

Narrative Budget for 2024-2025

Introduction:

The Synod of the Northeast is called to provide unencumbered spaces for the Holy Spirit to move among us, breathing new life into us and strengthening us to work for the realm and reign of God. We are led by scripture, in particular Psalm 48:12-14, “*Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.*” These words have inspired our actions. As a Matthew 25 Synod we actively engage to act boldly and compassionately to see our neighbors through Jesus’s eyes and served those who are marginalized or in need. We find in our work a mindset of including Matthew 25 themes of “*building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty*”.

In these pieces of the narrative budget, you will see how the values of community and common identity are shown by telling our stories. The Synod’s emphasis has included everything from governance to how mission is lived out. The Synod exists to serve. Serving through resourcing, guidance, gathering partners together, discerning the future and making the innovative plans of churches possible. The Synod provides what presbyteries are not able to thanks to the careful stewardship of finances and sometimes leaps of faith in dispersing grant monies to build up the body of Christ.

This is done, as you will see, with a theology of abundance not scarcity, gratitude not hoarding, transparency not unclarity, while always discovering the vision of God’s plan for us as a body together. Let us all remember the Synod’s purpose is to coordinate, communicate, connect, counsel, coach, cultivate leaders, champion the lowly, and chart a course that will display the Kin-dom of Christ to all in our Synod.

ADMINISTRATIVE

Administration is ministry. The largest portion of the budget is dedicated to this. The current staffing plan saved financial resources by not filling a full-time position but rather hiring staff that meet specific jobs needed to fulfill the priorities of the Synod Mission and Vision Statements. Our vision would not be fulfilled without the expertise of the staff.

The *Transitional* Leader is critical to discovering how to better build and sustain our Synod to respond to what the church is today, and facing change with courage. The *Stated Clerk* is essential for continuity with the past, keeping all aligned to the Book of Order, coordinating help in difficult situations, meetings, and commissions. The *Administrative Coordinator* not only organizes programs but pulls together Connectional Ministries. There are three people who deal with *finance*, which is enormously important for monitoring, receiving and disbursing income and by creating transparent and complete reports. Investments are carefully evaluated and included in reporting. A *Communication Specialist* had a far-reaching storytelling position in this social media age. These are not just jobs to be done but Mission and Ministry Work.

The Budget Committee went through each line of the budget. Questions were asked of each line's value, is it still a priority, has it had positive outcomes, does the number need adjusting, and where can monies be reallocated if there is a critical need or priority to support. Ideas arise to be brought back to the Administrative, Mission and Connectional Ministries Working Groups for further evaluation. The cost of the in-person budget meeting, retreats, and leadership training events are worth their weight in gold.

The Synod could not function without all the volunteers who serve on the Working Groups (there is a staff person assigned to each). They become the hands, feet, and hearts that serves and connects the Body of Christ. The Mission and Ministries Commission works together to do planning and implementation. They have cut the costs of meetings by having a number via Zoom. There is value in gathering in person, especially for community building, discernment, and important decision making. The choice to continue Covid Safety, for example, with single rooms for meetings, was an important priority decision made for the participants' wellbeing.

Some big-ticket line items of administration are essential to the health of the Synod. A home-based office gives a place for staff to meet and work. Utilities keep that office warm/cool and lit. Insurance costs are essential to protect property damage, and liability which also includes for sexual misconduct, directors and officers, spiritual counseling, donated labor and employee crime. Staff are compensated fairly, and part of their package includes Workman's Compensation, business auto coverage, travel accidents (all not just staff) and Short-Term disability. This protection is not just covering for financial loss but a caring umbrella over all when a storm happens.

The annual Audit, although pricy, came to be because it was necessary to make sure our financial life is in order. It ensures good practices are used and demonstrates transparency. Computer equipment and services are the heart of communicating. The Website was updated to include online grant requests and offers a green tab for directed donations. These are: Synod Mission, Small Church Residency, Native American Church Initiative, Indigenous Peoples Day Offering that pays for visits in September to four churches, and Emergency Migrant Ministry. "Online" also has saved an enormous amount on copying (hard copies) and fees for mailing important documents and communications. The e-mailed newsletters' creation spreads the good news of Synod work to all. Telephones are still needed, both land lines and mobile phones for quick and direct communication. Professional legal representation is crucial in dealing with conflict that gets out of hand. These are examples of the careful Stewardship of the funds entrusted to the Synod.

What funds all the budget line items? *Synod Mission Income, Per Capita, Donor Restricted Support, and Fees* are the general answer. The real answer is the support of all our churches, and investments made from donations. The Synod ministers all over the area, and it does so due to the generosity of all the congregants who make up those churches. For this we are grateful.