

**MINUTES OF THE TWENTY-NINTH ASSEMBLY
SOUTHWESTERN TEXAS SYNOD
OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
May 1-2, 2026
Triumphant Love Lutheran Church – Austin, TX
and via Zoom Digital Media**

The Thirty-fourth Assembly of the Southwestern Texas Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was held at the Triumphant Love Lutheran Church, Austin, Texas, on May 1-2, 2026. The Theme of the Assembly was *Becoming...En Processo*.

**PLENARY 1
Friday, May 1, 2026
Triumphant Love Lutheran Church, Austin, TX
Zoom Digital Media**

Bishop Sue Briner convened the Assembly at 2:00 p.m. and in both English and Spanish languages, imparted a welcome and the Assembly theme of *Becoming...En Processo*.

Hilda Santiago was invited forward to share our land acknowledgement which specifically honored and acknowledged the Lipan Apache, Coahuiltecan, Tonkawa, Comanche and Jumano peoples upon whose ancestral homelands we were physically gathered. She encouraged attendees to regularly acknowledge the people who originally lived on land where their church was built and invited them to learn more about our indigenous siblings through engagement with media, music, podcasts and books created by Native people; participating in community events hosted by local indigenous groups; and regularly tithing to ELCA Indigenous congregations and service ministries. She closed by sharing the Office of the Bishop was in the early stages of learning and strives to commit more time to learning about and connecting with Indigenous peoples to work for healing and justice.

Bishop Briner led the Opening of the Assembly and declared the assembly to be in session at 2:05 p.m. She expressed appreciation to Triumphant Love hosts, Pastor Danielle Casey, Deacon Brianna Morris Brock, Deacon Kelly Jensen, Pastor Susie Schnelle, and Pastor Armin Steege. Pastor Casey was invited forward to share greetings and housekeeping items.

Bishop Briner highlighted the family friendly table available for children and their caregivers. She also noted that refreshments would be available throughout the assembly and expressed gratitude to the hospitality volunteers. Staff members were acknowledged, and Bishop Briner pointed out they were wearing name tags and would be available to assist with questions and any other needs. Assistance with voting could be received by raising a hand either physically for those on-site, or via the Zoom screen for those online. Bishop Briner concluded her remarks by recognizing Dave Wegner of Shepherd of the Hills in Austin, who was providing technical support along with some Office of the Bishop's staff.

Bishop Briner introduced Carol Semper, Vice President of the Synod, who welcomed assembly participants and imparted the intentions of the Assembly including worshipping together; learning about the joys and challenges of life in our synod; consideration of a budget; electing synod leaders; sharing

stories of how we are *Becoming...*; participating in workshops; and raising funds for the Tiemann Leadership Endowment all while trusting that God will send us out – still becoming – energized, inspired and equipped to engage in God’s mission in the world.

Bishop Briner discussed Parliamentary Procedure and noted basic guidance could be found in the Bulletin of Reports, Exhibit A-1. She conveyed information on how the Assembly could be addressed for both in-person and virtual attendees, and introduced Assembly Parliamentarian Dawn Young, a member of Christ Lutheran, Elm Creek, and Reference and Council Committee Chair Pastor Drew Ingram, Pastor at Christ, Georgetown.

The web-based process for voting, VPoll, was explained by Bishop Briner and a test vote was taken. Once the test vote was successfully completed an official check-in vote was performed for the Assembly credentials.

While awaiting the results of the check-in vote, members of campus ministry shared sticker ‘swag’ with Assembly members.

REPORT OF THE CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE

Bishop Briner introduced the Chair of the Credentials Committee, Pastor Sergio Rodriguez, Senior Pastor at Abiding Love, Austin, and invited him forward to give the credentials report. Pastor Rodriguez reported there were 60 lay male, 47 lay female, no lay non-binary, 30 rostered male, 33 rostered female, and one rostered non-binary for a total of 171 registered voting members. The percent of lay voting was 63% and rostered voting was 37%. The Credentials Committee certified that all constitutional requirements regarding composition of the voting membership were met. Bishop Briner announced at 2:39 p.m. the Assembly was now in order.

Following the credentials report, Vice President Semper introduced new roster members who have come to our synod or taken new calls within the last year, by asking them to stand if they were present.

ADOPTION OF STANDING RULES

Vice President Semper stated the Standing Rules, as presented in Exhibit A-3 in the Bulletin of Reports, had been recommended by the Synod Council for adoption. Bishop Briner called for discussion on the Standing Rules. There being no discussion, Bishop Briner called for a voice vote to adopt the Standing Rules as presented.

VOTED

SA26.05.01

To adopt the Standing Rules of the Assembly

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Vice President Semper presented the proposed agenda (Exhibit A-2) thed by the Synod Council for adoption and noted the Synod Assembly could amend the agenda with a simple majority vote. However, once the agenda was adopted a two-thirds vote would be required to amend the agenda. Vice President Semper also noted that with the Assembly’s agreement, the order of the agenda could be adjusted to facilitate a better flow of work. Bishop Briner called for discussion on the agenda. There being none a voice vote was conducted.

VOTED

SA26.05.02

To adopt the Agenda.

Vice President Semper reported two resolutions had been received and would be considered during the last plenary session on Saturday. She noted any resolutions brought to the Assembly now would require a two-thirds vote for consideration and then be passed along to the Committee on Reference and Counsel. She further explained anyone wishing to submit a resolution would need to utilize the appropriate form on the Synod Assembly website. Ms. Semper also announced that the financials and budget would be presented to the Assembly later that afternoon, and a vote on the budget would take place the following afternoon. Ms. Semper advised that per our Standing Rules, any motion for expenditure of funds or proposed amendment to the budget would need to be submitted via the form found on the voting member page of the Synod website by 5:00 p.m. that day for review by the Synod Council. Furthermore, any such motion or proposed amendment should contain a statement setting out the probable fiscal impact of the proposal and the suggested source of any required additional funds. Finally, any such proposal would require a two-thirds vote for adoption. Ms. Semper concluded by informing members of the recording of the April 29, 2026, budget hearing which, along with all budget documents, could be found on the Assembly business webpage.

CHURCH BECOMING

Bishop Briner invited Pastor Norma Malfatti, Senior Director, Director for Evangelical Mission Relationships at the churchwide expression of the ELCA, to the podium to talk about Church *Becoming* and how instead of becoming one thing it is becoming a mixed ecology – one church expressed in many ways. She explained what a mixed ecology was and why it mattered, what ecotones were and how coupled with a mixed ecology it affirmed both continuity and innovation, and why a mixed ecology made sense for the ELCA. She discussed the inherited church, why new expressions were necessary, and mixed ecology as *Missio Dei* (translated as the mission of God or the sending of God). In her concluding remarks Pastor Malfatti conveyed that a mixed ecology of church allows us to say with confidence and hope that we honor what has been, embrace what is emerging, and trust God with what is still becoming. She closed with a quote from Dag Hammarskjöld “*For all that has been – Thanks. For all that shall be – Yes.*”

Brother Chris Markert, Bishop’s Associate and Director of Evangelical Mission thanked Pastor Malfatti and expressed that Assembly members would have the opportunity to not just learn, but also to experience the many ways we are becoming church through the variety of workshops being offered during the Assembly. He encouraged members to explore something new by attending one or more of the workshops.

At 3:01 p.m. the Assembly recessed for members to attend a workshop of their choosing.

PLENARY 2
Friday, May 1, 2026
Triumphant Love Lutheran Church, Austin, TX
Zoom Digital Media

At 4:16 p.m., Bishop Briner welcomed Assembly members back and a video highlighting United Campus Ministry at Texas State University was shown.

PRESENTATION OF YEAR END FINANCIALS AND THE 2027-2028 MISSION PLAN

Vice President Semper welcomed to the podium Synod treasurer, Leslie Blalock of Grace, San Antonio, who presented both the year-end financial summary and the 2026-2028 Mission Plan. At the conclusion of Ms. Blalock's presentation, Bishop Briner reminded Assembly members that any motion for expenditure of funds or proposed amendment to the budget had to be submitted via the Assembly web page by 5:00 p.m. that day for review and recommendation by the Synod Council. She also informed everyone that the budget vote would take place on Saturday afternoon.

While awaiting the Credentials Report, Vice President Semper invited Signe Fredrickson of Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest (LFSW) to the podium to talk about the Foundation's mission and role as a Synodical partner.

CREDENTIALS REPORT

Pastor Sergio Rodriguez reported there were 50 lay male, 70 lay female, no lay non-binary, 33 rostered male, 34 rostered female, and one rostered non-binary for a total of 188 registered voting members. The percent of lay voting was 64% and rostered voting was 36%. The Credentials Committee certified that all constitutional requirements regarding composition of the voting membership were met.

CONSTITUTION CHANGES

Bishop Briner explained the Synod constitution and bylaw changes under consideration by the Assembly and proposed they be considered en bloc. As such, she asked if anyone would like to remove one or more of the provisions for separate conversation and consideration. Given no one came forward, Bishop Briner called for a voice vote to adopt the constitution and bylaw changes en bloc.

VOTED

SA26.05.03

**To adopt the constitution and bylaw changes as presented
in Exhibit C-4 of the Bulletin of Reports.**

ELECTION FOR COMMITTEES

Pastor Taylor Dieringer, Pastor of Faith, Austin, and chair of the Nominations Committee was asked by Bishop Briner to present the slate of candidates for Synod leadership positions. Pastor Dieringer acknowledged fellow members of the Nominations Committee: Pastor Jamie Bouzard, Jan Demro, Pastor Darwin Huartson, and Debbie Mattke, presented each position and the current nominees, and explained the process for nominations from the floor.

The following nominations were presented with nominations open from the floor.

Consultation Committee, 6-year term

Lay Female:

Gina Dieringer
Cynthia House

Bishop Briner asked for nominations from the floor. Seeing none, the position was closed.

Lay Male:

Carl Teinert

Bishop Briner asked for nominations from the floor. Seeing none, the position was closed.

Rostered Minister Female

Pastor Susan Schelle
Pastor Lea Walker Clark

Bishop Briner asked for nominations from the floor. Seeing none, the position was closed.

Rostered Minister Male

Pastor Herbert Palmer
Pastor Aaron Richter
Pastor David Tinker

Bishop Briner asked for nominations from the floor. Seeing none, the position was closed.

Rostered Minister Male, 1 year (filling an unexpired term)

Pastor Gary Conklin

Bishop Briner asked for nominations from the floor. Seeing none, the position was closed.

Discipline Committee, 6-year term

Rostered Minister Female

Pastor Eileen Spehr
Pastor Anamae Storbeck

Bishop Briner asked for nominations from the floor. Seeing none, the position was closed.

Rostered Minister Male

Pastor Marcus Bigott
Pastor Charles Fredrickson

Bishop Briner asked for nominations from the floor. Seeing none, the position was closed.

For positions to be elected where only one person had been nominated for the position, Bishop Briner proposed those persons be declared elected by acclamation and called for any objection. There was none.

VOTED
SA26.05.04

To elect all persons in uncontested positions:

Consultation Committee
Carl Teinert, Lay Male, 6-year term

Pastor Gary Conklin, Rostered Minister Male, 1-year term
(filling an unexpired term)

Bishop Briner asked Pastor Dieringer to pray as the assembly prepared to vote on contested positions.

While awaiting voting results, Pastor Tim Schroeder, Benefit Services Regional Representative for Portico, was invited to the podium to share information about another Synod partner, Portico.

VOTED
SA26.05.05

To elect persons in contested positions:

Consultation Committee, 6-year term
Gina Dieringer, Lay Female
Pastor Lea Walker Clark, Rostered Minister Female

Discipline Committee, 6-year term
Pastor Anamae Storbeck, Rostered Minister Female
Pastor Marcus Bigott, Rostered Minister Male

Bishop Briner announced the runoff election for the Consultation Committee: Rostered Minister Male position would take place on Saturday afternoon.

At 5:12 p.m. Bishop Briner announced the Assembly was in recess until 9:00 a.m. the following morning.

Saturday, May 2, 2026
Triumphant Love Lutheran Church, Austin, TX

At 9:00 a.m. Bishop Sue Briner welcomed everyone and Deacon Darcy Mittlesteadt, Bishop's Associate for Leadership and Lifelong Faith Formation guided Assembly members in a faith practice to ground us not just for the work before us, but in the presence of God among us.

Following the faith practice, Vice President Carol Semper invited the members to join in the second round of workshop opportunities and the Assembly was recessed.

PLENARY 3
Saturday, May 2, 2026
Triumphant Love Lutheran Church, Austin, TX

At 10:30 a.m. Vice President Semper welcomed everyone back.

SYNOD BECOMING

Bishop Briner was joined by Office of the Bishop staff members Deacon Darcy Mittlesteadt, Brother Chris Markert, and Pastor Ricardo Jimenez-Reyes, who talked about the countless ways in which our Synod was *Becoming* including growing disciples, developing leaders, accompanying congregations, experimenting in new ways, embracing differences, and transforming communities. A video highlighting what we are *Becoming* through the Candidacy process was shown and Bianca Blaney, co-leader of Gather Austin, came forward to share information about the Gather young adult community, its mission, and Gather Texas opportunities. Bishop Briner invited the Assembly into a brief moment of reflection and asked members to turn to people near them and take a few minutes to share where they have already seen signs of becoming in their congregations or community, and to name one thing they wanted to bring back to their congregation or ministry to share. Bishop Briner concluded by proclaiming what they just named are the places where *Becoming* is already happening.

Vice President Semper announced the Synod Assembly offering this year would be supporting the Tiemann Endowment Fund for Leadership Development and that the fundraising goal was \$100,000. She explained to help reach this goal the Synod Council committed a \$20,000 matching grant. Ms. Semper ended her remarks with a video highlighting the Tiemann Endowment for Leadership fund.

ELCA REPORT

Pastor Norma Malfatti was invited back to the podium by Ms. Semper and shared information about the wider church and our connectedness.

Pastor Malfatti discussed the ways in which the ELCA is a connected church, how Mission Support is utilized and the returns realized through the investment including: Young Adult Global Mission; ELCA World Hunger; Ministry with Children grants; new communities of belonging through Synod Authorized Outreach Ministries, Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities and other strategic ministries; Lutheran Disaster Response; Church Property Resource Hub; and through the gift of time and talent offered by faithful volunteers from our Synod who serve on committees and engage in special efforts with and for the churchwide organization, just to name a few. Pastor Malfatti concluded with a video introducing presiding bishop, Yehiel Curry, and sharing his remarks exploring the importance of being a connected church in God's kingdom, knowing that we are stronger together than alone.

SPEAKER: RAY ALTMAN, UMC

Brother Chris Market returned to the podium and introduced The Rev. Ray Altman, Director of Congregational Vitality and New Faith Communities for the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church, who shared greetings and insights on how we are church together.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND LUNCH

Bishop Briner shared announcements in preparation for the lunch break and invited Deacon Darcy Mittlestaedt to pray for the lunch. Bishop Briner also announced that the Assembly would be in recess until 12:45 p.m. at which time everyone should meet in the Sanctuary for worship. She noted the Cross Trails Corporation meeting would begin at 2:15 p.m. and conclude by 2:45 p.m. when the final Plenary session would begin. The Assembly recessed at 11:38 a.m.

PLENARY 4

Saturday, May 2, 2026

Triumphant Love Lutheran Church, Austin, TX

At 2:45 p.m. Bishop Briner reconvened the Assembly and called for an official check in vote via VPoll to verify the afternoon Assembly credentials. While the results were being verified, Ameya Steubing, a UT Austin Campus Ministry student who will be serving Lumin-Austin as a Carl and Claudia Teinert Social Justice Intern, was invited to the podium to talk about the Name Gathering project on behalf of ELCA Lutheran Campus Ministries in the United States. Ms. Steubing explained the aim of the project was to invite congregation members to refer college-bound graduating seniors, and that referrals could be made by way of a secure online form that was accessible via the QR code printed on cards located at each table.

CREDENTIALS REPORT

Pastor Sergio Rodriguez reported there were 55 lay male, 73 lay female, no lay non-binary, 33 rostered male, 34 rostered female, and one rostered non-binary for a total of 196 registered voting members. The percent of lay voting was 65% and rostered voting was 35%. The Credentials Committee certified that all constitutional requirements regarding composition of the voting membership were met

COMMUNITIES BECOMING

Bishop Briner was joined by Office of the Bishop staff members Hilda Santiago, Brother Chris Markert, and Pastor Ricardo Jimenez-Reyes and discussed the myriad of ways our communities are *Becoming*. Through ministries like Austin City Lutherans, Goliad Road Community of Promise, Reconciling in Christ, Project Radical Hospitality, Project Radical Hospitality Border Experience and the Eagle Pass Immersion Program, disaster preparedness and response, More Than Enough Food Grants, and ministries connected to migration and justice, we see communities becoming more nourished, more connected, and more resilient, and we see what happens when generosity becomes shared mission. Bishop Briner invited Assembly members to once again to take a few minutes to share with one another where they have seen signs of *Becoming* in their communities and to name one thing they wanted to bring back to their congregation or ministry. She reminded everyone that what they named are places where God is already at work in our communities.

RESOLUTION 1

In consideration of a resolution before the Assembly, Bishop Briner introduced a video highlighting SUMUD, the ELCA's response to occupation and injustice in Palestine and Israel.

Vice President Semper announced one resolution had been received before the April 1, 2026, deadline and a hearing had taken place on April 21, 2026, for those interested in the resolution. Ms. Semper

asked Pastor Drew Ingram, Pastor at Christ, Georgetown, and Chair of the Committee on Reference and Council to come forward and introduce the resolution entitled *Resolution to Support Justice and Peace for Palestine and Israel*.

Pastor Ingram expressed his pleasure at presenting the first report and recommendation on behalf of the Committee on Reference and Counsel, and noted he was joined in the work by Mimi Richter, Michelle Schlinke, and Pastor Caleb Jeffers. Pastor Ingram forewent the *Whereas* portion of the resolution and read aloud the *Be It Resolved* section. He concluded by advising the Assembly the Committee on Reference and Counsel recommended approval of the resolution and explained their rationale.

Bishop Briner thanked Pastor Ingram and called for questions or discussion. Pastor Julie Rowe, Zion, San Antonio; Pastor Sharon Wiggins, Faith, Austin; Pastor Anamae Storbeck, Living Word, Buda; and Pastor Jay Wegner, Atonement, San Antonio, came forward and expressed their support of the resolution. There being no further questions or discussion Bishop Briner called for a vote on the resolution as presented.

VOTED

SA26.05.06

To adopt the *Resolution to Support Justice and Peace for Palestine and Israel*.

VOTE ON BUDGET

Bishop Briner announced there were no amendments to the 2026-2028 Mission Plan presented on Friday and called for a voice vote.

VOTED

SA26.05.07

To adopt the 2026-2028 Mission Plan as presented in Exhibit C-11 of the Bulletin of Reports.

Following the Mission Plan vote, Bishop Briner called for a voice vote on the proposed 2026-2028 Mission and Ministry Mission Plan.

VOTED

SA26.05.08

To adopt the 2026-2028 Mission and Ministry Mission Plan as presented in Exhibit C-13 of the Bulletin of Reports.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS/RUNOFF ELECTION

Bishop Briner once again invited Nominating Committee Chair, Pastor Taylor Deringer to pray for the Assembly as they prepared to vote in the runoff election for the Consultation Committee Rostered Minister Male position.

VOTED
SA26.05.09

To elect a person in a contested position:
Consultation Committee, 6-year term
Pastor Aaron Richter, Rostered Minister Male

RESOLUTION 2

Vice President Semper announced a second resolution was received after the April 1, 2026, deadline and explained that per the standing rules, this resolution could come before the assembly if recommended by either the Committee on Counsel and Reference or the Synod Council. Pastor Ingram was asked to return to the podium to present a report and recommendation regarding the *Resolution on the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action*. As with Resolution 1, Pastor Ingram forewent the *Whereas* part of the resolution and read aloud the *Be It Resolved* portion. At the conclusion of his presentation, Pastor Ingram conveyed that the Committee on Reference and Counsel recommended approval of the resolution and provided the committee's rationale for their decision.

Bishop Briner thanked Pastor Ingram and called for questions or discussion. Pastor Harold Vanicek – Spirit in the Hills, Austin, and Pastor Heather Hansen – Abiding Presence, San Antonio, both co-authors of the resolution, came forward to voice their support. Seeing no further questions or discussion Bishop Briner called for a vote on the resolution as presented.

VOTED
SA26.05.10

To adopt the *Resolution on the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action* as presented.

CLOSING ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bishop Briner announced next year's Assembly would take place at Triumphant Love Lutheran in Garden Ridge on April 30 - May 1, 2027, and Vice President Carol Semper announced the Assembly offering totaled \$40,773.92, which included the \$20,000 matching grant approved by the Synod Council.

Bishop Briner recognized and expressed thanks to outgoing committee members, Jorge Lopez and Pastor Ricardo Jimenez-Reyes for translation, Triumphant Love hosts, sponsors, volunteers, worship team, nominating committee, and other assembly leaders.

CLOSING ASSEMBLY

Following the Order for Closing of the Assembly, Bishop Briner declared the Assembly closed at 3:59 p.m.