

Report of the Synod Vice President 2026 Synod Assembly

“May grace and peace be yours in abundance, in the knowledge of God and of Jesus, our Lord.” (2 Peter 1:2)

The 2026 Synod Assembly brings me to the end of my 7th year of service in the role of Synod Vice President. My second 4-year term will end at the 2027 Assembly, and I am already in discernment about allowing accepting a nomination for a 3rd term. If the only consideration in that discernment was whether I wanted to continue working with Bishop Kreiss and the other members of the Synod Council, the decision would be an absolute “no-brainer”. Despite some level of turnover every year in the membership of the Council as terms end and new folks are elected or appointed, the Council is always populated by faithful, dedicated volunteers who take on the work of the Council with thoughtfulness, good humor, and flexibility. It truly is a joy to work with them!

Chapter 10 of the Synod Constitution is all about the Synod Council. It’s my favorite chapter!! In Chapter 10, you’ll find a description of the makeup of the Council. In addition to having a voting member from each of the Synod’s Conferences, one young adult and one youth member, we strive to adhere to the representational principles set forth in the ELCA Constitution for councils, committees and boards. Per those guidelines, the Council tries to maintain an equal balance of female and male members, and a 60/40 balance of lay to rostered members. Specifically, we understand that the Council should be at least 60% lay, which is an attempt to allay any concerns that organizations within the ELCA are clergy-dominated.

If you’re reading this report – and you are a voting member at the Synod Assembly – I suspect that you are an active member of your congregation (or you are its pastoral leader) and you have some experience in leadership there, serving on committees and/or Congregation Council. I imagine, then, that you’ll understand how challenging it can be, at times, to find volunteers willing to be nominated for leadership roles. That is certainly true of Synod Council. Add to that the complexity of maintaining the appropriate balance of gender and roster status, and the challenge is even greater. When there is a seat on Council up for election, it can be very difficult to, for instance, find a rostered female from Conference 4, or a lay male from Conference 7. Sometimes, we have to return to the primary criterion for nominees – someone who says, “yes” – and figure out the balance later. Additionally, there are a few “at-large” seats on the Council which are appointed by the Council (not elected by the Assembly) for the stated purpose of ensuring proper balance. In my time as Vice President, we have been fortunate to maintain those balances without exception.

However, what you won’t find in Chapter 10 of the Constitution (or anywhere else) is a recommendation for some kind of balance on the Council of education level, career path, or life experiences. I don’t think there’s a reasonable way to legislate that. Under our guidelines we could have (theoretically) a 20-member Synod Council of made up of 8 Pastors or Deacons

(including the Bishop), a youth (someone under 18) and 11 schoolteachers – or 11 nurses – or 11 accountants or 11 cart attendants from Target. And, while I would gladly welcome any individual with those backgrounds on the Council, I think it would be unwise and unhealthy to have such a homogenous group. Again, fortunately, we have enjoyed a remarkable diversity of backgrounds of Council members in my tenure. We realize, though, that that may not always be the case – especially given the constant challenge of finding nominees.

In your bundle of documents for consideration at the Assembly, you will see a series of proposed amendments to the Bylaws of the Synod regarding the makeup of the Synod Council. One of those amendments includes a proposal to create two additional at-large positions on the Council which may be appointed by vote of the Council for the specific purpose of including a person with legal or accounting training and experience. I believe that voices from those areas of expertise are important for the balance and deliberation of the Council. We have, in my opinion, been fortunate that, in the nearly 40-year history of the Southeast Michigan Synod, the Council has always had at least one attorney as a voting member. That may not always be the case, and we are attempting to be wise and proactive by proposing these amendments. I trust that you will read and consider them – along with all the other reports and proposals in your documents – prior to the Assembly.

I would be remiss in my report if I didn't extend a number of thank-you's:

- To Synod Staff, for the work you all do for the Synod and for your support of Synod Council.
- To Pastor Albert Le Blanc and the members of Hope, Dearborn, for providing the Synod Council with a comfortable location for our meetings.
- To my loving wife, Caryn, for not being able to say “no” when I tell her there's more “Synod stuff” to do.

In grateful service to Christ and his Church,

Paul G. Archer
Synod Vice President

Disposition of Memorials from the 2025 Synod Assembly

Among the specific responsibilities of the Synod Council (provision S10.03c of the Synod Constitution) says the Council will “carry out the resolutions of the Synod Assembly”.

The 2025 Synod Assembly voted to adopt two Memorials, which were then forwarded to the Memorials Committee of the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly:

M1: End the Occupation and Recognition of Palestinian Statehood

M2: Addressing Legacy of Indian Boarding Schools

On both issues, the Memorials Committee received similar memorials from several other Synods. Language from similar memorials was merged into a single document and presented for debate and adoption by the Churchwide Assembly. In both instances, the Memorials passed overwhelmingly.