

**Southeast Michigan Synod of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Thirty-sixth Synod Assembly
May 16-17, 2025
Westland, Michigan**

Minutes

The Thirty-sixth Synod Assembly of the Southeast Michigan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America convened at Celebration Lutheran Church, Westland, at 6:45 PM on Friday, May 16, 2025.

PLENARY SESSION I – Friday, May 16, 2025

CALL TO ORDER

Bishop Donald Kreiss called the Assembly to order for Plenary Session I at 6:57 PM and opened with the Land Acknowledgement and The Order for the Opening of an Assembly. He thanked Synod Staff, Pastor Jim Fogle and the staff of Celebration in Westland for hosting this assembly. The Bishop also thanked the members of Conference 8 and their pastors.

Pastor Sara Freudenberg, Conference Dean, Emmanuel, Livonia
Pastor Jim Fogle, Celebration, Westland
Pastor Scott Seeke and Intern Richard Durance, Holy Cross, Livonia
Pastor Bill Matlack, Holy Spirit, West Bloomfield
Pastor Andrew Chavanak and Vicar Alysa Offman, Holy Trinity, Livonia
Pastor Krister Ulmanis and Pastor Amy Cooley-Higgs, Hope, Farmington Hills
Pastor Judd Delancy, Shepherd of the Lakes, Walled Lake
Pastor Mark Fisher, St. John, Farmington Hills
Mr. Eric Stenson, Timothy, Livonia

The Bishop welcomed the voting members to the Assembly and made announcements. The Assembly offerings will go to support our companion Synod, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

Mr. Scott Casey instructed the Assembly on the use of VPoll.

ADOPTION OF STANDING RULES OF THE ASSEMBLY

Bishop Kreiss explained the rules under which the Assembly operates.

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to adopt the Standing Rules of the Assembly as recommended by the Synod Council.

SA.25.05.01 ADOPTED yes 129, no 1

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Bishop Kreiss presented the Agenda as proposed by the Synod Council.

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to adopt the Agenda as recommended by Synod Council.

SA.25.05.02 ADOPTED yes 135, no 1

INTRODUCTIONS

The Bishop introduced the following people:

Mr. Paul Archer, Hope/Dearborn, Vice-President of the Synod
Ms. Sonja Markwart, All Saints/Hartland, Secretary of the Synod
Mr. Daryl Hurley, Genesis/Detroit, Treasurer of the Synod
Pr. Nathan Allen, Holy Spirit/Grand Blanc, Parliamentarian
Mr. Dale Eckart, Chair of the Elections Committee
Pr. Sara Freudenberg, Chair of the Resolutions Committee
Pr. Jen Kiefer, representing the Nominations Committee

The Bishop introduced our Churchwide Representative, Ms. Jill Beverlin, who serves as the Program Director for Coaching Ministries for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and will present the ELCA Churchwide Report.

The Bishop introduced our guest musicians, Aisea Taimani and Joyce Ting. Aisea is a Tongan American Creative Artist based out of the Bay Area. He serves as the Curator of Worship & Arts at Valley Presbyterian Church, Portola Valley, CA. Joyce is a Taiwanese American educator and performing artist. Joyce is the Co-Managing Director of Ailey Camp and teaches middle school drama at Park Day School in Oakland, CA. Additionally, Joyce is a member of Belonging Resident Company, a performance ensemble.

The Bishop introduced the interns serving in our Synod:

Rick Durance, Holy Cross/Livonia, from Trinity Seminary at Capital University
Alysa Offman, Holy Trinity/Livonia, from Luther Seminary

The Bishop introduced the new assigned First Call Candidates to the Synod:

Pastor Matt Jewell, St. John/Capac
Vicar Alysa Offman, graduating from Luther Seminary on June 1, 2025.

The Bishop shared with joy the newly ordained Pastors and Deacons in the Synod.

Deacon Kim O'Brien, serving as Chaplain at Trinity Health
Pastor Matt Jewell, St. John/Capac

The Bishop welcomed rostered leaders who have arrived to the Southeast Michigan Synod between April 1, 2024 and March 31, 2025:

Pastor Sara Cogsil, Trinity/Ann Arbor
Pastor Julie Winklepleck, American Lutheran Church/Clinton Twp
Pastor Bill Kirsh-Carr, Christ/Monroe
Retired Pastor Douglas Soley

The Bishop also introduced those serving as Pages at the Assembly:
Ms. Kelle Shepherd-Bhavsar, Hope/Farmington
Mr. Rick Durance, Holy Cross/Livonia

SYNOD COUNCIL ACTION ITEMS REPORT OF THE AUDITORS

The Bishop introduced Mr. Daryl Hurley, Treasurer of the Synod, who presented a letter from our Auditor, Schreiber Advisors, P.C., regarding the Audit for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2025.

The final report will be reviewed and accept the report of the auditor by the Synod Council upon its completion.

MOVED: It was moved to authorize Synod Council to review and approve the Report of the Auditor for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2025, when it is completed.
SA25.05.03 ADOPTED Yes 134, No 2

2027 BUDGET PRESENTATION

Daryl Hurley, Treasurer of the Synod, presented of the 2027 budgets, including the proposed Operating Budget and the proposed Fund for Mission Budget. Following the presentations, there was time for questions with Mr. Hurley.

RESOLUTIONS

The Bishop introduced Pr. Sara Freudenburg, Chair of the Resolutions Committee – Emmanuel/Livonia, to the podium. Other members of the committee include Pastor Jack Eggleston, Pastor Andrew Chavanak, Pastor Sharon Smith, Ms. Pat Alsup and Mr. Paul Archer.

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to suspend the rules for the purpose of avoiding the reading of the Resolutions.
SA.25.05.04 ADOPTED

The vote occurred through a voice vote, and a majority of the assembly voted in favor.

Memorial 2025 M-1 Memorial: End the Occupation and Recognition of Palestinian Statehood

Rationale: The Southeast Michigan Synod is a companion synod with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Holy Land. The ELCA in 2005 established the initiative Peace Not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land recently renamed SUMUD: for Justice in Palestine and Israel. The name sumud, Arabic “steadfastness” was chosen at the suggestion of our Palestinian Lutheran companions. Receiving this word as a prophetic gift from our companions reminds us that God’s steadfastness calls us to steadfastness.

The ELCA’s 2017 social message On Human Rights states “The ELCA as a church supports human rights around the globe in its work with global partners. In response to God’s call to comfort God’s people (Isaiah 40) and through the strategy of accompaniment, our church seeks to accompany those among our global partners who suffer human rights violations.”

ELCA has committed itself to uphold and foster human rights as described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; support international organizations such as the United Nations, including its Security Council and Human Rights Council; be sensitive to the needs of indigenous peoples...practice

accompaniment in its advocacy on human rights; and provide members, congregations, and other ELCA entities the resources needed to deepen their understanding of and commitment to promoting human rights.

United Nations Resolutions 446, 452, 465, 471, and 476 have declared the state of Israel's military occupation of the West Bank is illegal. The occupation includes: restriction of freedom of movement; military incarceration without due process; demolition of homes; restriction of the water usage that is administered by the State of Israel; appropriation of Palestinian homes in Jerusalem; and appropriation of Palestinian land by illegal Israeli settlements.

Resolved that the Southeast Michigan Synod 2025 Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to encourage its members to continue to pray, and advocate for human rights, justice, and peace for all Palestinians and Israelis.

Resolved that the Southeast Michigan Synod 2025 Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 ELCA Church Wide Assembly to request the Presiding Bishop to direct a letter to the President of the United States, to the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House, calling for the U.S. to take action in its foreign policy supporting the recognition of Palestine as a legitimate state in the United Nations, as other United Nations member states have done.

Resolved that the Southeast Michigan Synod 2025 Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly to request the Presiding Bishop to direct a letter to the President of the United States, to the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House, calling for the U.S. to take action in its foreign policy supporting the human rights of all Palestinians and Israelis by calling for an end of the illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

Submitted by:
Pastor Paul Walters, Lutheran Church of the Master, Troy;
Pastor Fred Harms, St. Paul, Grosse Pointe Farms;
Margaret Harms, St. Paul, Grosse Pointe Farms;
Pastor Jack Eggleston, Unity, Southgate.

The Resolution committee recommends this Memorial to the Assembly.

Memorial 2025 Memorial Supporting Addressing Legacy of Indian Boarding Schools

RESOLVED, that the 2025 Southeast Michigan Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to address the legacies of our church's role in Indian Boarding Schools by broadening and deepening awareness at congregational, synod, and churchwide levels of Christian and Lutheran roles in Indian boarding schools,

RESOLVED, that the 2025 Southeast Michigan Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to identify, secure, and maintain funding to support ongoing truth-seeking efforts by the ELCA Truth-Seeking & Truth-Telling Initiative and other initiatives that foster healing and reconciliation with Native communities, including but not limited: to the location, preservation, and digitization of archival records; the organization of, care of, and access to all information about Indian Boarding Schools and Day Schools by students survivors, their descendants, communities, and Tribal Nations,

RESOLVED, that the 2025 Southeast Michigan Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to direct the ELCA to provide on-going support for and encouragement to congregations, synods, and ministries learning truth about Indian Boarding Schools to responsibly create paths to healing and repair, such as by commemorating the National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools annually near September 30th.

Submitted by:

Rev. Branden Hunt

Rev. Michael Johnson

Ms. Marilyn Knak

Mr. Rick Durance

Editors: Elizabeth M. Andress, Co-lead (lay volunteer), ELCA Truth-Seeking & Truth-Telling Initiative on Indian Boarding Schools; liz@solbrack.com, 651-983-8105 (m) Rick Durance, Intern, Holy Cross Lutheran Church (Livonia), rickdurance@gmail.com, 330-3226723 (m)

Rationale: Indian Boarding Schools were institutions that forcibly took Native children from their families and communities, prohibited Native language and culture, subjected them to harsh conditions, forced labor, and abuse. They were part of a larger system of physical and cultural genocide.¹

From 1819 to 1969, 520 Indian Boarding Schools operated in the United States, with over 1,000 additional institutions operated as day schools, orphanages, etc.² Almost 19,000 children were forcibly enrolled, and enrollment comprised over 80% of all Native children at one point.³ In Michigan, there were five Indian Boarding Schools and over 30 similar institutions (with one possible Indian Day School being investigated within Synodical boundaries).⁴

Religious communities operated over 50% of these nationally institutions, and eight had Lutheran affiliation. A predecessor denomination of the ELCA (the Norwegian Synod) operated one from 1883 to 1933 as the Bethany Indian Mission Boarding School in Wittenburg, Wisconsin.⁵

Over 9,000 students died at over 50 Indian Boarding Schools, with more deaths still being discovered. Native Children also suffered physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse at these institutions. This abuse traumatized the children, their families, their tribal communities, and subsequent generations.⁶

Previously, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly has committed to truth-seeking, anti-racism, and justice including the “Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery” in 2016.⁷ This work continued with the “Declaration to American Indian and Alaska Native People” in 2021 and the launch of the Truth and Healing movement in 2023.⁸

Since 2007, racial reconciliation has been a priority for the Southeast Michigan Synod, such as Synod Council’s “Covenant of Racial Reconciliation.” The Synod further resolved to promote additional anti-racism work in 2017.⁹

This memorial would serve to continue, broaden, and deepen these anti-racism efforts of ELCA Churchwide and the Southeast Michigan Synod.

¹David Treuer, *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America From 1890 to the Present* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2019), 141. ²“Indian Boarding Schools in the United States.” National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. Accessed March 15, 2025: <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2025-Indian-Boarding-Schools-Map-.pdf> ³United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report Volume II, July 2024, Accessed March 15, 2025: <https://www.bia.gov/service/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative>, 15, and “US Indian Boarding School History.” National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. Accessed March 15, 2025: <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/education/us-indian-boarding-school-history/> ⁴United States Department of the Interior, Indian Boarding School Report Vol II. - List of Other Institutions, Bureau of Indian Affairs, July 2024, Accessed March 15, 2025: <https://www.bia.gov/service/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative>, 6-7. ⁵DOI, Indian Boarding School Vol. II, List of Other Institutions, 3-4, 12, and 15, and Anna M. Peterson, “Norwegian Americans and the Bethany Indian Mission,” *Currents: The Newsletter of the Norwegian-American Historical Society* (Volume 189, Fall 2023): 6-9. ⁶DOI, Indian Boarding School Vol. II, 5-15. ⁷“ELCA Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery,” *Evangelical Lutheran Church of America*, 2016, https://resources.elca.org/wpcontent/uploads/Repudiation_Doctrine_of_DiscoverySPR16.pdf ⁸“A Declaration of the ELCA to American Indian and Alaska Native People,” *Evangelical Lutheran Church of*

America, 2021, https://resources.elca.org/wp-content/uploads/Declaration_to_American_Indian_Alaska_Native.pdf and “ELCA Launches Truth and Healing Movement,” Living Lutheran, April 13, 2023, <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2023/04/elca-launches-truth-and-healingmovement/> 9Congregational Engagement in Anti-Racism Training,” Southeast Michigan Synod, 2017, https://semisynod.com/wpcontent/uploads/2022/06/Resolution-2017_1-Updated.pdf

The Resolution committee recommends this Memorial to the Assembly.

Point of information The following resolution was submitted for consideration at the 2025 Southeast Michigan Synod Assembly. Upon reviewing resolution and governing documents of the Southeast Michigan Synod, it was discovered that the current form of the Synod Constitution and other governing documents already make room for full inclusion of all people in positions of leadership, regardless of gender identity. Synod staff did revise the nomination form regarding the Discipline and Consultation committees to remove gender specifications, as they are not required. No other action can be taken. We present the resolution, however, as a point of information to the assembly.

We, the leadership of the Southeast Michigan Synod, are grateful to Pastor Newman for taking the time to craft this resolution. We continue to celebrate over 33 years of partnership with Reconciling Works and our status as Reconciling in Christ synod. We also celebrate that our constitution and other governing documents make room for all voices at the leadership table and we commit to continuing our efforts to provide educational resources regarding the importance of full gender inclusion.

Resolution to Expand Gender Categories in Synodical Representation Southeast Michigan Synod, ELCA

Whereas we believe that all people are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and are made holy in God’s love, regardless of gender identity;

Whereas Jesus consistently modeled radical inclusion, welcoming and affirming those who were marginalized by societal norms;

Whereas the current practice of electing representatives based solely on binary gender categories (male/female) does not reflect the full diversity of God’s creation and excludes non-binary, gender-expansive, and other individuals who do not identify within that framework;

Whereas the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is committed to justice, equity, and full participation of all people in the life of the Church (Galatians 3:28);

Whereas the Southeast Michigan Synod seeks to be a leader in fostering inclusion and ensuring that all members have a voice in synodical decision-making;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Southeast Michigan Synod of the ELCA will immediately adopt an expanded model for representation, in which gender categories include:

- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary/Unspecified/Other

Be it further resolved that the Southeast Michigan Synod will revise all governing documents, policies, and election procedures to reflect this commitment to gender inclusivity;

Be it further resolved that the Southeast Michigan Synod will submit this resolution to the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, calling upon the wider Church to follow this example in ensuring that all God’s people—regardless of gender identity—are welcomed fully into leadership and participation;

Be it finally resolved that the Southeast Michigan Synod will provide education and resources to

congregations and synodical leaders on the importance of gender inclusion, ensuring that this work reflects our shared commitment to justice, equity, and the radical love of Christ.

Submitted by: Rev. Steph "Ash" Newman (they/them) Christ Lutheran Church, Waterford, Michigan

REPORT OF THE NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE/NOMINATIONS FROM THE FLOOR

The Bishop introduced Pr. Jen Kiefer, Chair of the Nominations Committee, who presented the Report of the Nominations Committee. The other members of the committee were: Pr. Matthew Bode and Ms. Monique Taylor-McCants.

The Bishop discussed the process for Nominations from the Floor. Nominations will be asked for after the announcement of each category. If you would like to be nominated, please raise your hand. If there are new nominations, please submit them after we have addressed each category. And, be sure you have secured the assurance from the nominee that they are willing to serve. Nomination Forms are available at the Registration Desk.

SYNOD COUNCIL:

Conference 1 Elect one – Three Year Term

Bishop declared the nominations for Conference 1 closed.

Conference 4 Elect One - Three Year Term Ms. Nadalie Brown, King of Kings, Shelby Twp

Bishop declared the nominations for Conference 4 closed.

Conference 5 Elect One - Three Year Term Mr. Larry Loomis, Triumphant Cross, St. Clair Shores

Bishop declared the nominations for Conference 5 closed.

Conference 10 Elect One - Three Year Term Pastor Sara Cogsil, Trinity, Ann Arbor

Bishop declared the nominations for Conference 10 closed

Youth (14-18 Years)

Elect One - Two Year Term

Ms Marin Carlson, Shepherd of the Lakes, Walled Lake

Bishop declared the nominations for the Youth member closed.

DISCIPLINE COMMITTEE

Clergy Persons

Elect Two – 6 Year Term

Pastor Matthew Bode, Zion, Ferndale

Pastor Emily Werner, Trinity Health, Ypsilanti

Bishop declared the nominations for the Discipline Committee, Clergy Persons, closed.

Lay Persons

Elect Two – 6 Year Term

Mr. Roland Chandler, Genesis, Detroit

Ms. Patricia Alsup, Revelation, Detroit

Bishop declared the nominations for the Discipline Committee, Lay Persons, closed.

CONSULTATION COMMITTEE

Clergy Persons

Elect Two – 6 Year Term

Pastor Greer Cherney, Zion, Ann Arbor

Pastor Carm Yero, Unity, Southgate

Pastor Steph Newman, Christ, Waterford, was nominated from the floor.

Bishop declared the nominations for the Consultation Committee, Clergy Persons, closed.

Lay Persons

Elect Two – 6 Year Term

Ms. Roslyn Brown, Amazing Grace, Warren

Ms. Edelyn Westwood, Christ, Waterford

Bishop declared the nominations for the Consultation Committee, Lay Persons, closed.

Bishop Kreiss announced that nominations were complete for all positions.

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to close nominations for all positions.

SA.25.05.04 ADOPTED

The vote occurred through a voice vote, and a majority of the assembly voted in favor.

MISSION MOMENT

The Assembly learned about the ministry of Love Rising from Pastor Michael Johnson, Love Rising, Detroit.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Bishop made a number of announcements.

ADJOURNMENT

The Bishop recessed Plenary Session I at 7:48 pm for a break. He reminded all attendees that Opening Worship begins at 8:00 pm.

PLENARY SESSION II – Saturday, May 17, 2025

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Bishop called Plenary II to order at 9:31 AM. He also made announcements.

The Assembly participated in Morning Prayer and was lead in song by Aisea and Joyce.

MISSION MOMENT

Mr. Dave Morin brought greetings from Samaritas.

VICE PRESIDENT PAUL ARCHER

Paul Archer provided the Assembly with his Report.

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come...” (Revelation 1:4)

Fellow members of the Southeast Michigan Synod and guests,

My written report, included in your documents, includes the majority of what I need to share with you, but I want to emphasize my belief that the past year has been a great year for the Synod Council, with significant changes to the way we go about our business. For as long as I’ve been aware of the Synod Council, they have met 6 times a year, with meetings lasting no more than 3 hours, depending on the agenda. This typically left enough time to conduct the routine “business” of the Council and little else. After much discussion in the past year, the Council voted to switch to a schedule of 4 meetings per year – which is the minimum number of meetings permitted by the Constitution – with a meeting agenda planned for about 6 hours. This change in schedule has, in my opinion, had a positive impact on our work together. We still have time for devotions, time to pray with and for one another, and time to receive all the reports we need to receive, but the longer format allows time for more strategic and generative discussions about the ministries of the Synod, time to share in fellowship over a meal, and time to hear in-person reports from Synod staff. In addition, we have recently invited representatives from some of our funded ministries and our mission partners to bring updates to the Council. This has been a great opportunity for the Council to get an up-close look at these ministries and the impact they have on the people of our region – rather than just reading a report on paper. I believe these presentations have given the Council members a renewed sense of purpose and a better understanding of what Synod support looks like in our communities.

There are, I think, two great blessings to my service as Vice President. One is that I’m not paid for this job, so I don’t have all the hassles of IRS Form 1099s and calculating income tax and worrying about a higher standard of living. Second is the amazing people I get to work with – those faithful servants on the Council, and those blessed saints on Synod staff.

First, thanks to the Assistants to the Bishop: Beth Fisher, Jen Kiefer, Robin McCants, and C.J. Clark – for submitting reports and for joining our meetings and for keeping the Synod office running smoothly.

And thanks to the members of the Council for your dedicated service – for being on time and for being prepared – for sharing your voice and your opinions on the matters before us. It is a privilege to serve with you. I would ask you to stand as I read your name:

- Secretary Sonja Markwart
- Treasurer Daryl Hurley
- Michelle Carlson
- Pr. Niklaus Schillack
- Wendy Gomez
- Deacon Maggie Priestaf
- Pr. Andrew Chavanak
- Pr. Matthew Bode
- Pr. Michael Johnson
- John Wohl
- Monique Taylor-McCants
- Pr. Kristin McCarthy
- Sarah Kuhbander
- Bishop Don Kreiss

This year is a bit unique in that we have 5 members of the Synod Council who have served the maximum number of years and are ineligible to be reelected. Naturally, I will miss the joy of working with these 5 dedicated souls, and I think the Council will miss their experience and wisdom. Their retirements will be a significant loss in our institutional memory. I have no doubt that those elected to fill these Council seats will bring their own gifts to this role and become valuable members of the team. But, for now, I'd like to celebrate these 5 colleagues and friends. If present, I would ask you to come forward as I call your name.

- Jo Ellyn Bernardin
- LLM Gerry Udell
- Beth Paulo
- Pr. Elizabeth Friedman
- Jakob LeBlanc

Thank you.

MISSION MOMENT

Pastor Dylan Pyeatt, Associate Pastor of Lutheran Church of the Master, Troy and Pastor Developer at Micah 6 in Pontiac share with the Assembly the mission and work of Micah 6.

REPORT OF THE CHURCHWIDE REPRESENTATIVE - STATE OF THE ELCA

Bishop Kreiss introduced Ms. Jill Beverlin. Ms Beverlin serves as Program Director for ELCA Coaching Ministries. Ms. Beverlin's presentation shared the impact of the people of the Southeast Michigan Synod on churchwide ministries. She shared about Churchwide Assembly, and the coming election of a Presiding Bishop and ELCA secretary. She also shared a video from Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton celebrating our history and our changing church.

MISSION MOMENT

Pastor Dan Beirne, Director for Mobilization and Faith Relations for Global Refuge, formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services brought greetings and an update on this ministry.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Bishop made announcements regarding the assembly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Bishop recessed Plenary Session II at 10:42 AM for a break

BREAK

The Assembly took a short break for refreshments.

PLENARY SESSION III – Saturday, May 17, 2025

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Bishop called Plenary III to order at 11:08 AM. For the Assembly's fundraising efforts, The Bishop modeled a kilt. The Assembly was led in song by Aisea and Joyce.

REPORTS FROM SYNOD STAFF

Pastor Jen Kiefer, Ms. Robin McCants and Mr. CJ Clark presented reports to the Assembly. Pastor Kiefer shared about candidacy and compensation guidelines. Ms. McCants shares about the Licensed Lay Ministry (LLM) program, and the updated Synod Constitution with a Continuing Resolution regarding the work of LLMs in the Synod. Mr. Clark shared about worship trends across the ELCA from 2013-2023.

MISSION MOMENT

Pastor John Cummings, Pastor Developer at Grace in Action, Southwest Detroit, brought greetings and an update on this ministry.

The Assembly also heard from Pastor Eric Johnson, part of Zoe Oakland, regarding the campus ministries in Oakland County.

REPORT OF THE CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE AND THE FIRST BALLOT

Bishop Kreiss introduced Pastor Ben Adams and Pastor Eric Johnson, of the Credentials Committee. The report of the Credentials Committee was as follows: As of 10:40 AM May 17, 2025, a total of 204 persons had registered which included:

VOTING MEMBERS: 184 of which 69 (37.5%) were clergy and 114 and 1 youth(62.5%) were lay and we had 20 visitors.

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to declare elected all those persons nominated to positions in which there were no contests.

SA.25.05.05 ADOPTED

The vote occurred through a voice vote, and a majority of the assembly voted in favor.

The Bishop declared the following persons duly elected:

SYNOD COUNCIL:

Conference 4

M. Nadalie Brown, King of Kings, Shelby Township

Conference 5

Mr. Larry Loomis, Triumphant Cross, St. Clair Shore

Conference 10

Pastor Sara Cogsil, Trinity, Ann Arbor

Youth (16-18 Years)

Ms. Marin Carlson, Shepherd of the Lakes, Walled Lake

DISCIPLINE COMMITTEE

Clergy Persons

Pastor Matthew Bode, Zion, Ferndale

Pastor Emily Werner, Trinity Health, Ypsilanti

Lay Persons

Mr. Roland Chandler, Genesis, Detroit

Ms. Patricia Alsup, Revelation, Detroit

CONSULTATION COMMITTEE

Lay Persons

Ms. Roslyn Brown, Amazing Grace, Warren

Ms. Edelyn Westwood, Christ, Waterford

FIRST COMMON BALLOT

The Bishop gave instructions then balloting took place. The nominees were:

Consultation Committee

Clergy Persons

Elect Two – 6 Year Term

Pastor Greer Cherney, Zion, Ann Arbor

Pastor Carm Yero, Unity, Southgate

Pastor Steph (Ash) Newman, Christ, Waterford

REPORT OF THE FIRST COMMON BALLOT

There were 160 total votes. The results were as follows:

Pastor Greer Cherney, Zion, Ann Arbor – 119 Votes

Pastor Carm Yero, Unity, Southgate – 97 Votes

Pastor Steph (Ash) Newman, Christ, Waterford – 104 Votes

Bishop Kreiss declared Pastor Greer Cherney and Pastor Steph (Ash) Newman duly elected.

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

The Bishop relinquished the Chair to Mr. Paul Archer, Vice-President of the Synod, for the purpose of making the Bishop's Report to the Assembly. The Bishop addressed the Assembly.

Bishop's Report 2025
Synod Assembly at Celebration, Westland May 16-17, 2025

Members and Friends of Southeast Michigan Synod Dear Ones in Christ,
Grace to you and peace, from God our Creator and Jesus our Savior who reminds us that the kingdom of God comes in ways we do not always expect!

The theme of this Assembly is "Bear Burdens" which is a line pulled from St. Paul's *Letter to the Galatians*, part of which we read in worship last night. "Bear Burdens" is one of the alliterative exhortations that comprise our Synod's mission statement. I know that you know it, but I say it out loud just to remind you:

Rise Up! Bear Burdens, Build Bridges, Break Chains, Bring Hope!

I think it's still a really good mission statement for all that it's 15 years old now, and I'm looking forward to thinking together, talking together, praying together, and working together over the next four years to figure out how we use those words to help shape what our synod's ministry looks like, and how we use them to shape the ways that we move out into the world as members of Christ's church. And speaking of our Synod ministry, during this report I hope to give you a better understanding of just what that is what we do. Because--and you'll hear me say this again later in this report--WE are the Synod. Those who serve on Synod staff with me, which includes your local deans, we do ministry, we bear burdens on behalf of those we are called to serve, which is mostly you, dear Ones!

So part of my time is going to highlight for you some of the things the Synod does in order that our congregations and their leaders have better access to the resources and help they need, so the Gospel can be preached and the sacraments celebrated to the glory of God.

I will also confess to you that "Bear Burdens" has produced this kind of image in my mind, and it's too good not to share with you now.

So. The other reason I wanted to share that image with you is to give us all just a moment to breathe, and then perhaps to laugh together as well. You see and you know that the last 10 years have been challenging years for all of us who are part of the North American Christian movement we'd identify as "mainline Protestantism."

Just so we're clear, that movement includes all of our "full communion partners: The Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, the Reformed Church in America, The Presbyterian Church (USA) the United Church of Christ, the Moravian Church, and a handful of other traditions. And here's the truth: none of us are bigger now than we were 10 years ago. Speaking broadly but fairly, all of us are less well resourced now than we were a decade ago: measured in terms of numbers of members, numbers of congregations, numbers of ordained leaders, and numbers of dollars. Further, this trend is prevalent across North America and Northern Europe. And hear me say this, dear Ones: no one here is to blame for this reality.

We are swimming against tides of cultural change, tides of widely-held suspicion of organizations and hierarchies, tides of a generalized uncertainty about the purpose and value of weekly religious gatherings,
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Minutes of the 36th Synod Assembly, May 16-17, 2025

and against a social order that drives each of us away from a common center toward more radical margins characterized by suspicion and distrust of those who are different. No wonder many of us feel tired by the end of a week!

We may not like it, but this is, as some of you may remember from your Catechism days, most certainly true. However, just because that is our current reality it does not follow God has given up on the Church or on Lutherans. The Christian Church (the whole thing, that is) continues to grow significantly in the global south. More particularly, the largest member church of the Lutheran World Federation (and we're a part of that, dear Ones) is the Mekane Yesus Church, that is the Lutheran Church in Ethiopia, with more than 10 million members. More particularly yet, our companion synod, the Mbulu Diocese in Tanzania has grown in terms of congregations and members in the last 10 years as well. And we give thanks to God for that increase. Now even as that growth is happening around the world, there are, of course, individual congregations here in Southeast Michigan that have grown or flourished during this time, which is wonderful.

And let us be clear that we can measure growth in ways other than numbers, because certainly we have leaders and members who have grown in faith or deepened their skill sets. We have congregations that have expanded outreach in their communities, continued to share the good news in new and innovative ways, and have learned to work together in ways that strengthen both their connections to each other and their witness in the community.

And there are a number of ministries, some new and some familiar that we continue to encourage and support as we have done for a number of years now. You've already heard from some of them during our time here: Love Rising, Samaritas, Micah 6, our very own national ELCA, Global Refuge, and Grace in Action just to remind you; and you'll hear more as the Assembly goes on: from Living Water Ministries, and Mother of the Savior.

I know that you were plugged in during those presentations, and I ask you to please pay attention going forward as leaders or members of other agencies or communities share with us about what the Holy Spirit is up to here in our Synod.

I also want to commend to you the very fine work of two of our synod feeding ministries who are helping to keep us fed during this assembly: Fed Up, led by Pr. Anna Taylor-McCants (breakfast pastries) Jubilee, led by Pr. Sara Freudenburg, (lunch empanadas).

I also want to give a shout out to Living Red Ministry, out of Dexter and led by Pr. Vickie Lovell who offered one of the workshops yesterday. Living Red is both a place of Christian community and a place of healing where "seekers" --folks looking for a new kind of spiritual connection-- are invited and welcomed into a relationship with Jesus and others.

All those ministries, as well as our three campus ministries: Lord of Light at the U of M; all together at Wayne State (a joint ELCA and TEC ministry, by the way), and Zoe, Oakland at Oakland University are supported by dollars from the Fund for Mission Budget that is in turn supported by gifts from you and from congregations who made hard and faithful decisions about how to create a legacy by distributing assets from the sale of buildings. You heard about how we put some of that money to use in the budget presentations our Synod Treasurer Mr. Daryl Hurley offered last night.

Still with me? Good. Because I also want to share one recent personal experience that has shaped this report and continues to shape my own ministry as your bishop of our Synod. And I have been your bishop for a while, dear Ones. I was first elected by the Synod in 2011, re-elected in 2017 and again in 2023. For those of you doing the math, that's 14 years. So far. This is now the longest call in my professional ministry, and by some measure it has been the most rewarding *and* the most challenging of the three I've had. I am and continue to be deeply grateful for your support, your prayers, and the way we have learned to work as partners over this time. And it has not been easy. I don't mean to suggest I'm a special snowflake about that: I don't think anybody who takes their job seriously has it easy: we don't live in that time.

But this past January it was my privilege to attend a 5 day retreat in northern California. Later I can share more with you about the group that gathered and the goals we hoped to accomplish, but the thing that I want you to hear is this: That time, and that group of about 25 others offered me a place and space to think and to pray deeply about my own sense of mission and how I understand my multiple roles in the world (again, we all have multiple roles).

My roles include: baptized child of God, husband, father, brother, son, friend, pastor and bishop. Your roles may vary. All of us on the retreat were invited--or challenged-- to think about how we would define our personal mission and then to come up with a mission statement. My process getting there involved thought, prayer and discernment. Others got there by a different path; for this exercise the point was the product, not the process. As a side note I also observe that while there is great strength to be found in gathering with people who share the same faith and a similar regard for the Church (thank you!), in this case it was really helpful to me to be one of only three ordained persons (my colleagues were a Reformed Rabbi and a minister out of the United Church of Christ).

Anyway, what that meant was I was mostly treated with a polite mixture of kindness, curiosity, and skepticism. Further, I think it was good that I was in no way responsible for the planning or execution of that event. I expect members of your Synod staff are nodding their heads at that.

And so, as I said, in that time and space I got to think and to pray and to discern about my personal mission statement and consider how to capture that statement briefly and memorably. After all, a mission statement is no good if you can't remember what it's about, which is, as I said at the beginning of this report, one of the reasons Rise Up! Bear Burdens, Build Bridges, Break Chains, Bring Hope! is such a good one. You can remember it and it belongs to all of us, yes?

Because we are the Synod, yes? Then please say it with me one more time:

Rise Up! Bear Burdens, Build Bridges, Break Chains, Bring Hope!

Well done! That's ours. That belongs to all of us.

So let me share mine with you now: To Shepherd, Serve, and Love. Just those three words. That's mine. And thank you for letting me share it with you now. Out of that context and out of that process I found those three words which felt both right and good in terms of being both descriptive and hopeful about who I am and what Christ has called me to do. And I continue to think it's a good sign that four and a half months later they still feel that way.

To Shepherd, Serve, and Love.

I don't for a moment suggest that I have exclusive ownership of those words, or that I am the only one who has ever used them in a mission statement, but they fit me. Over the past months they have helped me keep a frame around the tasks that are central to my personal discipleship, my own sense of call, and they have helped me recover a sense of energy and purpose as I live those things out in the world.

For me, spending the time to come up with that has been a really good thing. A blessing, even. You may very well have your own mission statement. I expect and hope that some of you do. Some of you may be wondering what your statement might be and are challenged and curious. Some of you may be thinking that this sort of thing doesn't really get the work done, and are finding all this explanation a bit tedious. Some of you may be wondering about lunch. All of those reactions are perfectly appropriate. But I offer all that to you as a way of getting our hearts and heads into the same space. The word "Synod" literally means "on the way together," and so now I want to move on to spend time talking with you about how those mission statements align, and what I think it means for us to "bear burdens." I want to talk with you about what I think some of those burdens are, how we carry them, how we carry them with and for each other, and to think about what those burdens mean for us and for the mission, witness and work of the Southeast Michigan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Bear Burdens! And as shepherds we do. The classically minded will recall that the word "shepherd"

translates to the Latin “pastor” but the verb “to shepherd” is something we’re all called to, no matter what sort of collar you wear.

Many of you are familiar with this image from the stained glass above the altar in the sanctuary, the image of Christ the Good Shepherd carrying a lamb on his shoulders. For me it’s always a lovely reminder of the question Christ asked the disciples: *Which one of you, having 100 sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?* (Luke 15:4). I have seen a bunch of these windows across the Synod, and always Jesus looks very responsible and the lamb looks a little put out. What do you think?

And to be sure, all of us have experience of carrying something to church, whether it was a child to be baptized, boxes of pizza to confirmation class, or a casserole to a funeral luncheon. We carry things home with us as well: an ashen cross on our foreheads at the start of Lent, a branch on Palm Sunday, pots of flowers after Easter, a particularly good thought from Sunday’s sermon, the melody from the new song introduced by the choir.

But I hope, dear Ones, that you have also carried home with you the prayer requests that are printed in the bulletin or lifted up during worship. I hope that you have committed to remember those who are in the hospital, or in recovery, or in custody, and to pray for their return to a whole and healthy life.

I hope that you have carried home in your heart some of the burden of the grief of those who mourn, the pain of those who are ill, and the loneliness of those who are alone. And just as those burdens are real and are lighter when shared, so there are joys which are carried or that carry us along as well. You have your own list, of course, but I expect it includes new births, first communions, confirmations, graduations, weddings, new jobs, new homes, new chapters in life.

We bear those burdens, we shepherd those in our care because that is what the Body of Christ does as it seeks always to be made well and strong and to heal those parts that are wounded.

Another way that we as a Synod, and we, as your Synod leaders act as shepherds and bear one another’s burden is by encouraging our congregations and their leaders to engage in faithful ministry rooted in the moment and the realities of the time in which we live and serve. We are called to prod, to guide, to recommend, to consult and to challenge each other and those in our care to help bring God’s reign closer. And so we are committed to partnering with you to find good and practical solutions to challenges we understand, and to praying, experimenting and struggling with you when we encounter a situation we have not seen before.

Because we as your leaders are working with more than 100 other congregations and ministries, here in Southeast Michigan and countless other places across the ELCA, we have resources of knowledge and information we are glad to share with you. We know who does stewardship well and faithfully. We know where congregations are coming together to do effective and fun confirmation studies involving kids from different parishes. We know how to connect your high school graduates with campus pastors, and how to help get your 7th graders to camp for a week at Stoney Lake that may very well change the trajectory of their lives.

We can help you hook up with programs provided by the national church that are meant to develop a specific skill set or to find other, like-minded leaders or encouragement and support. We support a churchwide coaching network you heard Ms. Beverlin mention, a network that helps leaders develop a range of healthy and hopeful responses to the challenges they face in their ministry. And because this is the time in which we live and serve, as your Synod leaders we have become familiar with the process of helping congregations and their leaders recognize the signs and discern the next steps as a congregation chooses to enter the process of Holy Closure. It is a hard process, and can be a painful one even when it’s done well, because all of us understand that our church buildings are not just buildings, but are places we gather to celebrate or acknowledge critical moments in our shared lives. Your Synod staff are prepared to walk with you during that journey, and to help closing congregations support trusted ministry partners or to start new funded ministries that are the

signs of new life and embody the promise of resurrection at the heart of our faith.

So. From the word “Shepherd,” we move to “Serve,” and though that’s a word taken out of my mission statement, I want to talk now about how we offer service--of many kinds-- in ways that connect again to the “Bear Burdens” part of the mission statement that belongs to all of us. I also want to explore with you a little bit about how the Synod council is part of our church structure, and how members of that Council as well as the Council itself can be allies and resources for leaders and congregations.

Let us start here: all of us are members of the ELCA, which is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Founded in 1988 by a merger of three previous church bodies: the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, the ELCA is the largest of the three main Lutheran churches in the United States. I won’t list the others because even I start to get confused with all the names and all the letters.

You may know--or you may not-- that one of the unique features built into the ELCA’s constitution is the description of our national church as one body in three expressions. That is, we understand the ELCA is made up of

- 1) Congregations,
- 2) Synods, and
- 3) the Churchwide organization, all of them different but all of them authentically ELCA.

Each expression has different responsibilities, different authority, and different leadership, but together we make one church. Got it?

Now given that I already shared that the word “Synod” literally means “on the road together,” your experience may be that the Synod and its leaders are trusted companions on the journey. I hope so, dear Ones, and I along with the remarkable members of our Synod staff in partnership with the elected members of Synod Council have tried very hard to make it so over the past 14 years. Or you may not have had that experience; or the experience that you had twenty years ago was so painful; or you’ve experienced a series of disappointments from a number of bishops or Synod councils: in any event, dealing with the Synod, much less inviting “them” in, is seen as a desperate and last resort.

But here’s the thing: WE are the Synod. All of us. All of you. Me too. I said that before. And though we sometimes fall short, the Synod exists to serve our congregations, not the other way around. St. Mark in his gospel says of our Lord that Jesus *“came not to be served, but to serve”* and that is the position of the Synod as well.

I have been certain of that since I was elected out of the parish to serve in the office of Bishop, and equally certain as I have served with Synod Executives and leaders from Synod Council. So how does this happen? How does the Synod serve congregations and their leaders by bearing burdens, rather than by adding to them? Good question.

First, the Synod serves by offering counsel, advice, support, and relief. And so we get calls and emails and text messages asking for just those things. For example:

- Where can we find compensation guidelines for a pastor with 3 years of previous experience?
- What resources can congregations find to deal with hunger, advocacy, anti-racism, or working against gun violence?
- How do we support our companion Synods? Who are our companion Synods? When will we be organizing our next visit to one of them?
- How do we contact a supply pastor and how much should we expect to pay them?
- Do you know any organists?
- Where can I find records of my great grandfather’s baptism?

And most of those questions have fairly straightforward answers. Sometimes we get requests for support for more complicated issues:

- How can we make sure our congregation is a safe place for all our members?

- How can we resolve a conflict between paid staff members?
- Pastors calling about how to go about searching for a new call.
- Congregational leaders asking about how to get their pastor to take a new call.
- How can we support an immigrant family?
- How do we talk about sharing ministry and staff with a neighboring congregation?
- Can we share a minister with the Episcopal congregation across the street?

And we can help find answers to those questions too, but you know that none of them get solved in a 5 minute conversation. Also there are times when leaders reach out to the Synod for relief, that is when the pastor is on vacation, or taken ill, or there's an emergency, or a conflict that requires immediate attention. The preachers on Synod staff, and that includes Pr. Kiefer, Ms. McCants, Mr. CJ Clark and myself, are in pulpits more than 100 times a year, sharing the good news of the Gospel all over the Synod. It's a very tangible way we help bear burdens for both leaders and congregations. Beyond these limited engagements, the Synod offers ongoing training and support for leaders by sponsoring, funding and endorsing the preparation necessary for congregational ministry.

Licensed Lay Ministry, for example, is one of the programs in Southeast Michigan that serves both leaders and congregations by equipping lay members to serve as preachers, worship planners, pastoral care providers, and teachers in partnership with a local pastor or in congregations where there is no ordained leader present on Sunday mornings.

In Southeast Michigan we rely on trained LLMs to be available as supply preachers across the Synod. Also we have a large handful of LLMs who serve in congregations as their "Pastoral Presence."

This means that those LLMs preach regularly, attend Council meetings, preside at the Table with the Bishop's permission, provide pastoral care and officiate at funerals, serving congregations that can no longer afford seminary trained leaders but who have the resources and capacity to remain engaged in ministry beyond their four walls. The interesting thing to be aware of here is that while our Synod has been ahead of the curve both in terms of supporting this program and supporting LLMs in their ministry, we are now seeing Churchwide explore how a trained lay ministry might be instituted nationally. In the meanwhile, please know how grateful I am for those of you who serve as LLMs here, and for the Advisory Board and Ms. Robin McCants (herself a LLM) who directs the program on behalf of the Synod.

Of course, the Synod is also committed to helping bear burdens for those who feel called to ordained ministry as well. Our Candidacy committee led by Pr. Jen Kiefer helps keep candidates on track through years of seminary education, offering retreats, mentorship, and a series of interviews that serve both as points of connection and opportunities to get to know each others' gifts and growing edges. We are and continue to be grateful for those who discern a call to serve as pastors or deacons, and we are deeply grateful for the congregations, pastors and leaders who help lift up those candidates and identify them as those with the gifts and talents for leadership in the church.

We serve and we bear burdens for each other in other ways as well. The Synod is organized in a series of conferences; 11 geographic areas served by a Dean who is meant to be a consultant, a counselor, a communicator and cheerleader for the ministry that goes on in local congregations. Additionally, deans gather regularly to connect with each other and with Synod staff, to share their wisdom, their experience, and to provide advice and counsel as we travel on the road together. I am deeply grateful for their partnership as well, and want to take a moment to thank them now:

So let us recognize: Nathan Allen, Mike Opfermann, Jonathan Heierman, Dave Parker, Jamey Authier, Robin McCants, Colleen Nieman, Albert Le Blanc, Sara Freudenburg, Rick Hogan, Elizabeth Friedman, and Paul Walters.

Thank you!

The Synod also helps carry the burden of leadership by putting together gatherings intended at least in part to give our pastors, deacons, and LLMs the opportunity to share their challenges and frustrations, the things that have gone well and the events that didn't. So we plan an annual Autumn Leadership Event, a First Call Theological Education Event, an annual Synod Assembly (you're at one right now!) and help support

opportunities for coaching that helps pastors develop their leadership skills, their emotional intelligence, and their coping skills.

Ms. Beverlin, as I've mentioned before, helps with that on the national level, but Pr. David Hively, formerly of Christ, Monroe and now serving in Southwestern Washington Synod, helps coordinate those opportunities for our leaders here in Southeast Michigan. And of course members of Synod staff offer occasional pastoral support for our rostered leaders, caring for colleagues who care for those they are called to serve.

Additionally, as we think about how we serve and help carry burdens, the Synod helps coordinate our ecumenical and international relationships. We have, for instance, long standing partnerships with our two companion Synods: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (the ELCJHL) and the Mbulu Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) which I mentioned earlier. Through our Synod contacts we do our best to maintain those relationships, to strengthen the connections between congregations here and there, and to coordinate the occasional visits that happen between us. Most recently and in light of the ongoing war in Gaza, we have helped coordinate our Synod-wide support for members of communities living under threat of violence in the West Bank, who are enormously dependent on tourism and pilgrims for their livelihood.

Closer to home, we work at strengthening our ecumenical partnerships, particularly with our Episcopal siblings. We have two joint Lutheran-Episcopal congregations in Southeast Michigan: Holy Faith in Saline, pastored by the Rev. Andrea Martin, and Spirit of Grace in West Bloomfield, pastored by the Rev. Joyce Partyka Staib. It was my pleasure to be with Bishop Bonnie Perry (my episcopal counterpart) and the good folks of Spirit of Grace just last week as they celebrated 10 years of ministry as a federated congregation. I preached, she presided, and together we got a glimpse of what Christian unity might actually look like. It was lovely.

At last we come to the last work in my mission statement: Love.

"Beloved, let us love one another. For love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God."

That's from 1st John, chapter 4, and I remember that because I learned it in a song I learned at camp. (Sing) And that's a really good verse, don't get me wrong. You could do much worse for a confirmation verse.

But I confess to you, my sisters and brothers and friends and dear Ones, that the reason I got this report started by looking at the connections between my mission statement:

To Shepherd, Serve, and Love,

and the Synod's mission statement:

Rise Up! Bear Burdens, Build Bridges, Break Chains, Bring Hope!

Was the line that I remembered--and most of you do too, I expect --that comes from that most familiar passage from Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. Paul writes all those wonderful things about love, about it being patient and kind and so on, and then he goes on to state as fact that "Love bears all things."

Love bears all things, dear Ones, even though most of us probably don't think of it that way, at least not at first. Love bears all things, dear Ones, the burdens each of us struggle with, the challenges all of our congregations are dealing with, the disappointments, the frustrations, the delights, the happiness and the rare moments of surpassing joy that are part of our shared life of faith --love bears all that with us, and for us, so that we are not overwhelmed and overcome with the burdens that are simply and inescapably a part of our lives right now.

And when we are at our best, the Synod --and you remember: WE are the Synod. All of us. All of you. Me

too.-- when we are at our best the Synod leans into love because sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ is, by definition, an act of love. We do that in so many ways, dear Ones, we do it together in all the ways that you as individual disciples practice daily, in all the ways that congregations gather and direct their energy and passion to support and care for others, and in all the ways that your Synod--our Synod-- comes together to serve and to shepherd and to love those given into our care.

I recognize these are not easy days to turn love outward, and to care for those who are different from us. We are beset on all sides with warnings, with threats and with danger. It would be easier and it would be safer to remain behind our sanctuary walls, to hang on to what we have, and to guard against the risks that come with being open and vulnerable and welcoming.

But we are the Body of Christ. As we gather, when we gather, no matter where we gather, we believe and trust that Jesus himself is present with us, in our midst, and we know this because Jesus promised he would be. Love bears all things, dear Ones. Love bears the burdens of our brokenness, our frailty, and our doubts, and love will always bear us safely as we travel on the way together. It is our privilege to gather as a Synod. It is our joy to gather with Christ.

So we carry that truth for each other, because Jesus' sacrificial love --and the joy that walks with it--is what has saved and redeemed us. For Christ is risen! CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!
Darn right.

So, as I near the end of my time, we lift up the names of those who were ordained since last March 31:

Pr. Amy Cooley	4/19/20
Higgs	24
Dcn. Kimberly	7/27/20
O'Brien	24
Pr. Matt Jewell	9/7/202
	4

Let us also give thanks for the life and ministry of: Pr. James Fuchs d. 4/1/2024 Will you pray with me?

The Lord be with you. O God, we remember with thanksgiving all those who have loved you and served you on earth, who now rest from their labors. Keep us in union with all your saints, and bring us with them to the joyous feast of heaven; through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen

Thank you for your attention and your patience dear Ones, and let me end my time before you by thanking those who have worked hard to make this 2025 Synod Assembly come together.

Thank you

- 1) To Pr. Jim Fogle, and the members of Celebration for hosting us, and to members of congregations in this conference who have committed a great deal of time and energy to making sure this Assembly will run smoothly as possible.
- 2) To members of the Synod Assembly Planning Team: Pr. Jen Kiefer, Ms. Robin McCants, Ms. Beth Fisher, and Mr. CJ Clark for putting this event together and keeping track of all the details. I believe they, along with our bookkeeper Ms. Tracey Johnson happen to be the finest Synod staff in the ELCA, and it is my privilege to serve and to laugh with them almost every day.
- 3) To our Church Wide Representative, Ms. Jill Beverlin who will be bringing us a report on behalf of the ELCA, and giving us a sense of the direction of the wider church.
- 4) To Mr. Scott Casey for helping us vote in such a cool way.
- 5) To our Synod supported Food Truck ministries: Fed Up! For the coffee and breakfast pastries, and Jubilee who will be providing us lunch today. We are very pleased you are here today feeding us.

- 6) To our friends who are providing child-care today, so that our youngest children's parents can be present for this Assembly.
- 7) To our Treasurer, Mr. Daryl Hurley, and to our Vice-President, Mr. Paul Archer, whose reports are a part of this assembly and who, along with our Secretary Ms. Sonja Markwart, serve as the elected officers of the Synod.

I also want you to know that Paul Archer is one of our Synod's Licensed Lay Ministers, and he was the preacher last night at our opening worship service. Ms. Robin McCants, member of Synod staff and another Licensed Lay Minister will preside at the closing "Service of the Word" this afternoon while I preach. We asked Paul to preach and Robin to preside as we are trying to both lift up and say "thank you" to our Licensed Lay Ministers who do so much very good work around the Synod.

- 8) To our Slide Master, Ms. Elaine Pearson, who is both incredibly patient with me and whose keen eye for a helpful graphic makes me a much more interesting speaker than I usually am.
- 9) To the formidable Rev. Dr. Nathan Allen for serving as our Parliamentarian.
- 10) To all of you, dear Ones, who have made the commitment to take time out of your busy lives to share in the work that we are called to do as one expression of Christ's church. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

I also want to acknowledge our Directors, folks who use their considerable skill to oversee a particular area of Synod Ministry. David Hively, Director of Coaching Sarah Mayer Flatt, our Synod Story Teller.

I am grateful for both of them as well, and invite you to thank them with me. (clapping)

And let me thank my wife Kristin for her love, patience, and support, and for all the burdens she bears with and for me and for our kids: daughter Kate and new husband Vince, and our son Perry.

And that's where I'll end, dear Ones. With gratitude and love for those who help me bear the burdens and for those who help bear my burdens as well.

Rev. Dr. Donald P. Kreiss

Bishop Southeast Michigan Synod May 17, 2025

MOVED: It was moved and supported to receive the Report of the Bishop.
SA.25.05.06 ADOPTED

The vote occurred through a voice vote, and a majority of the assembly voted in favor.

Mr. Archer then returned the Chair to Bishop Kreiss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Bishop made a number of announcements.

ADJOURNMENT

The Bishop recessed Plenary Session III at 12:55 PM for lunch. Bishop Kreiss prayed for our lunch.

BREAK

The Assembly took a break for lunch. Jubilee in Detroit served lunch to the Assembly.

Following lunch, the attendees participated in various workshops.

PLENARY SESSION IV – Saturday, May 17, 2025

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Bishop called Plenary IV to order at 3:15 PM.

REPORT OF THE CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE AND THE FIRST BALLOT

Bishop Kreiss introduced Pastor Ben Adams and Pastor Eric Johnson, of the Credentials Committee. The report of the Credentials Committee was as follows: As of 2:00 PM May 17, 2025, a total of 204 persons had registered which included:

VOTING MEMBERS: 184 of which 69 (37.5%) were clergy and 114 and 1 youth (62.5%) were lay and we had 20 visitors.

MISSION MOMENT

Pastor Ben Adams provided the Assembly with an update on All.Together Ministries.

VIDEO GREETINGS FROM MOTHER OF THE SAVIOR

The Assembly watched a video greeting from Father Halim Shakur and the people of Mother of the Savior Lutheran Church, an Arabic speaking congregation located in Dearborn,

SYNOD COUNCIL ACTION ITEM

ADOPTION OF 2027 BUDGET

The Bishop stated that it was time to vote on the budgets as presented in Plenary Session I, earlier in the day and invited Mr. Daryl Hurley, Treasurer of the Synod, to the podium.

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to adopt the 2027 Operating Budget.

The Assembly then voted on the motion to adopt the budget.

SA.25.05.7 ADOPTED Yes 124 , No 1

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to adopt the 2027 Fund for Mission Budget.

The Assembly then voted on the motion to adopt the budget.

SA.25.05.8 ADOPTED Yes 119 , No 1

The Bishop thanked Treasurer Hurley and the Finance Team for their faithful stewardship in preparing the budgets and management of the finances of the church.

MISSION MOMENT

Nicole McCarthy, Executive Director of Living Water Ministries, brought greetings and an update on this ministry.

RESOLUTIONS AND MEMORIALS

The Bishop introduced Pastor Andrew Chavanak who led the discussion. Other members of the committee include Sara Freudenburg, Chair of the Resolutions Committee – Emmanuel/Livonia Pastor Jack Eggleston, Pastor Sharon Smith, Ms. Pat Alsup and Mr. Paul Archer.

The Assembly then discussed the Memorials and voted on them.

Memorial 2025 M-1 Memorial: End the Occupation and Recognition of Palestinian Statehood

Rationale: The Southeast Michigan Synod is a companion synod with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Holy Land. The ELCA in 2005 established the initiative Peace Not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land recently renamed SUMUD: for Justice in Palestine and Israel. The name sumud, Arabic “steadfastness” was chosen at the suggestion of our Palestinian Lutheran companions. Receiving this word as a prophetic gift from our companions reminds us that God’s steadfastness calls us to steadfastness.

The ELCA’s 2017 social message On Human Rights states “The ELCA as a church supports human rights around the globe in its work with global partners. In response to God’s call to comfort God’s people (Isaiah 40) and through the strategy of accompaniment, our church seeks to accompany those among our global partners who suffer human rights violations.”

ELCA has committed itself to uphold and foster human rights as described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; support international organizations such as the United Nations, including its Security Council and Human Rights Council; be sensitive to the needs of indigenous peoples...practice accompaniment in its advocacy on human rights; and provide members, congregations, and other ELCA entities the resources needed to deepen their understanding of and commitment to promoting human rights.

United Nations Resolutions 446, 452, 465, 471, and 476 have declared the state of Israel’s military occupation of the West Bank is illegal. The occupation includes: restriction of freedom of movement; military incarceration without due process; demolition of homes; restriction of the water usage that is administered by the State of Israel; appropriation of Palestinian homes in Jerusalem; and appropriation of Palestinian land by illegal Israeli settlements.

Resolved that the Southeast Michigan Synod 2025 Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to encourage its members to continue to pray, and advocate for human rights, justice, and peace for all Palestinians and Israelis.

Resolved that the Southeast Michigan Synod 2025 Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 ELCA Church Wide Assembly to request the Presiding Bishop to direct a letter to the President of the United States, to the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House, calling for the U.S. to take action in its foreign policy supporting the recognition of Palestine as a legitimate state in the United Nations, as other United Nations member states have done.

Resolved that the Southeast Michigan Synod 2025 Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly to request the Presiding Bishop to direct a letter to the President of the United States, to the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House, calling for the U.S. to take action in its foreign policy supporting the human rights of all Palestinians and Israelis by calling for an end of the illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

Submitted by:

Pastor Paul Walters, Lutheran Church of the Master, Troy;
Pastor Fred Harms, St. Paul, Grosse Pointe Farms;
Margaret Harms, St. Paul, Grosse Pointe Farms;
Pastor Jack Eggleston, Unity, Southgate.

The Resolution committee recommends this Memorial to the Assembly.

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to adopt Memorial 2025 M-1.

Discussion:

1. One member spoke in favor of the Memorial regarding the conflict in Palestine. Statistics were shared regarding the devastation and death that has occurred.
2. Another spoke in favor of the Memorial, urging that we care for our siblings in Christ in Palestine.
3. We had discussion of the issue of Resolved 2 – recognizing Statehood. Who are we recognizing? And that this resolution undercuts the other Resolved in the Memorial.
4. Another spoke in favor of the Memorial and the need to resolve this conflict.

The Assembly then voted on the motion to adopt the Memorial 2025 M-1.

SA.25.05.9 ADOPTED Yes 106 , No 18

Memorial 2025 M-2 Memorial Supporting Addressing Legacy of Indian Boarding Schools

RESOLVED, that the 2025 Southeast Michigan Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to address the legacies of our church's role in Indian Boarding Schools by broadening and deepening awareness at congregational, synod, and churchwide levels of Christian and Lutheran roles in Indian boarding schools,

RESOLVED, that the 2025 Southeast Michigan Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to identify, secure, and maintain funding to support ongoing truth-seeking efforts by the ELCA Truth-Seeking & Truth-Telling Initiative and other initiatives that foster healing and reconciliation with Native communities, including but not limited: to the location, preservation, and digitization of archival records; the organization of, care of, and access to all information about Indian Boarding Schools and Day Schools by students survivors, their descendants, communities, and Tribal Nations,

RESOLVED, that the 2025 Southeast Michigan Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to direct the ELCA to provide on-going support for and encouragement to congregations, synods, and ministries learning truth about Indian Boarding Schools to responsibly create paths to healing and repair, such as by commemorating the National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools annually near September 30th.

Submitted by:

Rev. Branden Hunt

Rev. Michael Johnson

Ms. Marilyn Knak

Mr. Rick Durance

Editors: Elizabeth M. Andress, Co-lead (lay volunteer), ELCA Truth-Seeking & Truth-Telling Initiative on Indian Boarding Schools; liz@solbrack.com, 651-983-8105 (m) Rick Durance, Intern, Holy Cross Lutheran Church (Livonia), rickdurance@gmail.com, 330-3226723 (m)

Rationale: Indian Boarding Schools were institutions that forcibly took Native children from their families and communities, prohibited Native language and culture, subjected them to harsh conditions, forced labor, and abuse. They were part of a larger system of physical and cultural genocide.¹

From 1819 to 1969, 520 Indian Boarding Schools operated in the United States, with over 1,000 additional institutions operated as day schools, orphanages, etc.² Almost 19,000 children were forcibly enrolled, and enrollment comprised over 80% of all Native children at one point.³ In Michigan, there were five Indian Boarding Schools and over 30 similar institutions (with one possible Indian Day School being investigated within Synodical boundaries).⁴

Religious communities operated over 50% of these nationally institutions, and eight had Lutheran affiliation. A predecessor denomination of the ELCA (the Norwegian Synod) operated one from 1883 to 1933 as the Bethany Indian Mission Boarding School in Wittenburg, Wisconsin.⁵

Over 9,000 students died at over 50 Indian Boarding Schools, with more deaths still being discovered. Native Children also suffered physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse at these institutions. This abuse traumatized the children, their families, their tribal communities, and subsequent generations.⁶

Previously, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly has committed to truth-seeking, anti-racism, and justice including the “Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery” in 2016.⁷ This work continued with the “Declaration to American Indian and Alaska Native People” in 2021 and the launch of the Truth and Healing movement in 2023.⁸

Since 2007, racial reconciliation has been a priority for the Southeast Michigan Synod, such as Synod Council’s “Covenant of Racial Reconciliation.” The Synod further resolved to promote additional anti-racism work in 2017.⁹

This memorial would serve to continue, broaden, and deepen these anti-racism efforts of ELCA Churchwide and the Southeast Michigan Synod.

¹David Treuer, *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America From 1890 to the Present* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2019), 141. ²“Indian Boarding Schools in the United States.” National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. Accessed March 15, 2025: <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2025-Indian-Boarding-Schools-Map-.pdf> ³United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report Volume II, July 2024, Accessed March 15, 2025: <https://www.bia.gov/service/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative>, 15, and “US Indian Boarding School History.” National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. Accessed March 15, 2025: <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/education/us-indian-boarding-school-history/> ⁴United States Department of the Interior, Indian Boarding School Report Vol II. - List of Other Institutions, Bureau of Indian Affairs, July 2024, Accessed March 15, 2025: <https://www.bia.gov/service/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative>, 6-7. ⁵DOI, Indian Boarding School Vol. II, List of Other Institutions, 3-4, 12, and 15, and Anna M. Peterson, “Norwegian Americans and the Bethany Indian Mission,” *Currents: The Newsletter of the Norwegian-American Historical Society* (Volume 189, Fall 2023): 6-9. ⁶DOI, Indian Boarding School Vol. II, 5-15. ⁷“ELCA Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery,” Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, 2016, https://resources.elca.org/wpcontent/uploads/Repudiation_Doctrine_of_DiscoverySPR16.pdf ⁸“A Declaration of the ELCA to American Indian and Alaska Native People,” Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, 2021, https://resources.elca.org/wp-content/uploads/Declaration_to_American_Indian_Alaska_Native.pdf and “ELCA Launches Truth and Healing Movement,” *Living Lutheran*, April 13, 2023, <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2023/04/elca-launches-truth-and-healingmovement/> ⁹Congregational Engagement in Anti-Racism Training,” Southeast Michigan Synod, 2017, https://semisynod.com/wpcontent/uploads/2022/06/Resolution-2017_1-Updated.pdf

The Resolution committee recommends this Memorial to the Assembly.

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to adopt Memorial 2025 M-2.

Discussion:

1. One spoke of his support of the Memorial and gratefulness to the Synod for their inclusion for indigenous people. Many other synods will be voting on a similar memorial for presentation at Churchwide Assembly.

The Assembly then voted on the motion to adopt the Memorial 2025 M-2.

SA.25.05.10 ADOPTED Yes 124 , No 5

RECOGNITION OF ANNIVERSARIES AND INSTALLATION OF SYNOD COUNCIL

It is our delight to take this time to recognize Congregations and Rostered Ministers Celebrating Milestone anniversaries in 2025.

As we celebrate milestones in the ministries of our congregations and colleagues, we would first like to recognize The Rev. Dr. Kit Kleinhans, who is retiring from her role as Dean of Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University.

(Presentation by Nik Schillack)

We now would like to take a moment to recognize Mr. Ben Fogt, who has completed his course of studies in the Licensed Lay Ministry Program in the past year.

It is our delight to take this time to recognize Congregations and Rostered Ministers Celebrating Milestone anniversaries in 2025.

Celebrating their 125th anniversary as a congregation:

Revelation Lutheran Church, Detroit

Celebrating their 150th anniversary as a congregation:

Zion Lutheran Church, Ann Arbor

Celebrating their 175th anniversary as a congregation this year:

St. Mark Lutheran Church, Roseville

Celebrating 5 years of Ordained Ministry:

Pastors Judd Delancey, Ken Grant, and Michael Opfermann

Celebrating 10 years of Ordained Ministry:

Pastors Ben Adams and Greer Cherney

Celebrating 15 years of Ordained Ministry:

Deacon Karen Ludwig

Pastors Aaron Werner, Candida Turner, John Cummings, Kristin VanderPloeg and Ron Strobel

Celebrating 20 years of Ordained Ministry:
Pastors Diane Grebel and John Meulendyk

Celebrating 30 years of Ordained Ministry:
Pastor Alan Casillas

Celebrating 35 years of Ordained Ministry:
Pastors Helen Liesenburg and Steven Higley

Celebrating 40 years of Ordained Ministry:
Pastor Lori Carey

Celebrating 45 years of Ordained Ministry:
Pastors Jack Eggleston, Julia Hanneman-Schoenbach, and Kathryn Schell

Celebrating 50 years of Ordained Ministry:
Pastors Michael Rothgery, Roger Harms, and Thomas Barbret

Celebrating 55 years of Ordained Ministry:
Pastors Duane Schafer, Mark Evans, Phil Hemke, and Walt Dickinson

Celebrating 65 years of Ordained Ministry:
Pastors Roger Schleef, Terry Daly, and Bill Moldwin

Thank you for all your years of faithful service to the Gospel and the communities of faith you serve.

Bishop then invited Ms. Sonja Markwart to the podium to call the new members of Synod Council to the front of the Assembly Hall for installation.

WORSHIP

The Synod concluded with a celebration the Holy Eucharist with Ms. Robin McCants Presiding and Bishop Donald Kreiss Preaching.

ADJOURNMENT

The Thirty-sixth Synod Assembly concluded at 5:40 PM with the Order for Blessing at the Close of the Assembly.

Respectfully,
Sonja M. Markwart, Secretary