

GREATER MILWAUKEE SYNOD, ELCA
2024 SYNOD ASSEMBLY MINUTES
COURAGE: MAY COURAGE BE OUR DAILY BREATH

God's Vision: A world that embodies the fullness of life: justice, peace, equity, hope and love for everyone, including all races, genders, identities, abilities, and social status.

Our Mission: We follow Jesus, form communities, love all.

The 2024 Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly was held 17-18 May 2024. Voting members and guests attended at the Italian Community Center, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Saturday, May 18: Assembly Day 2

I. PLENARY 1

A. Opening of the Assembly

Musician Patricia DeBlaey (Galilee Lutheran/Pewaukee), led the Assembly in singing the hymn, *Morning Has Broken*.

Bishop Paul Erickson convened the Assembly at 8:30 am. **Erickson** gave thanks for the worship leadership in last night's service and expressed gratitude to **Ascension Lutheran/Milwaukee** who supplied items. **Erickson** shared our received synod offering designated to the **Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit/Milwaukee** is just under \$5,000.00.

B. Assembly Orientation

The Assembly received a brief orientation to the details of carrying out business at the Assembly, including ways of using the Assembly booklet, an introduction to Robert's Rules of Order, additional Assembly rules, and time allotted for floor discussion.

Bishop Paul Erickson refreshed the Assembly on the use of pronouns when introducing oneself and how to create safer space for many folks who use gender-neutral pronouns.

The Assembly received introductions to the voting procedures for the Assembly, including voice vote; voting cards; and written ballot.

Erickson introduced the Assembly's theme: *Courage, May Courage Be Our Daily Breath*.

C. Devotion

Yolanda Jackson-Lewis (Mount Pleasant Lutheran/Racine) led the Assembly in devotions based on Ezekial 2, emphasizing the courage that Ezekial had to follow God. **Jackson-Lewis** shared a video, and asked, "In the synod, what gives you courage to work for a more inclusive church?" The Assembly entered a time for reflection and discussion with those around them on the following questions: "What stood out to you as you watched this video?" and "Why is building a just and inclusive church important to you?"

Musician Patricia DeBlaey (Galilee Lutheran/Pewaukee) led the Assembly in singing the refrain of the hymn, *Commonwealth is God's Commandment*.

D. Introductions

Bishop Paul Erickson introduced and thanked individuals playing roles throughout the Assembly: **Patricia DeBlaey (Galilee Lutheran/Pewaukee)**, musician; **Mary Romskog (synod staff)**, Assembly Manager; **Phil Smith (synod staff)**, registration coordinator; **Robin Bayland (synod staff)**, communications manager; synod staff, worship team, AV and tech crew members from Studio Gear; our hosts at the ICC, **Synod Secretary Sarah Stobie (Bay Shore Lutheran/Whitefish Bay)** who is also serving as Assembly Parliamentarian; and **Vice President Joyce Caldwell (Faith Lutheran/Cedarburg)**.

Erickson reminded the Assembly about the display tables available outside the conference room, featuring various ministries in and outside of the synod. **Erickson** shared his gratitude for them.

E. Credentials Report

Secretary Sarah Stobie presented the first report of the Credentials Committee. As of 8:45 a.m., there were 188 Lay Voting Members and 108 Rostered Voting Members, totaling 296 voting members. There were also 44 visitors present, for a total of 340 people.

F. Adoption of Assembly Appointments

Bishop Paul Erickson presented his appointed committees for the Assembly.

Assembly Election Committee

Central Conference: **Greg Walker (Reformation Lutheran/Milwaukee)**

North Conference: **Zachary Peterson (Immanuel Lutheran/Cedarburg)**

South Conference: **The Rev. Becca Laabs (Lakeside & Trinity Lutheran/Kenosha)**

South Central Conference: **The Rev. Stephen Boyhont (Mt Hope Lutheran/West Allis)**

West Conference: **Cindy Kuehn (Cross Lutheran/Ixonia)**

West Central Conference: **Sue Cyr (St. Mark's Lutheran/Waukesha)**

Chair of Committee: **Linda Grosser (St. John's Lutheran/Jackson)**

Credentials Committee

Gary Dennison (Gethsemane Lutheran/Brookfield)

Monica Gramling (Good Shepherd Trinity/Milwaukee)

Sue Johnson (Vernon Lutheran/Mukwonago)

Tom Johnson (Vernon/Lutheran/Mukwonago)

The Rev. Kelly Nieman Anderson (Metropolitan Chicago Synod)

Ruthann Rohde (Mt. Meru Committee)

Penny Schwid (Ascension Lutheran/Milwaukee)

Julie Seidlitz (Mount Carmel Lutheran/Milwaukee)
Phil Smith (Holy Cross Lutheran/Menomonee Falls)
The Rev. Chuck Turbin (Grace Lutheran/Grafton)
The Rev. Vicki Watkins (Village Church/Milwaukee)
Becky Yakes (Mount Carmel Lutheran/Milwaukee)
Lani Ziller (Hephatha Lutheran/Milwaukee)
Chair of Committee: **The Rev. Karen Pahl, Synod Treasurer**

Worship Planning Team

Bishop Paul Erickson (synod staff)
Mary Romskog (synod staff)
The Rev. Char Guiliani (Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit/Milwaukee)
Patricia DeBlaey (Galilee Lutheran/Pewaukee)
Vance Blackfox (ELCA Churchwide)
**Joanne Conroy (President of the American Indian and
Alaska Native Association of the ELCA)**

Reference & Counsel Committee

Central Conference: **The Rev. Karen Kuttler (Kingo Lutheran/Shorewood),
Chair**
North Conference: **The Rev. Chris Thomas (Trinity Lutheran/Cedarburg)**
South Conference: **Karen Langlois (Living Faith/Racine)**
South Central Conference: **Teri Junge (Trinity Lutheran/South Milwaukee)**
West Conference: **Brian Krueger (Our Savior's Lutheran/Oconomowoc)**
West Central Conference: **Dennis Martin (Mt. Olive Lutheran/Mukwonago)**

Parliamentarian: **The Rev. Sarah Stobie, Synod Secretary**

Synod Assembly Action Approval of Assembly Appointments
SA24.05.01.

The Assembly approved the appointments of the Credentials Committee, Elections Committee, Reference and Counsel Committee, and the Parliamentarian.

Adopted by Voice Vote.

G. Adoption of Assembly Agenda.

Bishop Paul Erickson presented the proposed Assembly Agenda, recommended for approval by the Synod Council. **Erickson** noted within each Plenary Session, the chair may choose to adjust the order of items to accommodate the Assembly Schedule.

Synod Assembly Action Approval of Agenda
SA24.05.02.

The Assembly approved the 2024 Synod Assembly Agenda as presented.

Adopted by Voice Vote.

H. Approval of Rules and Procedures

Bishop Paul Erickson directed the Assembly to review the recommended Rules and Procedures for the 2024 Synod Assembly, recommended for adoption by the Synod Council. The Assembly was made aware of proposed rules (a) limiting all floor speeches to three minutes and (b) limiting debate to three speakers for and three against motions.

<u>Synod Assembly Action</u>	<u>Approval of Rules and Procedures</u>
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SA24.05.03.

The Assembly approved the 2024 Synod Assembly Rules and Procedures as presented.

Adopted by Voice Vote.

I. Nominations Report

Secretary Sarah Stobie presented the first report of the Nominations Committee. At the time of this reporting, several seats had no nominations.

Consultation Committee (Partial Term)

- At Large, Lay Male, 08//31/2025: No nominations received.
- At Large, Lay Male, 08//31/2027: No nominations received.
- At Large, Lay Male, 08//31/2029: No nominations received.
- At Large, Lay Female, 08/31/2029: Vote for One.
 - **Jean Nelson (Galilee Lutheran/Pewaukee)**
 - **Kendra Stea (Lake Park Lutheran/Milwaukee)**

Discipline Committee (Full Term: 09/01/2024- 08/31/2030)

- At Large, Lay Female: Vote for One
 - **Tamara Woodbury (Trinity Lutheran/South Milwaukee)**
- At Large, Lay Male: No nominations received.
- At Large, Rostered Minister: Vote for Two
 - **The Rev. Denise Mbise (Trinity Lutheran/South Milwaukee)**
 - **The Rev. Karen Jost (St John Lutheran/Stone Bank)**
 - **The Rev. Matthew Rose (Christ Our Savior/Sussex)**

2025 Churchwide Assembly (07/28-08/02/2025)

- At Large, Lay Female: Vote for One
 - **Maryann Galicia (Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit/Milwaukee)**
 - **Linda Grosser (St John's Lutheran/Jackson)**
 - **Tamara Woodbury (Trinity Lutheran/South Milwaukee)**
- At Large, Lay Male: Vote for One.
 - **Todd Beutin (St. Luke's Lutheran/Greendale)**
- At Large, Rostered Minister: Vote for One
 - **The Rev. Jackie Cook (Christ the King Lutheran/Delafield)**

- **The Rev. Char Guiliani (Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit/Milwaukee)**
- **The Rev. Juniper Linberry (Cross Lutheran/Milwaukee)**
- **The Rev. Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld (Luther Memorial/West Allis)**
- At Large, Lay Female, Youth/Young Adult (30 or younger when elected): No nominations received.
- At Large, Lay Male, Person of Color or person who primary language is other than English: No nominations received.
- Central Conference, Lay Female, Person of Color or person who primary language is other than English: **Dr. Rose Dotson (Cross Lutheran/Milwaukee)**
- North Conference, Lay Female: **Christine Esser (Immanuel Lutheran/Cedarburg)**
- South Conference, Rostered Minister: **The Rev. Matt James (Lutheran Church of the Redeemer/Racine)**
- South Central Conference, Lay Male: **Jason Woodbury (House of Prayer/Franklin)**
- West Conference, Lay Male: No nominations received.
- West Central Conference: Rostered Minister: **The Rev. Kristie Jaramillo (Norway Lutheran/Wind Lake)**

Bishop Paul Erickson explained the process for nominating from the floor and asked West Conference to meet briefly and lift up a Lay Male for the churchwide assembly open position.

J. Reference and Counsel Report

The Rev. Karen Kuttler (Kingo Lutheran/Milwaukee) presented the initial report of the Reference and Counsel Committee. The Reference and Counsel Committee met in a hybrid fashion (in person and via Zoom) on April 30, 2024, to discuss the five resolutions submitted for action by the 2024 Synod Assembly. The resolutions were all reviewed, edited, and formatted to meet the necessary requirements for resolutions and to ensure clarity.

The individual authors of the resolutions, West Central Conference/Greater Milwaukee Synod Hunger Team, South Conference, South Central Conference, and West Central Conference were consulted and gave their approval to the final form of the resolutions. The revised resolutions were published in the assembly book and will be presented for consideration; the original versions of the resolutions were available on the Synod Assembly webpage.

Kuttler read the resolved portions of the five resolutions into the record. The complete resolutions are below.

RESOLUTION 1: Resolution to Participate in Pray – Act – Connect – Educate (PACE) to Reduce Hunger in Our Neighbors Near and Far

Submitted by the West Central Conference

working with the Greater Milwaukee Synod Hunger Team

WHEREAS, According to ELCA World Hunger, more than 820 million people, approximately 11% of the people in our world today, are hungry; and

WHEREAS, ELCA World Hunger is uniquely positioned to reach communities in need and to assist them with health clinics, microloans, water wells, animal husbandry, community meals, and advocacy, and that our gifts to ELCA World Hunger make it possible for the ELCA to respond, supporting sustainable solutions that get at the root causes of hunger and poverty; and

WHEREAS, ELCA advocacy works for change in public policy based on the experience of Lutheran ministries, programs and projects around the world and in communities across the United State, and that the ELCA works through political channels on behalf of the following biblical values: peacemaking, hospitality to strangers, care for creation, and concern for people living in poverty and struggling with hunger and disease; and

WHEREAS, We believe that we are freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor, and that God uses our hands, through our direct service work, our voices, through our advocacy efforts to restore and reconcile our world, and that through faithful advocacy we live out our Lutheran belief that governments can help advance the common good; and

WHEREAS, When we act as a coordinated network of advocates and reach out to officials on relevant, timely issues, we effectively impact public policies; and

WHEREAS, ELCA World Hunger is observing its 50th anniversary; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Greater Milwaukee Synod will encourage our synod members to support ELCA World Hunger by raising an additional \$50,000 by Synod Assembly 2025 above our usual synodical offerings through initiatives like Global Barnyard, and other opportunities found in the ELCA Good Gifts Catalog, Act 2 Day 4 Tomorrow, and many more opportunities found at <http://www.elca.org/hunger>; and

RESOLVED, That congregations of the Greater Milwaukee Synod will be encouraged to learn about and participate in Pray – Act – Connect – Educate (PACE) so that they can be God’s hands and voice for our hungry neighbors, near and far; and

RESOLVED, That congregations of the Greater Milwaukee Synod will be encouraged to learn about ELCA World Hunger domestic hunger and hunger education grants.

RESOLUTION 2: Resolution to Amend the United States Constitution

Submitted by the South Conference

WHEREAS, Lutherans care about government because it is a gift from God intended for the safety and flourishing of human life; and

WHEREAS, The ELCA holds to the biblical idea (Jeremiah 29:7) that God calls people to be active citizens and to ensure that all people benefit from the good of government; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Greater Milwaukee Synod work with Wisconsin United to Amend, and communities across the state, to defend democracy from the corrupting effects of undue corporate power by advocating for amending the United States Constitution to establish that:

1. Only human beings are endowed with constitutional rights — not corporations, unions, nonprofits or other artificial entities, and that
2. Money is not speech, and therefore limiting political contributions and spending is not equivalent to limiting speech; and

RESOLVED, That the Greater Milwaukee Synod encourage congregations and their members to advocate for a constitutional amendment to that end, and

RESOLVED, That the bishop be instructed to communicate in support of this effort with all state legislators, members of Congress, and Senators representing the territory of the synod.

RESOLUTION 3: Memorial to Develop a Social Statement on Children and Vulnerable Youth

Submitted by the South Central Conference

WHEREAS, There is currently an active debate in our society centered on children and vulnerable youth; and

WHEREAS, The ELCA social statements and social messages contain little about the unique value and vulnerability of children, and are inadequate to speak to the current moment; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly memorializes the 2025 Churchwide Assembly to authorize the development and adoption of a social statement on children and vulnerable youth.

RESOLUTION 4: Memorial to Increase Continuing Education Commitments

Submitted by the South Central Conference

WHEREAS, The 1997 ELCA Churchwide Assembly set expectations for congregations and agencies to budget \$700 to \$1,000 on continuing education annually per rostered minister (elca.org/News-andEvents/2931); and

WHEREAS, These monetary commitments have not changed in over 25 years; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly memorializes the 2025 Churchwide Assembly to increase the guidelines for financial commitments by congregations and agencies for continuing education, and to create a process for these guidelines to be regularly revised.

RESOLUTION 5: Resolution to Enhance the Call Process

Submitted by the West Central Conference

WHEREAS, The ELCA has created a system whereby candidates for call can see a 75-word summary statement about any congregation in the call process, which enhances their ability to pursue promising matches; and

WHEREAS, Congregations would benefit from having a similar capacity to review potential candidates, thus streamlining and focusing their efforts during the call process; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council be instructed to request that the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America consider creating and implementing as soon as possible a procedure and system to allow congregations to review brief (up to 75 words) summary statements that do not contain identifying information from potential candidates for called positions, with the possibility of requesting additional information on suitable candidates from their synod.

After **Kuttler** concluded reading the resolved portions of the five resolutions to the Assembly, **Bishop Paul Erickson** reminded the Assembly of the previous work completed from last year's resolutions, and to review page 14 of the Assembly Booklet for more information about the resolutions.

K. Presentation of the 2025-2026 Budget—Karen is reviewing herself

Treasurer Karen Pahl (Christ the Servant Lutheran/Waukesha) presented the budget, to be acted upon after the first break, to the Assembly. There was an online budget hearing held on Wednesday, May 15, 2024, ahead of the Assembly on Zoom.

Pahl shared that she has been serving as the Synod Treasurer since 2021. Her work has also included helping in the transition from having a full-time financial administrator in the synod office to working with an offsite bookkeeping and accounting firm with additional support being provided in the synod office. This transition has taken longer than anticipated, and the synod office recently signed a contract with a new firm and just posted a position description, seeking a part-time bookkeeper to work approximately 15 hours per week in the synod office to facilitate this work.

Pahl briefly reviewed this past fiscal year ending January 31, 2024. With mission support coming in at \$1.6 million and total support just over \$1.76 million along with our total ministries being under by \$16,000, the synod was able to have a small surplus of \$5,894 this past year.

Pahl highlighted that the level of mission support, which is the funds received from synod congregations, has been on a long, slow, and steady decline. For example, in the fiscal year that ended January 31, 2019, the synod received almost \$1.9 million in mission support, and this past year that ended January 31, 2024, that figure was \$1.6 million. We were able to use some synod reserve funds and the PPP funds received in 2020 to soften the blow of this decline, but both of those sources have now been exhausted, forcing us to

make cuts in various areas. Most notably, the synod has reduced the percentage of our mission support received, that is in turn given to the ELCA churchwide organization, from 55% in 2019 to 45% in the year that just ended. We have also reduced the percentage of mission support given to support **Lutheran Campus Ministry/Milwaukee** from 7% in 2021 to 6% back in 2022.

Pahl shared that as we estimate the amount of mission support received from congregations in this current fiscal year, as noted on the proposed budget document on page 25-26 of the Assembly booklet, we are projecting to receive \$1.55 million, and in order to maintain our other commitments, including the salaries of our synod staff, the synod council voted to reduce our percentage shared with the ELCA to 42%. As we look to the next fiscal year, the one covered by the budget that is to be considered at this Synod Assembly, we are hoping to maintain our mission support income at \$1.55 million.

Pahl shared that we are also aware that we have not been able to maintain the salaries of the rostered ministers on synod staff at synod guidelines, so in order to reach that level, and to maintain funding for Campus Ministry at 6%, we are proposing to reduce our churchwide sharing percentage to 40%, and we are proposing reductions in the amount of funds shared with a number of our partnership ministries. We also need to be mindful of the fact that the 2025-2026 fiscal year is the third and final year we can expect to receive funds from the Equipping the Saints Mission Appeal, which has added \$66,000 per year to support our work with Authentic Diversity. **Pahl** continued that the synod council is well aware of the challenges facing us, and we are exploring ways to identify additional revenue sources.

Pahl shared a word of thanks for all of our congregations in this synod who have graciously continued to share their financial gifts to the synod and beyond. We recognize that many of our congregations are experiencing their own challenges with changing patterns of attendance, participation, and funding. **Pahl** also pointed out that 32 of our congregations increased their commitment for this year. **Pahl** instructed the Assembly to look at pages 40-42 in the Assembly book, where **Pastor Matt Short** has assembled a brief summary of generosity and impact, both of the dollars shared with this synod and the work of our partners in ministry across the ELCA, emphasizing the generosity that has been shared.

Pahl shared that she truly believes that God has given us everything we need to do what God is calling us to do; we just need to prayerfully and generously share all that God has blessed us with so that the work of the church can continue to change lives, in this synod and around the world.

Pahl welcomed any questions or comments on the proposed budget for 2025-2026, or on the synod's finances in general.

Discussion ensued.

L. Report of the Bishop

***Bishop Paul Erickson** relinquished the chair to **Vice President Joyce Caldwell**.*

Bishop Paul Erickson presented his report to the Assembly. A written report was submitted prior to the Assembly.

Erickson shared gratitude for all the prayers and support received, and for all the challenges and questions the synod staff has also received, as it all works to strengthen our ability to do the work that God has called us to do with increased skill, grace, and compassion.

Erickson shared gratitude for the dedicated and talented staff, and invited the current staff to come forward and be recognized:

Mary Romskog, Executive Assistant for Administration and Candidacy

Phil Smith, Administrative Assistant

Pastor Kristin Nielsen, Assistant for Congregations in Mission

Pastor Matthew Short, Assistant for Evangelical Mission

Pastor Afi Dobbins-Mays, Assistant for Authentic Diversity & Leadership

Robyn Bayland, Communications Manager, and

Pastor Chris Manke, Executive Director of Outreach for Hope

Erickson shared love and appreciation for this team and a round of applause was given in gratitude for their work.

Erickson shared gratitude last year that we were about to transition the work of financial administration to an outside firm, supported by some additional bookkeeping work done in our office. We recently signed a contract to transition this work to a different accounting firm, and we hope that this new staffing arrangement will serve us well for years to come.

Erickson shared he asked the assistants to the bishop to have a few moments here to share their reflections on the theme, *Courage: May Courage be our Daily Breath*.

Pastor Afi Dobbins-Mays, Assistant for Authentic Diversity & Leadership, shared that she has now been on staff for eighteen months and is thankful and blessed to meet and build relationships with so many, walking with churches to become inclusive and more justice minded. **Dobbins-Mays** reflected that some may be wondering – “*Yes, but what does this really mean? What does a church which is striving to be authentically diverse look like?*” **Dobbins-Mays** shared that in the Greater Milwaukee Synod, she has seen it look like a church which is in a primarily White community forming a group to address their own biases, and the roots of racism in this country. **Dobbins-Mays** shared that they were prompted to urgent action after being deeply disturbed by the murder of George Floyd, a fellow human being. **Dobbins-Mays** invited congregations to form groups within the churches to focus on authentic diversity. **Dobbins-Mays** invited the congregations to form RIC /Anti Racism teams, to conduct their own audits, and to explore the work already done by the Strategic Plan (SP) Task Force. **Dobbins-Mays** shared that she has witnessed what courage and passion it has taken for the SP Task Force to remain committed to creating spaces where equity and welcome – where relief from the pain and trauma that being excluded creates -- can be found. **Dobbins-Mays** shared that she has witnessed them doing this work even as many of them are hurting or

exhausted from their own experiences of being othered. **Dobbins-Mays** asked for prayers for the SP Task Force, and for prayers for courage and passion for the synod to remain committed to making spaces. **Dobbins-Mays** offered her services and skills to assist congregations in this important, courageous work. **Dobbins-Mays** ended her report by stating, *“We are in this together as we continue to do this work which, though at times can be so heavy, is also work that in daring to be courageous is a great blessing!”*

Pastor Matthew Short, Assistant for Evangelical Mission, shared that courage is needed for Evangelical Mission. **Short** shared that “evangelical” means we have good news and “mission” means it is not just for us. **Short** shared about the ministry initiative called “Adventures in Renewal” which allows congregations to go at their own speed with videos and an assigned coach to work with the congregation. **Short** shared that this process reawakens an excitement for ministry, and helps congregations build deeper relationships with those outside their churches. **Short** shared how the Equipping the Saints (ETS) Appeal allows for the assigned mission coach’s expenses to be covered. **Short** shared that the team has been in conversation with 58 congregations, seven are forming renewal teams right now, fifteen sent people to an afternoon “Co-Lab” event just a few weeks ago. There are more of those events coming, where anyone can come to just test the water, and see what one next step might be for your congregation. **Short** thanked the two coaching coordinators, **Danette Braun (Kingo Lutheran Church/Milwaukee)** and **the Rev. Andrew Fetters (Holy Cross Lutheran/Menominee Falls)** **Short** reminded the Assembly to visit the website and review the offerings from the synod, as well as utilize the resources shared on the podcasts. **Short** ended his report with a call for courage to address and outweigh any fears that we may have.

Pastor Kristin Nielsen, Assistant for Congregations in Mission, shared that there are currently twenty-eight congregations in transition. **Nielsen** shared congregations in transition are often in a hurry, but she asks them all to consider four main questions to think of as they begin their time of transition. **Nielsen** asked for prayers for the 28 congregations to receive the courage to reflect and discover using these questions. **Nielsen** explained that the time of transition can be a time for exploration for congregations that are willing to do this kind of exploration, and most often find that it energizes the whole congregation before the next Rostered Minister is called. Congregations who attempt to rush the process often miss the gift of an intentional time of exploration, and how it can engage and energize your congregation’s curiosity and mission. **Nielsen** reminded the assembly that it does take courage to imagine what we might do differently, and what needs attention. **Nielsen** also asked for prayers for the synod’s team of interim pastors and bridge pastors and expressed her gratitude for them in this very specialized ministry.

Erickson shared that a significant piece of our work is accompanying congregations and leaders in those times of transition. **Erickson** expressed gratitude for **Nielsen**, Assistant for Congregations in Mission, as she leads us in this work. The complete transitions report is posted on the Assembly web page, but it details that,

since we gathered last May, we have partnered with our synod congregations in the completion of 21 call processes. **Erickson** also shared that he has had the privilege of ordaining seven new pastors since we met in assembly last year, and that we have welcomed nine new pastors to the synod, some of whom are returning to the synod after a time away. Erickson recognized and welcomed these rostered ministers to the Greater Milwaukee Synod: **The Rev. Becca Laabs, the Rev. Juniper Linberry, the Rev. Jessica Kowalski, the Rev. Myron Crawford, the Rev. Edwin Aparicio, the Rev. Mike Skunes, the Rev. Debbie Hartfield, the Rev. James Ahlquist, the Rev. Tom Gaulke, the Rev. Marcus Kunz, the Rev. Amanda Applehans, the Rev. Nikkeya Berryhill, the Rev. Erin Coutts, the Rev. Jane Crawford, the Rev. Chris Thomas, and the Rev. Cheryl Peterson.**

Erickson shared that we have also had eight rostered ministers retire this past year, and we currently have twenty-eight congregations that are seeking a pastor.

Erickson shared that we also want to take a moment to give thanks for the life and ministry of eight of our rostered ministers who have died in the past 12 months: **The Rev. RW (Pat) Anderson 8/31/2023, the Rev. Gerald Goodrich 9/1/2023, the Rev. Fran Odden 9/3/2023, the Rev. Dr. Melvin Miritz 11/29/2023, the Rev. Dale Erickson 12/14/2023, the Rev. Ned Dorau 1/23/2024, the Rev. John Gugel 2/19/2024 and Deacon Ken Bischmann 4/8/2024.**

Erickson shared a prayer with the Assembly: *We remember them in prayer. O God, we remember with thanksgiving those who have loved and served you on earth, who now rest from their labors, especially RW (Pat), Gerald, Fran, Melvin, Dale, Ned, John, and Ken. 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.*

Erickson shared that we also want to recognize rostered ministers who are observing special anniversaries of their ordination or commissioning (25, 40, 50, and 60 years), as well as congregations that are observing milestone anniversaries of their founding (25, 50, 75, 100, etc.). **Erickson** shared that it should be acknowledged that the pathway to ordination is often challenging, and that women, people of color, and those who are LGBTQIA+ often experience additional and unnecessary obstacles of racism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism, and more. We still have work to do to ensure that all who are called and gifted to serve in public ministry are able to do so, and he is grateful for all who are continuing the struggle to help us become more fully inclusive and authentically diverse. **Erickson** shared that there was an annual anniversary lunch this year at **Ascension Lutheran Church/Milwaukee**, on Monday, May 6. **Erickson** shared the names of those being recognized and invited them to stand if they were present. These names are also listed on pages 43-49 of the Assembly Booklet, along with photos and brief reflections.

Ministers of Word and Service, who have served for 25 years:
Deacon Janice Navarro

Ministers of Word and Sacrament, 25 years:
The Rev. Sharon Georgi

Ministers of Word and Sacrament, 40 years:
The Rev. James Ahlquist, the Rev. Steven Clingman, the Rev. Thomas Kent, the Rev. Steven Kuhl, the Rev. German Novelli, the Rev. Deborah Ohrtman, the Rev. Paula Ramcke-Wilke, the Rev. Steven Rutter, the Rev. Cristy Schoob, the Rev. David Schoob, and the Rev. Mary Ubuntu.

Ministers of Word and Sacrament, 50 years:
The Rev. June Eastvold, the Rev. Stephen Engelstad, the Rev. John Fredriksen, the Rev. Ronald Matter, the Rev. Paul Schwan, and the Rev. Mark Syre.

Ministers of Word and Sacrament, 60 years:
The Rev. C. Richard Becker and the Rev. Joseph Lewandowski.

New this year, **Erickson** shared that we are also recognizing rostered ministers who have retired from active service, including:
Deacon Sherie Kruse, Deacon Marian Wasierski, the Rev. Jennifer Arnold, the Rev. John Horner-Ibler, the Rev. Steven Kuhl, the Rev. Marcus Kunz, the Rev. Tom Smith, and the Rev. Greg Van Dunk.

Erickson also have congregations observing milestone anniversaries, **Ascension Lutheran/Waukesha**, celebrating 75 years of faithful ministry, **Christ Lutheran/Jackson**, celebrating 125 years, and **St. Mary's Lutheran/Kenosha**, celebrating 150 years.

Erickson shared that we receive the information on congregational anniversaries from the ELCA database, and we've learned that this isn't always accurate. If your congregation is celebrating a milestone anniversary, basically any multiple of 25, please let the synod office know, and we'll make sure you're included. A round of applause was given in appreciation.

Erickson shared that Courage is the theme of this year's assembly, the second of our synod's four core values. **Erickson** shared that his hope is that we can begin to see courage as central to who we are called to become as God's people in this time and in this place. **Erickson** shared that he also hopes, however, that we do not see the four values we share, curiosity, courage, compassion, and collaboration, as separate and distinct, but working together to create the kind of church environment we believe God is calling us to create.

Erickson continued, *"Last year, when we focused on curiosity, we took time to listen to the stories of folks who had felt included or excluded from various groups, and we were encouraged to take in what we heard and honor the experiences of others. I would hope that we see this not as simply an exercise in intellectual*

curiosity, but that we take those stories and reflections to heart, the seat of courage, and then boldly and fearlessly examine our own lives and the lives of the congregations and groups and systems in which we participate, and courageously ask, “what am I doing, what are we doing, to exclude and include others?” This is what courage looks like, not to defend or deny or explain away someone else’s feelings or experiences, but to honor their stories and then to work with them and with others to imagine a new way of being community.

“What else does courage look like? It looks like congregations recognizing that doing the same things we’ve always done just isn’t working any more, that we can’t just turn back the clock and hope that more families with young kids will somehow visit our church and decide to stay and save us from institutional decline. Courage looks like taking the time and finding the energy to take some risks, get outside our walls and get to know our neighbors. The work that Pastor Matt Short described in his report, related to the process now known as Adventures in Renewal, is courageous work. Rooted in curiosity, it requires taking some risks, getting out of our safe and comfortable pews to figure out how to not just recruit our neighbors, but to be neighbors, working together and walking together to build communities of justice and hope.

“Courage also looks like finding a way to have hard and necessary conversations, to ask the tough questions and to speak the truth in love. This is at the heart of our Authentic Diversity work, as described in the strategic plan we will be considering later this morning. We recognize that folks in this synod have been at this work for decades, and this plan helps us build on the work already accomplished and focus our time and energy and resources in such a way that make real progress in becoming a more antiracist and fully inclusive church. When we began this work on the Authentic Diversity audit two years ago, work that has led to the creation of the strategic plan, we created a page on our website to describe this work. On it, we describe the various steps in this process and then we ask, “But will anything really change?” The answer we wrote two years ago is the same as the answer today: that’s up to us. Will we have the courage to do the work laid out for us? Will we have the courage to dedicate the time, energy, and resources to fulfill the commitments we have made? Time will tell, but I certainly hope so.

“Courage can also look like taking the time to have hard and honest conversations with your rostered ministers and lay leaders to ask, “how are you doing?” Many of our congregations are finding that the load of leadership, both in terms of financial support and time and energy, is being carried by fewer and fewer people, and the risk of burnout and misconduct is high. Sometimes, this looks like rostered ministers or lay leaders over-functioning, taking on more and more responsibilities, in fear that if they don’t do it, no one will, and they end up doing more than any one person can or should handle. Sometimes, this looks like rostered ministers and lay leaders feeling hurt by criticism or alone in their work, and they pull back or shut down or simply walk away. Sometimes, this looks like folks engaging in behavior that is harmful and destructive, to themselves and to others.

While this is certainly not new, in the life of this synod or this church, it breaks my heart when I see the pain and division caused by such behavior.

“While every situation and every individual is unique, and the challenges we face are different, I pray that we will all find the courage we need to ask for help when we need it, and the grace to recognize that every single one of us is broken and bruised, and in need of mercy and healing. There may be times when the sharp edges of our brokenness are causing so much pain to others that we need to be removed from a community, at least for a time. I would pray, however, that we might find the strength and the courage to recognize that, while the challenges of life and ministry are many, the choices we make to seek help and healing can make all the difference.”

Erickson shared in closing that as Paul wrote in Second Timothy, chapter 1: “For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.” **Erickson** prayed that “*May God grant me, and you, and all of us the wisdom, and the courage, and the love to keep moving forward, inching our way into God’s beloved community. Thank you once again for the honor and privilege of serving as your bishop.*”

A round of applause was given in appreciation of the bishop at the end of the report.

Upon conclusion of the report, **Vice President Joyce Caldwell** returned the chair to **Bishop Paul Erickson**.

M. ELCA World Hunger Celebration of 50 years

Cindy Dobberke (Mount Olive Lutheran/Mukwonago) was introduced by **Bishop Paul Erickson**. **Dobberke** serves on the synod’s Hunger Team. **Erickson** also shared that coffee is provided today from the team. *A brief video was shown.*

Dobberke asked, “*Is our ministry out worldly focused?*” **Dobberke** shared that the ELCA World Hunger is celebrating 50 years of service, and that gifts received total more than \$650 million in the past 50 years. **Dobberke** shared that the ELCA World Hunger addresses the root causes of hunger and explores sustainable ways to address it. **Dobberke** shared the goal for the future is Net Zero Hunger by 2030, and this is being made by the United Nations. **Dobberke** shared that it is possible, and that there is more than enough food produced. **Dobberke** shared that the trend since 2015 has been an increase in world hunger. **Dobberke** shared that God is at work with us through the ELCA World Hunger, and that we can end hunger with this generation. **Dobberke** shared about the Synod Hunger Team which offers lots of resources through its emails and more. **Dobberke** closed in prayer.

The Assembly went into a recess for a snack break at 10:20 a.m. Nominations were accepted until the end of the break.

N. Hymn

Musician Patrica DeBlaey (Galilee Lutheran/Pewaukee) led the Assembly in the hymn, *I Woke Up This Morning*.

Bishop Paul Erickson recalled the Assembly into session at 10:38 a.m. and announced that nominations were now closed.

O. Report of the Siebert Lutheran Foundation

Bishop Paul Erickson invited **President Charlotte John-Gomez** to report to the Assembly and expressed his gratitude for the Foundation's support for our commitment for Authentic Diversity.

John-Gomez shared the history of the Siebert family and the creation of the Siebert Lutheran Foundation which has a mission to share the gospel with everyone and cease suffering everywhere while serving as Jesus' hands and feet. **John-Gomez** shared that we are called to serve outside our comfort zones. **John-Gomez** shared that while GMS is building a more authentically diverse church, Siebert is working hard within internally, with staff and its capacity with other partners. **John-Gomez** shared that the foundation is working to eliminate barriers and discriminatory practices. **John-Gomez** shared that the foundation is most grateful to invest in our strategy for Authentic Diversity.

Erickson shared his gratitude for the Siebert Lutheran Foundation's support, hard work and courage in leading this work forward.

P. Report of the Strategic Planning Task Force

Bishop Paul Erickson invited **the Rev. Afi Dobbins-Mays**, Assistant to the Bishop for Authentic Diversity and Leadership, to the podium.

Dobbins-Mays shared a summary report with **the Rev. Matt James (Lutheran Church of the Redeemer/Racine)** and **Yolanda Lewis (Mount Pleasant Lutheran/Racine)**. **Dobbins-Mays** shared her gratitude to the Siebert Lutheran Foundation and to its president, **Charlotte John-Gomez**. **Dobbins-Mays** referred the Synod Assembly to the Strategic Plan findings shared at the previous Synod Assembly, and which are still available on the website.

James shared that for the purpose of the work of the Strategic Planning Task Force (SPTF), it has defined Authentic Diversity work as the practice of identifying the policies, practices, beliefs, and attitudes that get in the way of our being a fully inclusive and authentically diverse church and creating plans, programs/initiatives that lead us more fully into that vision; demographically matching the ethnic and racial composition of the Greater Milwaukee area as well as the intersections with other marginalized groups such as gender and sexuality.

Lewis shared that the Greater Milwaukee Synod has (113) congregations. Currently 50% (56) of our congregations are engaged in some type of Authentic Diversity work. The hope is that, by engaging in the important work outlined in the strategic plan, we will continue to grow into a truly welcoming and inclusive church. The complete strategic plan is available on the assembly webpage.

Lewis also shared that there are the six themes that guide us in this work: Theme #1: Racial Justice/Anti-racism Integration - GMS needs to engage in an intentional process of integrating racial justice and anti-racism into the workings of the GMS from policy to preaching; content to communication. Theme/Finding #2: Self-awareness - There is a need for all individuals within the GMS to engage in active self-reflection on race, racism, and social justice. Theme/Finding #3: Identity - The term “diversity” is often used as a synonym for race only. GMS must consider the many intersecting identities of its congregants, leaders, and stakeholders as it continues its journey toward authentic diversity, equity, and inclusion, not solely race. Theme/Finding #4: LGBTQIA+ Inclusion - While 27% (30) of GMS congregations are Reconciling in Christ (RIC) congregations, GMS can do more for LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Areas of continued focus include supporting and elevating trans and intersex pastors and lay people and assisting new LGBTQIA+ ministers as they are called to serve. Theme/Finding #5: Communication - A diversification of communication methods is needed, particularly to better reach and engage younger people (under 25). Theme/Finding #6: Knowledge/ Relevance of Synod/Synod Council - Synod leaders must be more visible and available as a resource to congregations.

Dobbins-Mays shared that in closing, the team will provide support to meet the specifics of the goals. **Dobbins-Mays** shared that everyone should look for resources and the invitations to join in the discussion. The ground is ready for planting.

Erickson shared how the plan will be handled through a forum on Tuesday night on Zoom for review. Discussion ensued.

Erickson shared his gratitude to the team for its hard work.

Q. Report from our ELCA Churchwide Representative

Bishop Paul Erickson introduced **Vance Blackfox**, Director of Indigenous Ministries (IM) and Tribal Relations for the ELCA, as our ELCA Churchwide representative. *A video was shown.*

Blackfox shared a report from the ELCA Churchwide using PowerPoint, reminding the congregations of the need for mission support. **Blackfox** shared that together we do more than we could as a single congregation.

Blackfox shared that ELCA Churchwide is deeply grateful for the support from the Greater Milwaukee Synod (GMS). **Blackfox** shared that in the past year, \$20 million

was distributed to ELCA World Hunger, and \$291,545.00 was from GMS. **Blackfox** shared that Lutheran Disaster Relief received \$13+ million in 2023 and \$163,151 came from GMS. **Blackfox** shared information on the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC), which was created from the 2022 Churchwide and CRLC was asked to reconsider the statements of each expression of the church. **Blackfox** shared that there are 35 members, with GMS represented by **Pastor Char Guiliani (Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit/Milwaukee)**. In 2025, the commission will share their recommendations. **Blackfox** reminded the assembly about the 2024 Youth Gathering in New Orleans and asked for churches to consider sending youth in 2027 as well.

Blackfox shared the work that he personally does with IM and Tribal Relations. **Blackfox** shared that in the past two years, there have been many opportunities to engage with this ministry online and in person. **Blackfox** invited the assembly to see all the resources online which includes information on the 2020 response to the doctrine of discovery, the Truth and Healing Movement, Climate Justice and Care and a land acknowledgement guide for congregations to use. **Blackfox** shared that our mission support assists with all of this, and makes it happen. *A round of applause was given by the assembly in response to **Blackfox's** report.*

Erickson presented **Blackfox** with a gift as a token of our appreciation.

R. Action on the Budget

Treasurer Karen Pahl moved on behalf of Synod Council for the approval of the 2025-2026 Budget. The motion did not need a second.

Discussion ensued.

A motion was made from the floor with a budget amendment to line 49. It was seconded. Discussion ensued. The motion was made to show a need for more support in the transition process. **Carol Zeisemer (Lakeside Lutheran/Kenosha)** stated that there needs to be more funds to have an additional staff position and suggested that there be a reduction of funds from ELCA Churchwide Mission Support to support this position.

More discussion ensued. **Bishop Paul Erickson** responded to a call for a vote.

<u>Synod Assembly Action</u>	<u>Budget Amendment</u>
SA24.05.04.	
The Assembly did not approve the proposed amendment.	
<i>Adopted by Paper Card Vote.</i>	

Erickson asked if there were any more questions concerning the first motion made by the Synod Council to approve the 2025-2026 Synod Budget. Hearing none, **Erickson** called for a vote.

Synod Assembly Action

Adoption of Synod Budget

SA24.05.05.

The Assembly adopted the 2025-2026 Synod Budget as presented to the Assembly.

Adopted by Paper Card Vote.

Announcements were made by Assembly Manager Mary Romskog regarding the lunch.

S. Resolution 6: Ellwanger

Vice President Joyce Caldwell moved that the rules be suspended to consider a special resolution, honoring the courageous leadership of **the Rev. Joe and Joyce Ellwanger (Hephatha Lutheran/Milwaukee)**. Seconded.

Bishop Paul Erickson called for a vote from the Assembly.

Synod Assembly Action

Suspension of Rules to Consider a New

Resolution

SA24.05.06.

The Assembly voted to suspend the rules to consider a new resolution.

Adopted by Voice..

Caldwell read the resolution in its entirety.

Resolution 6: Honoring the Courageous Leadership of Rev. Joe and Joyce Ellwanger

Submitted by the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council

WHEREAS, the Rev. Joe and Joyce Ellwanger are living icons in the Lutheran Church and beyond for their selfless and courageous witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Gospel summons to peace, justice, and faithful living; and

WHEREAS, Joe and Joyce struggled for the Beloved Community amidst the bombs and racist hatred of the KKK in Birmingham and the shameful silence of many white moderate pastors; and

WHEREAS, Joe participated in the “Turnaround Tuesday” march over the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 9, 1965, days after Bloody Sunday, and Pastor Joe was

consequently present by invitation in the Oval Office for the signing of the Civil Rights Voting Act of 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson; and

WHEREAS, Joyce was imprisoned for six months in Alderson Federal Prison for her civil disobedience protesting the U.S. School of the Americas' training of right-wing military in the use of torture to quell dissent in autocratic countries in Central America; and

WHEREAS, Joe was one of the seven founding pastors of MICAHA, and both Joe and Joyce have provided key leadership in MICAHA since 1988 including serving as President (Joe), Secretary (Joyce), efforts to reduce mass incarceration, to Save the Felmers Chaney Center (Joe), to protect and expand public transportation (Joyce), to create a Holy Ground Task Force at Hephatha (Joyce), to recruit and form new WISDOM affiliates throughout Wisconsin (Joe), to combat white Christian nationalism through the We All Belong Campaign, and to work tirelessly on most of the issue campaigns of MICAHA over the past 35 years; and

WHEREAS, the community engagement of both Joe and Joyce is numerous, including leadership (and in some cases founding) the Martin Luther King, Jr. All-A-Thon, Project Return, Serenity Inns, Ezekiel Neighborhood Association, Breaking the Chains Ministry, the Coalition on Lead Emergency (COLE), and companion Synod partnership in El Salvador; and

WHEREAS, Joe and Joyce worked together to reshape and rejuvenate Cross Lutheran Church during a 34-year pastorate forging a Gospel centered, multi-cultural ministry that took the lead on the ordination of women, the blessing and marriage of gay and lesbian couples, providing sanctuary for refugees, seeking protection for Bishop Medardo Gomez from right-wing death squads in El Salvador, forming the Bread of Healing clinic, developing a life-shaping youth choir that traveled nationally, tending to the spiritual and physical needs of congregants and neighbors, and many other significant aspects of exemplary ministry that are narrated in Joe's widely read book *Strength for the Struggle*; and

WHEREAS, in retirement Joe and Joyce have continued to offer passionate, personal ministry as members of Hephatha Lutheran Church leading Adult Sunday School, building a Community Garden (Joyce), leading the MICAHA Holy Ground Task Force (Joyce), visiting the sick, providing meals at Serenity Inns (Joyce), giving rides to worship for men incarcerated at Felmers Chaney Center (Joe), leading Circles of Support for those re-entering from prison (Joyce), guiding Hephatha's Get Out The Vote team, and encouraging and supporting Pastor Mary Martha Kannass, the Hephatha congregation, and the 18th and Locust neighborhood; therefore, be it

RESOLVED that the 2024 Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly offers their enduring gratitude and admiration for the courageous leadership and dedicated service of Pastor Joe and Joyce Ellwanger.

Caldwell made the motion on behalf of the Synod Council. No second is needed.

Synod Assembly Action Resolution 6: Honoring the Ellwangers

SA24.05.07.

The Assembly adopted the resolution honoring the courageous leadership of the Rev. Joseph and Joyce Ellwanger as presented to the Assembly.

Adopted by Applause.

The Rev. Joseph Ellwanger expressed his and Joyce's deep gratitude to the synod for this honor, sharing that they came to **Cross Lutheran Church** in 1967 because Cross wanted a pastor who would help them reach into the community that was about 85% African American. **Ellwanger** shared that they left Birmingham to come to Milwaukee to do this hard work. At the time, Ellwanger shared that **Cross** was LCMS, but it became part of the GMS. **Ellwanger** gave thanks to the bishop for his willingness to stand up and be there, front and center, confronting the issues.

*The assembly moved to their lunch break with a prayer led by **the Rev. Joe Ellwanger**.*

II. PLENARY II

A. Hymn

Musician Patricia DeBlaey (Galilee Lutheran/Pewaukee) led the Assembly in singing the hymn, *Gather Us In*.

Bishop Paul Erickson recalled the Assembly into session at 1:18 p.m.

B. Devotions

The Rev. Aida Muñiz (Ascension/Milwaukee) co-chair of the Anti-Racism Team, led the Assembly in devotions, based on Acts 2, sharing the story of the first Pentecost, and a vision of what the world could look like—an inclusive community. *A video was shown.*

A time of reflection and discussion was given for those at tables to consider the questions: *Which reflection caught your attention? What gives you hope for a more just and inclusive church?* **Muñiz** closed in prayer.

Musician Patricia DeBlaey (Galilee Lutheran/Pewaukee) led the Assembly in singing the refrain of the hymn, *Commonwealth is God's Commandment*.

C. Report of the Credentials Committee

Secretary Sarah Stobie presented the second report of the Credentials Committee. As of 1:30 pm, there were 190 Lay Voting Members and 111 Rostered Voting

Members, totaling 301 voting members; with 48 visitors were present, there are 349 people present.

D. First Ballot for Open Positions

Bishop Paul Erickson called for the tellers to distribute the first common ballot for Churchwide Assembly voting members, and for open positions on synod consultation and discipline committees.

Time was given for voting members to complete their ballots and for the tellers to collect the ballots. **Erickson** declared that the voting for the first ballot had concluded.

E. Presentation of Amendments to the bylaws and constitution

Secretary Sarah Stobie presented the following amendments to our bylaws and constitution. Stobie shared that the following amendments were recommended for adoption by the 2024 Synod Assembly by the Synod Council at its March 21, 2024, meeting. Additions are underlined. Deletions are struck through in the text. All changes are highlighted.

Proposed Constitutional bylaw amendments to add to the synod council membership one dean, elected by the deans.

S10.01.01. The Synod Council shall be composed of the four officers of the synod, one youth member and at least one young adult, elected by the Synod Assembly, one member nominated by each of the conferences in the synod, and six at-large members all elected by the Synod Assembly, and one dean elected by the deans.

S12.01.02. Each conference shall:

a. Elect a dean, who shall serve a two-year term. Deans may be re-elected once, serving a total of four years. Conference Deans are expected to:

1. Meet regularly with synod leadership.
2. Assist the bishop as needed in providing pastoral care and support to the congregations and rostered ~~leaders~~ ministers of the synod.
3. Convene regular opportunities for meetings of rostered ministers and lay leaders for the exchange of ideas and concerns and the nurturing of collegiality.
4. Attend meetings of the synod council. One dean, elected by the deans, will serve as a voting member of the synod council. This election will take place prior to the September synod council meeting each year.

Synod Assembly Action

Adoption of ADSP Plan

SA24.05.10.

The Assembly adopted the submitted Authentic Diversity Strategic Plan (ADSP).

Adopted by Paper Card Vote.

G. Report of the Vice President

Vice President Joyce Caldwell presented her Report to the Assembly. Caldwell shared:

“Last month I had the privilege of spending time in Italy and one of the places that touched me was Pompeii. Many of us have heard the story of the destruction of the city of Pompeii by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in the year 79 CE. This city of 10-20,000 people was destroyed over the course of two days as 13-20 feet of volcanic ash and pumice rained down on the city along with blistering hot gases, that robbed people of breath. For the most part, Pompeii and its people who had not escaped lay buried under piles of ash for about 17 centuries. Excavations over the last two hundred years have revealed the vibrant life of a city with coffee shops brilliant frescos and mosaics ovens still containing loaves of bread and villas with interior gardens of fountains and flowers. It had been a place of vibrant daily life and community—until it wasn’t. So, what does the story of Pompeii have to do with us today? As we walked through the now uncovered ancient streets and saw evidence of the abundant life that had once existed there, I wondered what ash covers us and hides the vibrant life within us and our congregations and communities? What robs of us breath? Are we still covered with ash of the pandemic that has hindered our congregations from vibrant life and ministries? Does the ash of scarcity clog our giving and keep us from giving generously? Does the ash of polarization and fear—or the ash of comfort—bury our life of full community? Where and how do our congregations find it difficult to breathe fully and deeply with abundant life? And how do ashes of loss cover us as individuals and as communities? How does loss of spouse or child or parent; loss of employment; loss of health or mobility; loss of friends or support systems take our breath away and keep us from vibrant living? Who or where are we as church when we need to walk together through the depth of ashes to find signs of life and hope? How does a consumer-based economy and large inequities in wealth create ashes of poverty and soul sucking emptiness and loneliness? How do we find our way through the deep and longstanding ashes of oppression? How do systems of racism and heterosexism and classism press down with the heaviness of ash and toxic gases to make it oh so difficult to breathe? If we are standing on the top of a pile of ash, how do we recognize, and know, and understand the struggle to breathe that lies underneath the ashes of time and loss and injustice and oppression? How do we hear our neighbors, our siblings, and even our own selves? I struggle with these questions. I know that as church we have often failed to listen with our whole heart and spirit to those who may be struggling to

breathe. I know that living within my own comfort can hinder me from hearing my neighbors' struggle for breath and from seeking and knowing the full vibrant life and breath of the beloved community. And I know that unless I am open and intentional, I can be oblivious to all the ashes of life that lie around me, under me, on top of me, and within me.

I invite you for a moment to just breathe Close your eyes. Sit up tall. Relax your shoulders, and take three deep breaths, taking a long deep breath in, holding it for a moment, and releasing it slowly. Feel that breath of life that stirs dry bones and connects us and gives us courage and hope. As church across this synod, we breathe in different spaces We breathe in different geographic conferences; in white spaces and BIPOC spaces; in different socioeconomic places; in straight spaces and queer spaces; in places where we embrace pronouns and where we resist pronouns; in spaces where we are comfortable with our white ways of being and in spaces where we work diligently to break down racism and systems of oppression. And yet we breathe with one breath of life. Life begins and ends with a single breath, but most of the time we are oblivious to how we breathe and how we might impact the breath of others. Just as we breathe together in this space, we are mindful that we breathe together 2 in each of our individual spaces and our different congregation spaces, and we are connected by the spirit breath that gives us life. As a synod, we have been working to be mindful of our breathing and how each of our individual breaths are linked together; understanding that when any one of God's people struggles to breathe freely, all of us struggle to breathe. As you heard and saw last evening, funds from Equipping the Saints are uncovering new life as we learn to listen more fully and deeply to the neighbors around our congregations. Coaches are available through innovation grants to help dig through the ashes of comfort and complacency and the ways we have always done things to discover new ways to grow and be church. Collaboration grants are moving partner congregations into deeper relationships in breaking down old barriers and recognizing our common needs and life together. Leadership grants are helping rostered ministers breathe more deeply through sabbaticals and continuing education and being freed from some financial strain. Those gifts of new life will continue as gifts continue to be received. The Youth Listening Task Force that was called for in a resolution at last year's assembly is working to listen deeply to age groups that are increasingly underrepresented in our churches. As noted in their written report, the task force is focusing on age groups of those who are 12-18, 19-22, and 23-35. They aren't asking questions about where these youth and young adults would like to fit in the church as it currently exists, but they are seeking to get under the ashes to discover the vitality of life that already exists so that our churches can put aside the time-honored expectations of church and draw deep new breaths. Questions the task force will be asking are questions we all need to be asking ourselves in order to breathe more deeply and experience abundant life. Questions such as: • When you have a bunch of free time, what do you love doing? • Who in your life makes you feel loved for who you are? • Where do you experience a sense of community where you belong? • What gives you hope in your life? • Where could the Church show up and make a difference? What might the church look like in the future if we listen deeply and maybe learn new liturgies and worship outside of buildings? What if the church sings a new song?

Will we want to stifle it, or learn how to sing along? Would the church look and be different if we each asked ourselves similar questions and paused for self-reflection to uncover our passions and separate what we love doing from what we think we “should” be doing? Do we regularly take time to appreciate those who love us just as we are? Do we recognize the gifts of community, and do we hold on to hope? Sometimes we need to examine our own ashes that we have allowed to cover us. As a synod, we have been deliberately working to recognize and dig through the ashes of racism and heterosexism that have shaped our churches and communities. It can be painful for those of us who are white to come to see and know that the message of love that I may have heard in the church growing up wasn't a message of love that fully and completely included people of color and queer communities. It is challenging to recognize what it means to be white and how my white ways of being and doing can stifle the life and breath of others when those white ways are consciously or unconsciously enacted as THE way of being human and doing church. The Resolution 1 Task Force presented a report on ways that our governing documents, polity, and ways of being and doing church make breathing easy and unconscious for some while hindering the breath and full participation of others. Their full report is available on the synod website. We have serious work ahead to excavate the deep ashes of so many things we do that we simply take for granted. It will be a difficult and challenging task as we unearth the layers. As we dig through those ashes, we do so to find the vibrant life of new community. The Authentic Diversity Audit unearthed six themes that will require diligent and intentional focus and work. We will need to be synod together in becoming something new where we take time to build self-awareness and actively self-reflect on race, racism, and social justice; where we work to ensure that all identities and backgrounds and experiences have full life and breath; where we work to increase our knowledge of LGBTQIA+ identities and the intersections with race; and where we learn to communicate openly and break down gaps and barriers in communication, reaching beyond rostered ministers to communicate directly with lay leaders. Archeologists work deliberately to brush aside years of accumulated debris to discover the stuff of life. The work we are doing as a synod will require our focused attention and synod-wide participation. You have heard the report of the Authentic Diversity Strategic Task Force on some of the first deliberate steps for action. At their March meeting, the Synod Council began a deep and what will be ongoing conversations about the findings and calls to action from the Resolution 1 Task Force and the Authentic Diversity Audit. Synod Council goals for 2024-2025 include strengthening communication with congregations through lay leaders.

On your table is a form to fill out with the contact information for your congregation's officers. If you haven't already done so, I encourage someone from your congregation to fill it out now and put it in the box next to the box where you will leave your nametag lanyard when you exit the assembly. You will also be receiving a link after the assembly to send any contact information that you don't have available today. One of the gaps identified in the Diversity Audit was the lack of visibility of the Synod Council. These are leaders in our synod who have stepped forward to lead and guide decisions and actions between assemblies. The Synod Council approves synod calls, receives financial reports, recommends a synod

budget, takes action related to moving or closing congregations, appoints task forces as needed, hears staff and ministry reports, takes action on synod assembly resolutions, and any other items needed to guide and direct our collective work and ministry. You have been seeing their names and faces on the slides. All of their names and pictures are on the synod website. I encourage you to get to know your Synod Council members, and if you only know one, may it be the Synod Council member elected by your 5 conferences. Feel free to invite that person to your congregation annual meeting, or to a congregation council meeting, or to share a mission moment or temple talk at a worship service, or maybe an adult forum to learn more about our synod life together. The work we do together as church is life-giving. We share the Gospel to follow Jesus, form communities, and love all. And we do that with curiosity, compassion, collaboration, and courage. Where the ashes of time and “that’s the way we’ve always done it” cover us, may we have the courage to name the ashes, to dig through them, and to live in the full and abundant life given us by our Creator God. When we falter, may we have the courage to get up and try again. When we want to make excuses and seek our own comfort, may the Spirit that breathes in and through us, give us courage to breathe deeply and follow where the Spirit leads.”

The assembly responded to **Caldwell’s** report with applause. **Bishop Paul Erickson** shared his gratitude for **Caldwell’s** service as vice-president and also her work with our Antiracism teams.

*An announcement was made by **Phil Smith** before having a snack break.*

H. Hymn

Musician Patricia DeBlaey (Galilee Lutheran/Pewaukee) led the Assembly in the singing of the hymn, *Bind Us Together*.

Bishop Paul Erickson recalled the Assembly into session at 2:32 p.m.

Erickson shared that one of the actions of the Synod Council last November was to vote to join an organization called **Christians for Middle East Peace (CMEP)**, an ecumenical organization that has been working for 40 years to promote peace in that troubled region of the world. The ELCA, which is also a member of CMEP, has a long history of accompaniment and engagement in Palestine, and has recently launched an initiative called Sumud, which as you will hear, is an Arabic word meaning steadfastness or resilience. *A video was shown.*

I. Action on Resolutions

- 1. RESOLUTION 1: Resolution to Participate in Pray – Act – Connect – Educate (PACE) to Reduce Hunger in Our Neighbors Near and Far**

The Rev. Karen Kuttler (Kingo Lutheran Church/Shorewood) read

Resolution 1 submitted by the West Central Conference with the Synod Hunger Team. **Cindy Dobberke (Mt. Olive Lutheran/Mukwonago)** moved to adopt Resolution 1. The motion was seconded. **Dobberke** spoke to the resolution. **The Rev. Tyler Rasmussen (Mt. Zion Lutheran Church/Wauwatosa)** asked a question about PACE—an acronym that is self-made, not an established program or an organization. Regarding tracking funds received, **Bishop Paul Erickson** explained the mechanism of tracking from the ELCA World Hunger—through the synod directly or a report is received by the ELCA Churchwide which shares based on zip code. After discussion, **Erickson** called for a vote by paper card.

Synod Assembly Action

Adoption of Resolution

SA24.05.11.

The Assembly adopted Resolution 1: **Resolution to Participate in Pray – Act – Connect – Educate (PACE) to Reduce Hunger in Our Neighbors Near and Far** as presented.

Adopted by Paper Card Vote.

2. RESOLUTION 2: Resolution to Amend the United States Constitution

The Rev. Karen Kuttler (Kingo Lutheran Church/Shorewood) read Resolution 2 submitted by the South Conference. **The Rev. Jonathan Barker (Grace Lutheran/Kenosha)** moved to adopt Resolution 2. The motion was seconded. **Barker** spoke to the resolution. **Trisha Smith (Unity Lutheran/Brookfield)** lifted up challenges to change the constitution, and spoke against the resolution.

The Rev. Steve Kuhl (Martin Luther Lutheran/Milwaukee) shared his concerns with: **RESOLVED**, *That the bishop be instructed to communicate in support of this effort with all state legislators, members of Congress, and Senators representing the territory of the synod.* **Kuhl** made a motion to amend the statement so that the final Resolved motion would read: **RESOLVED**, That the Lutheran Office of Public Policy of Wisconsin be requested to communicate in support of this effort with all state legislators, members of Congress, and Senators representing the territory of the synod.

New motion to amend the statement was seconded. **Kuhl** spoke to the change, citing the Johnson Act and advocacy, and how our Presiding Bishop was vocal about maintaining the Johnson Act. **The Rev. David Schoob (Trinity Lutheran/West Bend)** spoke against the motion. Discussion ensued.

Bishop Paul Erickson, after discussion had ended, called for a vote on the motion on the floor to amend the statement.

Synod Assembly Action **Amendment of the Resolution**
SA24.05.12.

The Assembly approved the amendment to the last RESOLVED statement in **Resolution 2: Resolution to Amend the United States Constitution** as presented.

Adopted by Paper Card Vote.

Following the vote, **Erickson** asked if **Barker** had further comments on the newly amended Resolution 2. **Barker** had no further comments.

Discussion ensued. **Erickson**, after discussion had ended, called for a vote on the motion on the floor to adopt the amended Resolution 2: Resolution to Amend the United States Constitution.

Synod Assembly Action **Adoption of Amended Resolution**
SA24.05.13.

The Assembly adopted **Resolution 2: Resolution to Amend the United States Constitution** as amended and then presented.

Adopted by Paper Card Vote.

A video on Lutheran Campus Ministries was shown.

J. Report of the First Ballot

Secretary Sarah Stobie shared the results of the first ballot.

Consultation Committee (Partial Term)

- At Large, Lay Male, 08//31/2025: No nominations received.
- At Large, Lay Male, 08//31/2027: **Scott Warwick (Our Savior Lutheran/Oconomowoc)** received 232 votes; ELECTED
- At Large, Lay Male, 08//31/2029: **John Kenworthy (Trinity Lutheran/West Bend)** received 230 votes, ELECTED
- At Large, Lay Female, 08/31/2029: **Kendra Stea (Lake Park Lutheran/Milwaukee)**, received 131 votes; **Jean Nelson (Galilee Lutheran/Pewaukee)** received 99 votes. **Stea** ELECTED

Discipline Committee (Full Term: 09/01/2024- 08/31/2030)

- At Large, Lay Female: Vote for One
 - **Tamara Woodbury (Trinity Lutheran/South Milwaukee)**, received 227 votes, ELECTED
- At Large, Lay Male: No nominations received.
- At Large, Rostered Minister:
 - **The Rev. Denise Mbise (Trinity Lutheran/South Milwaukee)** received 162 votes, ELECTED
 - **The Rev. Karen Jost (St John Lutheran/Stone Bank)** received 116 votes,
 - **The Rev. Matthew Rose (Christ Our Savior/Sussex)** received 107 votes
 - NO ELECTION. Second Ballot needed between **Jost** and **Rose**.

2025 Churchwide Assembly (07/28-08/02/2025)

- At Large, Rostered Minister: Vote for One
 - **The Rev. Jackie Cook (Christ the King Lutheran/Delafield)** received 36 votes
 - **The Rev. Char Guiliani (Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit/Milwaukee)** received 104 votes
 - **The Rev. Juniper Linberry (Cross Lutheran/Milwaukee)** received 59 votes
 - **The Rev. Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld (Luther Memorial/West Allis)** received 34 votes
 - NO ELECTION. Second Ballot needed between **Guiliani** and **Linberry**
- At Large, Lay Female, Youth/Young Adult (30 or younger when elected): **Sarah Burns (Martin Luther Lutheran/Milwaukee)**, received 129 votes and **Erin Keller (Mount Pleasant Lutheran/Racine)** received 105 votes; **Burns** ELECTED.
- At Large, Lay Male, Person of Color or person who primary language is other than English: **Jose Andres Guerrero (Ascension Lutheran/Milwaukee)** received 149 votes, and **Gregory Guiliani (Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit/Milwaukee)** received 83 votes. **Guerrero** ELECTED
- Central Conference, Lay Female, Person of Color or person who primary language is other than English: **Dr. Rose Dotson (Cross Lutheran/Milwaukee)**, received 235 votes, ELECTED
- North Central Conference, Lay Female: **Christine Esser (Immanuel Lutheran/Cedarburg)**, received 230 votes, ELECTED
- South Conference, Rostered Minister: **The Rev. Matt James (Lutheran Church of the Redeemer/Racine)**, received 230 votes, ELECTED
- South Central Conference, Lay Male: **Jason Woodbury (House of Prayer/Franklin)**, received 227 votes, ELECTED
- West Conference, Lay Male: **Brian Krueger (Our Savior Lutheran/Oconomowoc)** received 231 votes, ELECTED

- West Central Conference: Rostered Minister: **The Rev. Kristie Jaramillo (Norway Lutheran/Wind Lake)**, received 230 votes, ELECTED

K. Second Ballot for Open Positions

After declaring the duly elected from above, **Bishop Paul Erickson** called for a second ballot for Churchwide Assembly voting members and for the Discipline Committee.

The second ballot was distributed. The tellers collected the completed ballots.

L. Continued Actions on Resolutions

1. Resolution 3: Memorial to Develop a Social Statement on Children and Vulnerable Youth

The Rev. Karen Kuttler (Kingo Lutheran Church/Shorewood) read Resolution 3. **The Rev. Tyler Rasmussen (Mt. Zion Lutheran, Wauwatosa)** moved to adopt the resolution. The motion was seconded. **Rasmussen** spoke to the resolution. No discussion.

<u>Synod Assembly Action</u>	<u>Adoption of Resolution</u>
SA24.05.14.	
The Assembly adopted Resolution 3: Memorial to Develop a Social Statement on Children and Vulnerable Youth as presented.	
<i>Adopted by Paper Card Vote.</i>	

2. Resolution 4: Memorial to Increase Continuing Education Commitments

The Rev. Karen Kuttler (Kingo Lutheran Church/Shorewood) read 4 Resolution. **The Rev. Tyler Rasmussen (Mount Zion Lutheran, Wauwatosa)** moved to adopt the resolution. The motion was seconded. **Rasmussen** spoke to the resolution.

Discussion ensued. After the discussion ended, **Bishop Paul Erickson** called for a vote.

Synod Assembly Action Adoption of Resolution

SA24.05.15.

The Assembly adopted Resolution 4: Memorial to Increase Continuing Education Commitments as presented.

Adopted by Paper Card Vote.

M. Report of Global Refuge, formerly known as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services

Bishop Paul Erickson shared that he serves on the Board of Directors for Global Refuge and presented a video of the work of the organization.

A video was shown.

N. Continued Actions on Resolutions

1. Resolution 5: Resolution to Enhance the Call Process

The Rev. Karen Kuttler (Kingo Lutheran Church/Shorewood) read Resolution 5. **The Rev. John Ibler-Horner** moved to adopt the resolution. The motion was seconded. **Ibler-Horner** spoke to the resolution.

Susan Hess (Ascension Lutheran/Milwaukee) proposed an amendment to Resolution 5. The motion was seconded.

Discussion ensued for the amendment to Resolution 5.

After discussion ended, **Bishop Paul Erickson** called for a vote.

Synod Assembly Action Adoption of Amendment

SA24.05.16.

The Assembly DEFEATED the amendment the Resolution 5: **Resolution to Enhance the Call Process** as presented.

Adopted by Paper Card Vote

The Rev. David Schoob (Trinity Lutheran/West Bend) proposed an amendment to the Resolution 5: to add the phrase “after completing their Ministry Site Profile” to the first resolved portion, thus reading: “That the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council be instructed to request that the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America consider creating and implementing as soon as possible a procedure and system to allow congregations, after completing their Ministry Site

Profile, to review brief (up to 75 words) summary statements....” The motion was seconded.

After discussion ended, **Bishop Paul Erickson** called for a vote.

Synod Assembly Action

Adoption of Amendment

SA24.05.17.

The Assembly ADOPTED the amendment the Resolution 5: **Resolution to Enhance the Call Process** as presented.

Adopted by Paper Card Vote

Discussion ensued on the amended **Resolution 5: Resolution to Enhance the Call Process**.

Synod Assembly Action

Adoption of Amended Resolution

SA24.05.18.

The Assembly adopted the amended Resolution 5: **Resolution to Enhance the Call Process**.

Adopted by Paper Card Vote

At the conclusion of the Resolutions, **Erickson** shared gratitude to the conferences, the authors of the amendments, and those present for their thoughtful process this afternoon.

O. Report on the Second Ballot for Open Positions

Secretary Sarah Stobie shared the results of the second ballot.

Discipline Committee (Full Term: 09/01/2024- 08/31/2030)

- At Large, Rostered Minister:
 - **The Rev. Karen Jost (St John Lutheran/Stone Bank)**, received 135 votes, and **The Rev. Matthew Rose (Christ Our Savior/Sussex)** received 64 votes; **Jost ELECTED**

2025 Churchwide Assembly (07/28-08/02/2025)

- At Large, Lay Female: Vote for One
 - **Maryann Galicia (Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit/Milwaukee)** received 60 votes
 - **Linda Grosser (St John’s Lutheran/Jackson)** received 29 votes
 - **Tamara Woodbury (Trinity Lutheran/South Milwaukee)** received 55

- **Erin Keller (Mount Pleasant Lutheran/Racine))** received 66 votes
- **THIRD Ballot Needed between Keller and Galicia.**
- **At Large, Lay Male: Vote for One.**
 - **Todd Beutin (St. Luke's Lutheran/Greendale)** received 88 votes, and **Gregory Guiliani (Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit/Milwaukee)** received 115 votes. **Guiliani ELECTED.**
- **At Large, Rostered Minister: Vote for One**
 - **The Rev. Char Guiliani (Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit/Milwaukee),** received 135 votes and **The Rev. Juniper Linberry (Cross Lutheran/Milwaukee)** received 70 votes; **ELECTED Guiliani.**

After declaring the duly elected from above, **Bishop Paul Erickson** called for a third ballot for Churchwide Assembly voting members.

The third ballot was distributed. The tellers collected the completed ballots.

A brief video, ELCA Youth Gathering and its theme, Created to be. New Orleans, was shown to the Assembly.

P. Announcement from Reconciling In Christ Team

Bishop Paul Erickson shared information from the RIC Team regarding the upcoming Pride Worship Service, June 13, at 6:30 pm. It will be hosted by Mt Hope Lutheran Church in West Allis.

Erickson also shared that the Pride Parade will take place on Sunday, June 9 at 2 pm.

The Rev. Char Guiliani (Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit/Milwaukee) shared a story about the need for our churches to show up and be grace at the Pride Parade. The goal is to have 2 people from every congregation in the synod.

Erickson shared a limerick before moving on to the next business on the agenda.

Q. Report on the Third Ballot

Secretary Sarah Stobie shared the results of the third ballot.

2025 Churchwide Assembly (07/28-08/02/2025)

- **At Large, Lay Female: Vote for One**
 - **Maryann Galicia (Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit/Milwaukee)** received 76 votes

- **Erin Keller (Mount Pleasant Lutheran/Racine)** received 98 votes, ELECTED.

Bishop Paul Erickson declared the elections for all open positions were now completed. A round of applause was given by the Assembly.

R. Installation of Newly Elected Persons

Bishop Paul Erickson and **Vice-President Joyce Caldwell** led newly elected Synod Leaders in a brief liturgy of Installation, including a reading from Romans 12. Following the Installation, the assembly shared a round of applause.

S. Closing of the Assembly

Bishop Paul Erickson again expressed his gratitude for those newly elected to serve, and for those who attended the Assembly. **Erickson** thanked the synod staff for their hard work as well as the tellers and members of the Elections Committee.

Erickson led the litany for Closing the Assembly and closed the session in prayer. He declared the Assembly closed at 4:21 p.m.

Musician Patricia DeBlaey (Galilee Lutheran/Pewaukee) led the Assembly in the hymn, *Rise, O Church, Like Christ Arisen*.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Crance Stobie

The Rev. Sarah Crance Stobie
Synod Secretary
Greater Milwaukee Synod