a very powerful communications tool for our synod.

Thanks to the multiple resources published in *The Lutheran New Yorker* Spring, Summer, Fall and Gratitude issues of 2019, events and occasions such as our Bishop's Election, our 2019 synod assembly, our Bishop's Installation, and our Mission Support 2019 fundraising campaign were widely successful. **You can pick up a copy of our *The Lutheran New Yorker*, spring and summer 2020 issues, on the communications display table!**



# MNYS COMMUNICATIONS & DEVELOPMENT

## Report for the 2020 Synod Assembly

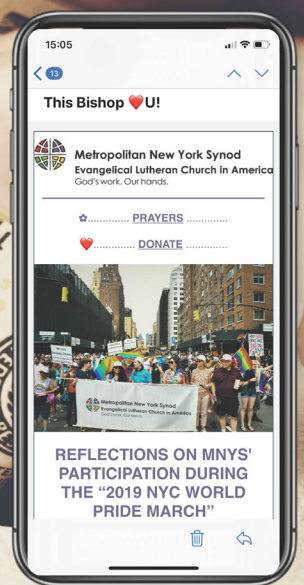
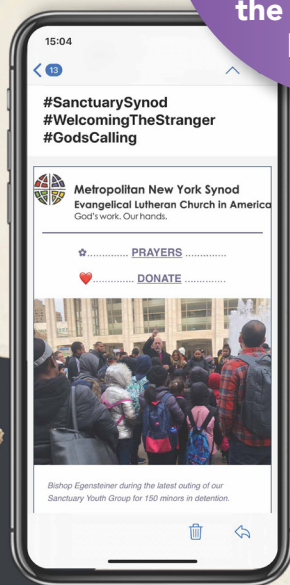
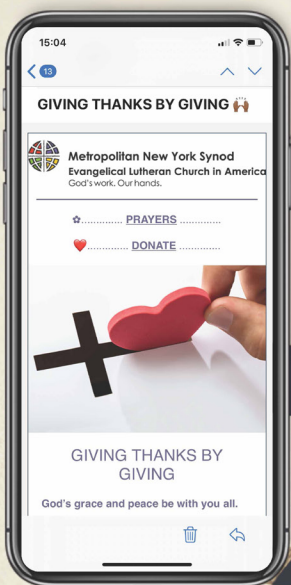
### EVANGELISM THROUGH STEWARDSHIP— “GIVING THANKS BY GIVING” CAMPAIGN

Starting in October 2019 and continuing to January 31, 2020, we implemented our successful, synod-wide stewardship campaign called “Giving Thanks by Giving.”

During this print and digital stewardship campaign, we featured a diverse array of programs and ministries from our synod that have a direct impact in our churches and in our communities. As Bishop Paul Egensteiner rightly expressed, *“We are not independent, but rather in a blessed network of mutual care and ministry with the other congregations in our synod, the ELCA, and the world.”* Supporters and members were able to clearly see how vital their support is to our synod. *Through this supportive network, we are guided by the Holy Spirit and continue on a path of generosity and compassion together.*

**“This Church, OUR Church, deeply cares for all God’s children. This Church, OUR Church, seeks to be on the forefront of justice issues. This Church, OUR Church, deeply values the foundational presence and ministries of congregations and ministry sites that are doing God’s work individually and collectively throughout this country.”—Bishop Paul Egensteiner**

Prayerfully consider making a donation to our Mission Support fund by visiting [mnys.org](http://mnys.org), & clicking the GIVE A GIFT button. ▶





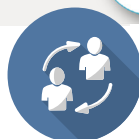
In one word, describe your experience regarding the configuration of the tables in the Grand Ballroom?



In one word, give us your opinion of the printed worship bulletins



In one word, give us your opinion of the visual content projected during our time together



## EVANGELISM THROUGH EVENTS

### 2019 SYNOD ASSEMBLY: THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

Thank you to all the leaders from our congregations who attended our 2019 Synod Assembly. At the assembly and under the theme "Care for Creation," pastors, deacons, synod deacons and elected voting members set the Synod's agenda for the upcoming year. This included major initiatives surrounding anti-racism efforts, environmental initiatives, inclusion of immigrants, and programming that celebrates LGBTQIA+ members. The assembly also passed the memorial that declared the ELCA a "Sanctuary" Denomination, ready to seek justice and protection for refugees and undocumented peoples.

*During the assembly, we also experienced a time of discernment within which we truly felt the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding our Bishop's Election.* Thank you for engaging with all the materials the MNYS Communications & Development team put together in preparation for this very important synodical decision.

The MNYS Communications & Development team gets unusually busy during the months prior to our time in assembly. However, we feel that all those hours really pay off every time we receive your positive comments and constructive feedback. After all, it is TOGETHER that we are able to effect positive change.

*Don't forget to answer the survey that will be sent to your email address, after the assembly. Thank you for allowing us to be Church Together!*

# MNYS COMMUNICATIONS & DEVELOPMENT

## *Report for the 2020 Synod Assembly*

### BISHOP'S INSTALLATION



A momentous event that kept the MNYS Communications & Development team very busy during the fall season of 2019, was the Installation Service of our Bishop. A sincere thank you to all those who participated and were present at the installation of Metropolitan New York Synod Bishop Paul Egensteiner. It was a beautiful event that upheld and encompassed the love that God feels for all God's children. The Holy Spirit was resoundingly present on this day.

*To purchase a photo booklet of the installation, please visit the MNYS Communications & Development display table.*

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### LET US PRAY

*Ever-living God, strengthen and sustain all bishops, that with patience and understanding, they may love and care for your people. Grant that together, they may follow in the way of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*







# EVANGELISM THROUGH RELEVANT PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

## LITURGICAL DANCE



As some of you may know, I am a retired professional ballet dancer. In that past life, I danced with national ballet companies and internationally-renowned dance companies such as National Ballet of Cuba, National Company of Dance in Mexico, Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo (NYC), Balle Hispanico (NYC), Kamea Dance Company (Israel), and The New York Baroque Dance Company.

Dance is another form of communication, and in trying to use this artistic experience for the advancement of our Church's mission, I started directing a liturgical dance group based here, in NYC. Some of my choreographic works have been featured in synodical events, and performed during our 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly under the theme

"Freed & Renewed In Christ - 500 Years of God's Grace in Action."

Additionally, this year, the secular dance world took notice of our program. The prestigious print-and digital publication, *Dance Magazine*, featured an interview related to our dance ministry and my perspective on the future of liturgical dance as a respected art form. *Lutherans are well-known for their artistic expressions during liturgy, and I am both honored and humbled to be a contributor to this perception.*

[Read the article at here ▶](#)

## LATINXS MINISTRIES ASSOCIATION OF THE ELCA

During the XIII Assembly of the Latinxs Ministries Association of the ELCA (Asociación de Ministerios Latinos de la ELCA, AML-ELCA), I was nominated and elected to be part of their board as the Communications & Media Officer, supervising high-level communications and PR strategies to increase the visibility of the Association within their audience and the entire ELCA. I look forward to spreading the good news with this ministry!

*As a Mexican immigrant in the U.S., this is truly an honor, and I hope the Holy Spirit will guide my journey with the AML-ELCA to promote a just treatment of immigrants and POC in our Church—precisely what the Gospel is calling us to do.*

# MNYS COMMUNICATIONS & DEVELOPMENT

## *Report for the 2020 Synod Assembly*

### LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE—EVANGELISM STRATEGIES COMMUNICATIONS BEST-PRACTICES WORKSHOPS

*We are pleased to introduce a series of Communications Best-Practices Workshops to help empower our congregations.* This series will include “how-to” tutorials that speak to the set-up of a basic website, building and creating an impactful email program, and how to build and curate a branded and engaging social media platform. *These workshops will be our first step in helping us prepare to advance our Bishop’s 2025 VISION.*

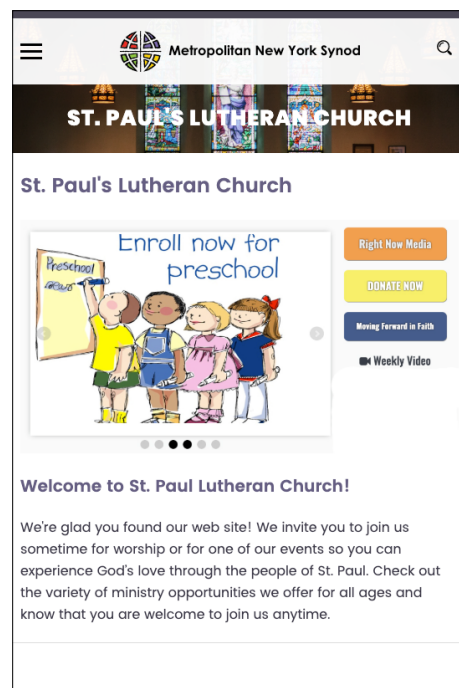
*STAY TUNED! More information will be available during the Fall of 2020.*

### CONGREGATIONAL MICRO-SITE

*Websites are becoming the front door of our congregations.* Now, with the optimization of our “Find a Church” page, it is time to establish a strategy that will offer an up-to-date digital presence to ALL our congregations in need of one.

We will implement congregational micro-sites within mnys.org to provide an up-to-date web presence for all our houses of worship. These micro-sites will help us advance all the evangelism projects previously described, from a synodical level to a congregational level.

Make sure  
to be ready to  
receive all these  
potential new  
members for your  
congregation!



### THANK YOU! ¡GRACIAS!

Methods of communication have changed with each time period spanning history. Throughout the Bible, even God altered the way They communicated with Their people. While God appeared to some face-to-face or in visions and dreams, They communicated to others through prophets, priests, angels, or scrolls. They even wrote Their message on a wall and on tablets of stone.

Before He left earth, Jesus gave the command, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15). The specifics on how the disciples were to “go” were not outlined and we must continue to work with diligence and servitude to carry on the Good News through any means necessary.

By working together to achieve these goals, we can lead by example. *Thank you for being part of our message every day and for helping to build a strong and committed community of evangelists who share the word and the love of our Holy Parent.*