

**MINUTES OF THE TWENTY-NINTH ASSEMBLY
SOUTHWESTERN TEXAS SYNOD
OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
May 3, 2025
Abiding Presence Lutheran Church – San Antonio, TX
and via Zoom Digital Media**

The Thirty-third Assembly of the Southwestern Texas Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was held at the Abiding Presence Lutheran Church, San Antonio, Texas, on May 3, 2025. The Theme of the Assembly was *More than Enough/Mas que Suficiente*.

**SESSION 1
Saturday, May 3, 2025
Abiding Presence Lutheran Church, San Antonio, TX
Zoom Digital Media**

Bishop Sue Briner convened the Assembly at 9:00 a.m. and in both English and Spanish languages, imparted a welcome and the Assembly theme of *More than Enough/Mas que Suficiente*.

Hilda Santiago was invited forward to share our land acknowledgement and specifically acknowledged and honored the Lipan Apache, Coahuiltecan, Tonkawa, and Jumano peoples upon whose ancestral homelands we were gathered physically, and encouraged virtual attendees to lookup the Indigenous peoples or tribal nations who were first to love, pray, grow, celebrate, cry, drum and sing upon the land and in the places where they were located.

Deacon Darcy Mittelstaedt and Pastor Ricardo Jimenez-Reyes led the invocation and call to worship, and also reminded members that we were not simply beginning with worship, but instead entering into a day of worship. Prayer stations were located throughout the meeting space and on-site attendees were invited to connect with God by spending time at each one or simply settling into one space for a while. At the conclusion of the Invocation and Call to Worship, everyone was asked to join in singing *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing* and then dwell in the story of the feeding of the 5000 via a video presentation

At 9:15 a.m. Bishop Briner declared the assembly to be in session and expressed appreciation to Abiding Presence hosts, and Pastors Steve Cox and Heather Hansen. Pastor Cox was invited forward to share greetings.

Bishop Briner conveyed restroom locations, encouraged on-site participants to use the mandalas and colored pencils at each table for creative expression, noted the family friendly space available for children and their caregivers, and explained refreshments would be available throughout the assembly. Staff members were acknowledged, and Bishop Briner noted they were wearing blue shirts and were 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. It was noted that Pastor Ryan Dockery of Shepherd of the Hills in Austin would be providing technical support along with staff members.

Bishop Briner introduced Leigh Ingram, Vice President of the Synod, who welcomed assembly participants to the first one day, hybrid Assembly and conveyed intentions of the Assembly including worship together; learning about the joys and challenges of life in our synod; consideration of a budget and the election synod leaders; hearing stories of how God has been providing us with more than enough; celebrating the 75th anniversary of Cross Trails ministry; raising money for a new dining hall at Camp Chrysalis; and finally to be sent out by God energized, inspired and equipped to engage in God's mission in the world.

Bishop Briner discussed Parliamentary Procedures and noted tips for Parliamentary Procedure could be found in Exhibit A-1 in the Bulletin of Reports. 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 Chair Pastor Caleb Jeffers, transitional pastor at Shepherd King and Hope Lutheran churches in San Antonio.

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 results of the credentials check in vote, Bishop Briner expressed thanks to the candidacy committee and videos highlighting new calls and those new to the synod, and Reconciling in Christ Congregations were shown. Bishop Briner encouraged attendees consider individuals, including themselves, who might consider becoming a candidate for ministry and to reach out to Deacons Darcy Mittelstaedt or John Dellis for inquiries on the process. A video about candidates and the candidacy committee was then shared.

REPORT OF THE CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE

Bishop Briner introduced the Chair of the Credentials Committee Pastor Fred Klinker of Galilean Lutheran Church in Corpus Christi and invited him to forward to give the credentials report. Pastor Klinker reported there were 53 lay male voting, 74 lay female voting, no lay other gender voting, 37 rostered male voting, 38 rostered female voting, and no rostered other gender voting for a total of 202 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 9:55 a.m. the Assembly was now in order.

ADOPTION OF STANDING RULES

Vice President Ingram presented the Proposed Standing Rules (SR), (Exhibit A-3 in the Bulletin of Reports, hereinafter BOR), for adoption pursuant to the recommendation of the Synod Council. Bishop Briner called for discussion on the Standing Rules. Deacon John Dellis came forward and asked whether there were enough standing rules and Bishop Briner confirmed there were more than enough. There being no further discussion Bishop Briner called for Vpoll vote to adopt the Standing Rules as presented.

It was observed that 203 votes were cast and given the credentials report documented 202 registered voting members another check-in vote was required. Thus, Bishop Briner called for assembly members to complete another official check-in vote via Vpoll. While results were being tabulated videos about Global Refuge and Portico were shared.

VOTED

SA25.05.01

To adopt the Standing Rules of the Assembly

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Vice President Ingram presented the proposed agenda (Exhibit A-2) and noted that the synod assembly can amend the agenda with a majority vote. However, once the agenda is adopted a two-thirds vote would be required to amend the agenda. Vice President Ingram also noted that the Standing Rules allow the chair to call items in whatever order is most expedient for the conduct of the assembly's business with the assembly's consent.

VOTED

SA25.05.02

To adopt the Agenda.

Vice President Ingram reported no resolutions had been received to this point and explained that any resolutions brought to the assembly now would require a two-thirds vote for consideration. Furthermore, she explained anyone wishing to submit a resolution would need to utilize the appropriate form on the synod assembly website. Ms. Ingram also communicated the budget would be presented to the assembly in the second morning session, and would be voted on during session three in the afternoon. Ms. Ingram advised that per our Standing Rules, any motion for expenditure of funds or proposed amendment to the budget would need to be submitted to the secretary or the vice-president via a form found on the voting member page of the synod website before 10:15 a.m. for review and recommendation by the synod council. Furthermore, any such motion or proposed amendment shall 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.

STATE OF THE SYNOD REPORT

Bishop Briner and Vice President Ingram, along with synod staff members Deacon Darcy Mittelstaedt, Pastor Ricardo Jimenez-Reyes, Brother Chris Markert, and Hilda Santiago joined together to present the State of the Synod Report where they spoke of ways we as a synod and church are sharing and living out God's promises by growing new leaders, exploring new ways to be church, planting new ministries, and speaking up for the most vulnerable among us.

Following the State of the Synod Report, a video was shared introducing SUMUD, an ELCA supported initiative for justice in Palestine and Israel. SUMUD means steadfastness in Arabic and reflects the resilience of our partners in the Holy Land. Following the video, Pastor Sharon Wiggins was invited forward to speak to the assembly about this newly formed self-organizing ministry team.

At 10:30 a.m., Bishop Briner called for a 30-minute break and announced the assembly would resume at 11:00 a.m.

SESSION 2

Saturday, May 3, 2025

Abiding Presence Lutheran Church, San Antonio, TX

After the break, a video was shown about one of our synod's amazing feeding ministries providing more

than enough at First Lutheran, Edinburg.

ELECTIONS FOR OFFICERS AND MINISTRY TEAM CHAIRS

Bishop Briner introduced Pastor Gary Conklin, Our Saviors Lutheran, McAllen, and chair of the Nominations Committee. Pastor Conklin acknowledged members of the committee: Pastor Jessica Cain, Carol Semper, Pastor Tim Bauerkemper, and Pastor Eileen Spehr, and presented each position, the current nominees, and provided direction for nominations from the floor.

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

Synod Council Members – Exhibit D

Synod Vice President, 4-year term, Lay

Carol Semper
Mike Stallings

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

Synod Secretary, 4-year term, Lay or Rostered

Monica Buie

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

Ministry Team Chairs, 3-year term, Lay or Rostered

Holy Experiments Team Chair:

Pastor Tim Bauerkemper
Pastor Kris Franke Hill
Pastor Cecilia Sukniac

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

Leadership Development Team Chair:

Rebecca Guengerich

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

Synod Council Members, 3-year term

Lay Male – Elect Two

Ronny Dentler
Darren Dunn
Jason Miranda
Mike Stallings

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

Lay Female – Elect two

Michelle Schlinke

Ann Schwartz

(Rebecca Vann was nominated but withdrew her name.)

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

Lay Female, Person of Color

Graciela Conklin

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

Rostered Ministers – Elect three

Pastor Gabriella Conklin

Pastor Ryan Dockery

Pastor Adam Varner

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

Youth Member, 2-year term

Cody Jones

Rhyker Love

Nate Thomas

Bishop Briner asked for nominations from the floor. Rhyker Love and Nate Thomas were nominated and accepted the nomination. Seeing no further nominations, 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

SA25.05.03

Approved by acclamation to elect all persons in uncontested positions.

Synod Secretary, 4-year term

Monica Buie

Leadership Development Team Chair, 3-year term

Rebecca Guengerich

Synod Council Lay Female, 3-year term

Michelle Schlinke

Ann Schwartz

Synod Council Lay Female, Person of Color, 3-year term

Graciela Conklin

Synod Council, Rostered Ministers, 3-year term

Pastor Gabriella Conklin

Pastor Ryan Dockery

Pastor Adam Varner

Bishop Briner asked Pastor Jessica Cain, Living Word, Buda, and a member of the nominating committee to pray as the assembly prepared to vote on contested positions.

**VOTED
SA25.05.04**

**Voted to elect persons in contested positions:
Carol Semper, Synod Vice President, 4-year term**

Bishop Briner announced that runoff elections would take place in the afternoon during Session three.

PRESENTATION OF THE 2026-2027 BUDGET

Vice President Ingram welcomed to the podium synod council member and chair of the Administration and Finance Committee, Johnnie Jordan, who presented a year-end budget summary and the 2026-2027 budget (Exhibits B2-B8 of the BOR). Mr. Jordan also discussed the 2026-2027 Mission and Ministry proposed budget. At the conclusion of his presentation, Mr. Jordan reminded the assembly that per assembly standing rules, any motion for expenditure of funds or proposed amendment to the budget had to be submitted via the appropriate form on the assembly web page to the secretary and vice president before 10:15 a.m. today for review and recommendation by the Synod Council. He also informed that the budget would be voted on later in the afternoon.

ELCA REPORT

Daniel Kirschbaum, Senior Director of Young Adult Communities at the churchwide expression of the ELCA was invited to the podium by Vice President Ingram to present the ELCA Report which touched on the topics of God's Love Made Real, our synod's presence, mission support, Gather communities, youth and young adult gathering, candidacy, ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Response, proposed social statement, Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, churchwide assembly, Living Lutheran magazine, and resources for advocacy and engagement. Mr. Kirschbaum closed their presentation by sharing Bishop Eaton's video, *Our journey of faith together*.

Vice President Ingram introduced a video about another amazing feeding ministry in our synod entitled Tres Hilos that began in partnership with the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church.

PARTNERSHIP WITH AME CHURCH

At the conclusion of the Tres Hilos video, Bishop Briner thanked Mr. Kirschbaum for their presentation and expressed gratitude for our partnership with ELCA churchwide. She then introduced the Reverend Doctor Raymond Bryant, Presiding Elder of the San Antonio district of the AME church who shared remarks about the Southwestern Texas Synod's partnership with the AME church and their focus on healthy food with their community garden efforts.

As attendees prepared for Holy Communion, Bishop Briner asked for a few moments of silence as a video played remembering roster leaders and spouses who had died the previous year.

HOLY COMMUNION

Pastor Cecie Sukniac from Spirit in the Hills, Spicewood, was welcomed forward to lead the assembly in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND LUNCH

Bishop Briner shared announcements in preparation for the lunch break and reminded individuals nominated for a position that they should have filled out a biography that would be posted on the assembly webpage by 1:00 p.m. Bishop Briner also announced that since the Cross Trails Corporation meeting would take place beginning at 1:15 p.m. the assembly was in recess until 1:45 p.m. Rebecca Guengerich, Leadership Team Chair, was invited by Bishop Briner to pray for the lunch.

SESSION 3

Saturday, May 3, 2025

Abiding Presence Lutheran Church, San Antonio, TX

At 1:50 p.m. Bishop Briner reconvened the assembly and called for an official check in vote via Vpoll to verify the afternoon's assembly credentials. While the results were being verified, worship continued with a prayer by Pastor Heather Hansen and the story of the feeding of the 5,000 from Mark 6:30-44 read in Spanish by Gilma Aguire, a Word and Sacrament candidate from St. John Lutheran Church in San Juan.

Daniel Kirschbaum shared the message and worship concluded with assembly attendees singing *Bless the Lord*.

Vice President Ingram introduced the Rev. Leyla King, Canon to the Ordinary in the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas who shared remarks regarding small churches and our partnership with them.

Bishop Briner spoke about our synod's longstanding relationship with Iglesia Luterana de Costa Rica, the Lutheran Church of Costa Rica also referred to as ILCO, and shared two videos. The first a brief greeting from ILCO and the second, a thank you from the ILCO women's commission for funding they received to support and educate women experiencing domestic violence.

Pastor Ricardo Jimenez-Reyes introduced a video about two related ministries on the border who reach out to and care for the vulnerable in Eagle Pass, both those who are residents and those who are passing through.

CREDENTIALS REPORT

Pastor Fred Klinker reported that as of 2:40 there were 53 lay male voting, 76 lay female voting, zero lay other gender voting, 37 rostered male voting, 38 rostered female voting, and no rostered other gender voting for a total of 204 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.

Following the report and in advance of the runoff elections, Carol Semper, member of the nominating committee Team, was invited to pray for the assembly.

While awaiting voting results, Signe Frederickson was called on to share information about the Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest.

VOTED
SA25.05.05

Voted to elect persons in contested positions:
Rev. Cecilia Sukniac, Holy Experiments Team Chair, 3-year term
Mike Stallings, Synod Council Lay Male, 4-year term
Cody Jones, Synod Council Youth Member, 2-year term

Angie Weiss, member of Grace Lutheran, Rock, made a motion to expand the synod council to add an additional youth member, Rhyker Love, for a 2-year term. The motion was seconded by assembly members.

VOTED
SA25.05.06

Voted by acclamation to elect Rhyker Love as a second Synod Council Youth Member, 2-year term.

Campus Pastors Brad Fuerst and Jamie Bouzard shared information and a video about their campus ministry programs at The University of Texas at Austin and Texas State University, San Marcos, respectively

Bishop Briner brought the 2026-2027 budget to the floor for discussion and reminded the assembly that a simple majority vote was needed for passage. Seeing no discussion, she called for a vote on the proposed budget.

While awaiting results of the budget adoption vote, Vice President Ingram introduced the More than Enough Fund video.

VOTED
SA25.05.07

To adopt the 2026-2027 Budget as presented in Exhibit B-7 of the Bulletin of Reports.

VOTED
SA25.05.08

Voted to elect persons in contested positions:
Jason Miranda, Synod Council Lay Male, 4-year term

Bishop Briner thanked Leigh Ingram for her service as Synod Council Vice President, and Brother Chris Markert thanked Pastor Jake Fain for his service as Holy Experiments Team Chair.

Bishop Briner recognized and expressed thanks to outgoing council and committee members, officers, ministry team chairs, Jorge Lopez and Pastor Ricardo Jimenez-Reyes for translation, Abiding Presence hosts, sponsors, volunteers, worship team, nominating committee, and other assembly leaders.

CLOSING ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bishop Briner announced the 2026 assembly would take place at Triumphant Love Lutheran Church, Austin, on May 1-2, 2026, from 1:00 p.m. on Friday through the end of day on Saturday. Bishop Briner further announced the assembly offering totaled \$20,000.

INSTALLATION OF NEWLY ELECTED LEADERS

Bishop Briner invited the Synod Council members, committee members, and ministry team chairs, forward to be installed.

AFFIRMATION OF BAPTISM

Deacon Darcy Mittelstaedt and Pastor Ricardo Jimenez-Reyes led assembly attendees in the Affirmation of Baptism which concluded with the singing of *This Little Light of Mine*.

CLOSING ASSEMBLY

Following the Order for Closing of the Assembly, the Assembly was adjourned at 3:39pm.