

**COMPANION SYNOD MINISTRY
CENTRAL STATES SYNOD – ELCA**

Who are the Companion Churches to the Central States Synod?

The Central States Synod is a Companion Synod to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Urals, Siberia, and the Far East (ELCUSFE) and the Kote (pronounced “cawtay”) District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea (ELCPNG). This means that the Central States Synod has a formal, mutually recognized covenant relationship with the ELCUSFE and the Kotte District of the ELCPNG.

The principle of “Accompaniment” guides our relationships.

These Companion Synod relationships are rooted in the model of “accompaniment,” which promotes the values of mutuality, respect, empowerment, and sustainability. Through the Companion Synod (sometimes called Companion Church) Ministry, companion churches and ELCA synods nurture and strengthen one another for life and ministry through prayer, study, communication, exchange of visitors, and sharing of resources. The “Companion Synod” program was initiated by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shortly after its formation in 1988. It was an effort to broaden the ELCA’s relationships with overseas churches by involving the 65 Synods of the ELCA in very meaningful and substantive ways. Since the Central States Synod entered into companion synod relationships with the Churches in Papua New Guinea and Russia, there have been numerous Companion Synod visits that have helped our relationships develop and grow. These visitations have not just been between church leaders, but between a multitude of individuals from the Central States Synod and the partner churches in Papua New Guinea and Russia. We are finding that these Companion church relationships enrich our lives, our faith, and our ministries by exposing us to the witness and perspectives of Christians in other parts of the world as we seek to work with one another to build up the body of Christ and share the Gospel with the world.

What are the blessings and benefits to the CSS-ELCA and our overseas partner churches?

- ***Encouragement:*** Until recent years, the Christian’s in Papua New Guinea were served and assisted by large numbers of overseas workers, primarily from Germany, America, and Australia. Those numbers have dropped dramatically in the past couple of decades. This is not a bad thing, as some of the dependency upon overseas workers was unhealthy. However, sometimes they feel somewhat abandoned by the people whom they consider to be their spiritual parents and mentors. Again and again, visitors to Papua New Guinea have heard the Christians there comment on how good it is to know that they are not forgotten.

The Christians in Russia are just emerging from nearly sixty years of persecution and violent suppression of religious activities. And even though the Russian government ended its official suppression of religion in the late 80s, the churches still face obstacles and challenges from all parts of the Russian state and society. Our engagement with our “CoSyn Christians” there in Russia expresses our concern for them and gives them support and encouragement. The people of the Central States Synod are also encouraged by the examples of faith, persistence, the evangelistic spirit, and resourcefulness of our Companion Christians in Papua New Guinea and in Russia.

- **Capacity Building:** “Capacity building” was a term often used by Pastor Walter Teunzac during past visits to Papua New Guinea. Pastor Teunzac was the Chair of the overseas partnership committee of the Kote District. What he meant was that by sharing ideas, thoughts, perspectives, even criticisms from our respective points of view, we help each other develop more options and a greater “capacity” to deal with our respective ministry challenges. Through formal and informal sharing, we broaden and deepen our knowledge and understanding of God at work in this world and grow in our “capacity” for faithful ministry.
- **Projects:** While sending money is not the most important part of our relationships, there is a place for the funding of projects in our partnerships. One of the resources that we Americans generally have in greater abundance than do our partners in PNG or Russia is money. Therefore, we have provided funds for projects in Russia, such as buying or renovating a room or building as a place of worship and providing financial support for Pastors. The Synod has also collected funds to help the congregations of the Kote District purchase new Sunday School materials. The synod provided funding for young adults from Papua New Guinea to spend a summer working as camp counselors at Camp Tomah Shinga. The CSS has also gathered donations to help buy a jeep for the ministry in Southwest Siberia.
- **Seeing the world through different eyes. (Transformation)** If you talk to anyone who has been on a companion synod visit, you will invariably discover that the person was profoundly changed through contact and interaction with the people in Papua New Guinea and/or Russia. This is true for our partners as well. At the end of one companion synod visit to Papua New Guinea, the district president said, “*We are not the same as we were when you came here a week ago. We have been changed.*” We are challenged to not be so parochial in our outlook. We are challenged to see our own problems differently when we see what other people around the globe are facing. We sometimes

are even able to see that our self-interests, appetites, and attitudes contribute to the problems that much of the rest of the world is dealing with.

Opportunities for Engagement.

- ***Pray regularly for our Companion Churches***, both personally and in your congregational prayers. Check the Companion Synod Packet for prayer ideas and watch the Bishop's Newsletter and Companion Synod Emails for prayer requests from our overseas partners.
 - To receive regular updates on our companion churches, send your name and email address to Gary Teske at teskimost@gmail.com. Visit the [Companion Synod Facebook page](#) or go to your Facebook page and search for "companion synod team central states synod ELCA". For additional news about Russia, check out get on a list to receive newsletters from missionary Bradn Buerkle and Bishop Alexander Scheiermann, Bishop of the Synod of the Urals, Siberia and the Far East. Contact Gary Teske to get on the list to receive those newsletters. Also, check in on the Facebook page of [the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea](#) for news about the Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea.
- ***Participate in a Companion Synod Visitation***. Get on the Companion Synod Network and watch for news about visitations. Email Gary Teske at teskimost@gmail.com and have him put you on the list for future visits. Sometimes, certain people with specific skills are needed, and you might be that person. For instance, individuals with computer expertise were needed for our recent visits to Papua New Guinea to do computer training. During that visit, we not only delivered 8 laptop computers but also provided training for the computer operators. We dubbed the visit, "Geeks for New Guinea."
- ***Host a Visitor***. Visits go both ways, and we often need people to provide housing, meals, and transportation for our visiting partners from other countries. Contact Gary Teske if you would be willing to host a visitor or provide transportation between host sites.
- ***Have a Companion Synod or Global Church Sunday at your congregation***. The Central States Synod observes the season of Epiphany as the Season of Global Awareness and has set aside two specific Sundays to lift up our partnership with the Kote District of the ELCPNG, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Urals, Siberia, and the Far East. Ideas for a Companion Synod Sunday are available on the CSS-ELCA website under Ministries/Companion Synod. Additional resources are available from the Companion Synod Facebook page and by emailing Gary Teske. Also, you will find a speakers list of

individuals who can be available (schedule permitting) to speak at your church or group at the end of this document.

- **Stay informed about the Global Ministry we share through the national expression of the ELCA.** The ELCA has a robust global ministry, and you can find plenty of opportunities for being involved in that ministry through publications like “Global Links” and “Hand In Hand.” You can view and/or subscribe to both of these resources at <http://www.elca.org/resources/globalchurch>.
- **Contribute to the Companion Synod Ministry.** Contributions can be sent to the CSS-ELCA Companion Synod Ministry and directed to . . .
 - the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Urals, Siberia, and the Russian Far East (ELCUSFE)
 - the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea (ELCPNG)
 - *our visitation teams.* It can cost between three and five thousand dollars per person to do a visit to one of our companion Churches or fund young adults from Papua New Guinea to come and work at Camp Tomah Shinga over the summer. The Synod tries to provide a minimum of \$500.00 to everyone going on a Companion Synod Visitation and more if possible, so that even people with modest incomes can participate in these visits.
 - Support for missionary Bradn Buerkle serving with the Church in Russia.
- **Participate in the Global Mission Sponsorship Programs of the ELCA.** You and your congregation can become sponsors for a missionary (such as Bradn Buerkle), a young adult in Global Mission (YAGM), the training and development of International Leaders through Scholarships, and other ongoing mission projects through the [ELCA division of Global Missions](#). If you need help getting information, contact Rev. Gary Teske at teskimost@gmail.com or 785-393-0965.

The Current Companion Synod Team is made up of the following individuals.

Rev. Andrew Beers

Joyce Benedict

Rev. Jon Brudvig

Jim Cooper

Rev. Matthew Helfrich

Rev. Keith Holste

Rev. Penny Holste

Gary Kallansrud

Rev. Janice Kibler

Daniel Lilienkamp

Doug Reed

Bishop Donna Simon

Gary Teske (Chair)

Companion Synod Speaker's List

Border Conference

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Central & Western Kansas Conferences

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Speakers on Refugee Resettlement

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