

Go Tell It IN the Mountains Initiative

The Go Tell It IN the Mountains Initiative completed its annual report to the Lill Foundation. This report required a synopsis of work completed in 2024. To aid in keeping all three of our synods abreast of this Initiative's work, I share that information with you. Before I do, please let me affirm that participation in the Go Tell It IN the Mountains Initiative is truly voluntary. Specifically noted in our grant is that no congregation or rostered leader will be required to participate. This grant is a gift, not a mandate. It provides options, such as the Mission Insite tool, but it does not force any one to use those options.

Here is a celebration of the work done in 2024!

Upon the reception of the Grant Funds a Steering Committee was formed comprised of representatives from all 3 synods and all three synod bishops. The Steering Committee actively worked on creating a job description and interview process for the position of Director of the Initiative.

Three videos were produced and placed on You Tube Channel for use by laity, councils, and clergy in understanding the goals of this Initiative and our contextual needs. These three videos provided an opportunity for a response with questions and recommendations to the Steering Committee.

In addition, during all three Synod Assemblies an information session was provided to share the Initiative, and a survey was provided to all participants in those Synod Assemblies. The Surveys focused on recruiting people to engage in all facets of the Initiative. These responses were collected, organized and provided to the incoming director.

After an extensive interview process, Rev. John H. Kratz was hired as the Initiative Director and his start date was September 1, 2024. Office space was secured with the Lutheran Home in Hollidaysburg with Allegheny Synod staff providing support and office supplies. Rev. Kratz met with all three Synods' staff and has monthly meetings with the Steering Committee.

Using the Survey responses noted above, and responses from an early series of on-line gatherings, the Director formed the 3 Task Forces noted in the grant and a fourth team focused on communications. The Task Forces are Digital Resources Task Force (Chair, Nathan Pile), Assessment Task Force, and Curriculum Task Force (Chair, Jim Lakso). The Communications Team (Chair, John Kratz) was organized after the Task Forces were in place. It was determined the best course of action for our Assessment work was to engage two sub-contractors who specialize in these areas. These subcontractors are noted below as they are contracted work and not volunteers like the other Task Forces' members.

Our first contract was with Faithnetwork on website design. Our website needs to be able to house a digital library which can be searched by category or date of service. Faithnetwork has an impressive track record with providing that type of resource.

Dr. Waldkoenig of United Seminary ELCA is contracted to create a 3-video series related to understanding our PA Appalachian context.

Ross Murray is contracted to create a 3-part video training on understanding and communicating with an awareness to LGBTQ concerns in our region.

Our largest contract has been given to Mission Insite to assist every congregation in understanding their specific contexts of their ministry. This two-year contract allows for every congregation and preacher to do an in-depth demographic analysis of their community with an option to plot map all members into the database to determine areas of representation or lack thereof.

Assessment partners were contracted to help in understanding the needs and concerns of two primary stakeholders. Sacred Playgrounds is contracted to do an assessment on all those nominally connected to our faith communities through our camping and on campus ministries. It is our hope that by discerning their needs we can adopt or create resources to meet those spiritual needs. Kroger Assessment Team has been contracted to do the assessment work for our Rostered Leaders (clergy), our Authorized Worship Leaders (Laity), and our Congregational leadership.

Coaches for Authorized Lay Worship Leaders (ALWL) were selected and affirmed by their respective Bishops. The primary trainer of our ALWL Coaches will be Rev. Dilip Abayasekara who will also provide a full tri-synod cohort option beginning in September 2025.

Through a series of meetings led by our Director, the three Bishops agreed upon a unified training regimen to become an Authorized Lay Worship Leader. The training offered by Faith+Lead of Luther Seminary was chosen as our primary education partner. Their fees and flexibility were better than our “in house” annual training module and we are free from having to annually recruit trainers.

Plans for an extensive 4 session training for ALWL’s in 2025 were conducted by our director. These sessions end with reflections which will allow us to prioritize our next wave of searching for consultants. The areas of development to be noted are Content development, Contextual awareness, Delivery styles and development, and Digital resources to aid in the presentation and dissemination of the gospel message.

Our first continuing education initiative is with Dr. Allison DeForest who is contracted to provide a full-day training event focusing on the summer 2025 pericope texts. The date for this training is May 21, 2025.

There are many structural procedures in place such as:

- 1) Regular reports written by the Director to the Steering Committee formatted around the 3 primary goals.
- 2) Monthly financial and investment reports proved to the Director by the Allegheny Synod treasurer.
- 3) Semi-annual information provided to the Lilly Oversight organization, and the annual program and finance review provided to Lilly.
- 4) The annual attendance by the Director at the Lilly Conference on Compelling Preaching in the spring each year.
- 5) Supervisory reports of the Director provided by the Allegheny Synod bishop, and

6) Extension Ministry reports completed annually.

You may have noted that much of our 2024 work prepares the way for 2025 events. We eagerly await to see what doors God will open through this Initiative to enhance the compelling preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our region.

For more information, please feel free to reach out to the Initiative Director, John Kratz, at director@alleghenysynod.com

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. John H. Kratz
Director, Go Tell It IN the Mountains Initiative