

# GREATER MILWAUKEE SYNOD, ELCA REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

## *2026 SYNOD ASSEMBLY REPORT OF THE SYNOD COUNCIL FOR 2025-2026*

### **I. OVERVIEW**

This report summarizes actions taken by the Synod Council and the Executive Committee of the Greater Milwaukee Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America from May 2025 through April 2026.

*Copies of the complete minutes of both the Synod Council and Executive Committee are available from the Synod Secretary, the Rev. Sarah Crance Stobie ([secretary@gmselca.org](mailto:secretary@gmselca.org)) or the synod office ([mary.romskog@gmselca.org](mailto:mary.romskog@gmselca.org)).*

Actions referred to in this report are preceded by two or four letters (SC for Synod Council and ECSC for Executive Committee) and a series of two-digit numbers separated by decimal points. The first two numbers identify the year, the next two identify the month of the meeting in which the action was taken, while the final numbers identify the order of the actions.

*Beginning in 2022, the ELCA Office of the Secretary provided guidance that the last two numbers should run consecutively through the entirety of the year. Thus, the coding for Synod Council Actions runs consecutively, even if occurring in different months.*

Actions that are purely administrative in nature, such as approval of minutes or acceptance of reports, are not included in this report.

### **II. SYNOD COUNCIL**

#### **A. Meetings**

The Synod Council met 9 times since May 2025; with regular meetings held on 15 May 2025; 17 July 2025; 18 September 2025; 20 November 2025; 15 January 2026; and 26 March 2026, and special called meetings on 31 May 2025; 28 June 2025; and 10 August 2025.

#### **B. Membership**

1. The membership of the Synod Council, through 31 August 2025, included the following: Conference voting members include **Todd Beutin** (South Central), **Chuck Ellingson** (Central), **Linda Grosser** (North), **the Rev. Matthew James** (South), **the Rev. Kimberly Jordan** (West), and **Missy Powers** (West Central).

At-large members include **the Rev. Doug Andersen**, **Laura Coleman**, **Rose Dotson**, **José Andrés Guerrero**, **the Rev. Joshua Gyson**, and **Steven Hartfield**.

Youth and Young Adult Members include **Lucas Short** and **Jacob Guerrero**. The Dean Representative was **the Rev. Jackie Cook**.

Officers of the Synod are **the Rev. Paul Erickson**, Bishop; **Joyce Caldwell**, Vice President; **the Rev. Karen Pahl**, Synod Treasurer and **the Rev. Sarah Crance Stobie**, Synod Secretary.

2. The membership of the Synod Council, beginning 1 September 2025, included the following:

Conference voting members include **Todd Beutin** (South Central), **the Rev. Kimberly Jordan** (West), **Bobbie Mitchell** (South), and **Missy Powers** (West Central), **Roxanne Rhinehart** (Central), and **the Rev. Alexis Twito** (North).

At-large members include **Laura Coleman**, **the Rev. Perrie Dralle**, **José Andrés Guerrero**, **the Rev. Joshua Gyson**, **Jeffrey Kehoe**, and **Jean Nelson**.

Youth and Young Adult Members include **Avery Newell** and **Alex Pechauer Bates**. The Dean Representative was **the Rev. Steve Bogie**.

Officers of the Synod are **the Rev. Paul Erickson**, Bishop; **Rose Dotson** Vice President; **the Rev. Karen Pahl**, Synod Treasurer; and **the Rev. Sarah Crance Stobie**, Synod Secretary.

### III. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

#### A. Meetings

The Executive Committee met 8 times since 1 May 2025 with meetings on 12 May 2025; 7 July 2025; 8 September 2025; 10 November 2025; 12 January 2026; and 23 March 2026.

The Executive Committee often makes recommendations to the Synod Council, which then serve as motions during the meetings of the full Council. *Minutes of the Executive Committee meetings were made available to members of the Synod Council prior to the next Council meeting.*

#### B. Membership

*The Executive Committee includes the Synod's Officers—Bishop, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer—and three other members of the Synod Council elected annually by the Council.*

1. The Executive Committee prior to 31 August 2025 included: **the Rev. Paul Erickson**, Bishop; **Joyce Caldwell** Vice President; **the Rev. Karen Pahl**, Synod Treasurer; **the Rev. Sarah Crance Stobie**, Synod Secretary; **Rose Dotson**, **Linda Grosser**, and **José Andrés Guerrero**.
2. The Executive Committee beginning 1 September 2025 included: **the Rev. Paul Erickson**, Bishop; **Rose Dotson**, Vice President; **the Rev. Karen Pahl**, Synod Treasurer; **the Rev. Sarah Crance Stobie**, Synod Secretary, **Todd Beutin**, **José Andrés Guerrero** and **Avery Newell**.

## IV. COMMITTEES AND TASK FORCES

### A. Membership

*The leaders of the Synod Council's committees and task forces are listed on the synod's website at <http://milwaukee-synod.org/who-we-are/committees/>.*

### B. Reports

The Synod Council received regular reports from staff program directors and from affiliated organizations and committees, as well as detailed reports from **Bishop Paul Erickson**.

Staff reports normally include those from the Assistants to the Bishop for Evangelical Mission, Congregations in Mission, and Anti-Racism and Missional Leadership. Other reports typically made include Outreach for Hope, Reconciling in Christ Team, the Anti-Racism Team, the Authentic Diversity Accountability Team, the Healing Network, and Lutheran Campus Ministry. Other reports are submitted as needed.

## V. ACTIONS OF THE COUNCIL

### A. Actions and Recommendations for 2025 Synod Assembly

Council Action

SC 25.05.27. Approval of Consent Agenda

The Council voted to approve the following items from the consent agenda as presented: ....and Approval of Voice and Vote for 2025 Assembly **the Rev. Miguel Perez**, serving as a synod authorized minister at **Emaus Lutheran/Racine**.

Council Action

SC 25.05.30. Recommendation to the 2025 Synod Assembly the Proposed Amendments to the GMS Statement of Vision, Mission, Values and Practices

The Council voted to recommend the proposed amendments to the GMS Statement of Vision, Mission, Values, Practices to the 2025 Synod Assembly.

Council Action

SC 25.05.32. Approval of Youth Representative Nomination to the 2025 Synod Assembly

The Council voted to approve the nomination of **Avery Newhall (Grace Lutheran/Grafton)** as Youth Representative for the Synod Council.

Council Action

SC 25.05.33. Approval of Synod Treasurer Nomination to the 2025 Synod Assembly

The Council voted to approve the nomination of **the Rev. Karen Pahl (Christ the Servant/Waukesha)** as Synod Treasurer for the Synod Council.

### B. Actions and Recommendations for 2026 Synod Assembly

Council Action

SC 26.01.07. Approval of 2026 Synod Assembly Rules

The Council voted to approve the 2026 Synod Assembly Rules as presented.

Council Action

SC 26.01.08. Approval of 2026 Synod Assembly Start Time

The Council voted to approve the 2026 Synod Assembly start time to be 4 pm on Friday, May 29, 2026.

Executive Committee Action

ECSC 26.03.08. Recommendation to the Synod Council

The Executive Committee voted to recommend to the Synod Council to recommend the 2027-2028 Budget to the 2026 Synod Assembly as presented.

Executive Committee Action

ECSC 26.03.10. Recommendation to the Synod Council

The Executive Committee voted to recommend to the Synod Council that the 2026 Synod Assembly Offering be designated to the remaining costs of the Mural Project.

Council Action

SC 26.03.14. Approval of Consent Agenda

The Council voted to approve the following items from the consent agenda as presented: ... Approval of Minutes for January 15, 2026 and 2025 Synod Assembly; ... Approval of Voice and Vote for 2026 Synod Assembly: **the Rev. Afi Dobbins-Mays**, a pastor of the UMC, serving on synod staff, **the Rev. Becky Erb Strang**, a pastor of the UCC serving on the synod staff, **the Rev. Eli Henry**, a pastor of the Presbyterian Church USA serving at Lutheran Campus Ministry, **the Rev. John Throop**, a pastor of Episcopal Church serving as interim pastor at St. Luke, Sheboygan Falls...

Council Action

SC 26.03.18. Approval to Recommend the Presented 2027-2028 Budget to the 2026 Synod Assembly.

The Council voted to recommend the presented 2027-2028 Budget to the 2026 Synod Assembly.

Council Action

SC 26.03.21. 2026 Synod Assembly Offering

The Council voted to approve that the 2026 Synod Assembly Offering be designated to the remaining costs of the Mural Project.

**C. Actions Regarding Congregations**

Council Action

SC 25.05.31. Approval of the request of **Christ Church/Mequon** to terminate their membership in the ELCA

The Council voted to approve the request of **Christ Church/Mequon** to terminate their membership in the ELCA.

Council Action

SC 25.09.50. Authorize the Bishop to form an Administration Team for **Grace Lutheran/Kenosha**

The Council voted to authorize **Bishop Paul Erickson** to form an Administrative Team for **Grace Lutheran/Kenosha**.

Council Action

SC 25.11.63. Approval of Authorization for GMS Strategic Ministries

The Council voted to approve the authorization for GMS Strategic Ministries—**Cross Lutheran/Milwaukee, All People’s Gathering/Milwaukee, and Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit/Milwaukee**.

Council Action

SC 25.08.46. Motion to Appoint an Administrative Committee to Act as a Congregation Council for **Grace Lutheran Church/Kenosha** until their meeting in November.

The Council voted to approve the motion to appoint an Administrative Committee to act as a Congregation Council for **Grace Lutheran Church/Kenosha** until their meeting in November.

#### **D. Actions Regarding Council Membership**

#### **E. Actions Regarding Ministries**

Executive Committee Action

ECSC 25.05.23.Recommendation to Approve **Wild Church** as a Synod Authorized Outreach Ministry

The Executive Committee voted to recommend the presented proposal to the Synod Council for approval.

Council Action

SC 25.05.29. Approval of **Wild Church** to be a Synod Authorized Outreach Ministry

The Council voted to approve **Wild Church** to be a Synod Authorized Outreach Ministry.

Council Action

SC 25.07.42. Letter of Invitation to Extended Service for **the Rev. Eli Henry, Lutheran Campus Ministry/Milwaukee**

The Council voted to approve the Letter of Invitation to Extended Service for **the Rev. Eli Henry, Lutheran Campus Ministry/Milwaukee** with one member abstaining.

Council Action

SC 25.11.61. Approval of Authorization for **Be Still, The Table** and **Breaking the Chains**

The Council voted to approve the authorization of **Be Still, The Table, and Breaking the Chains** as Synodical Authorized Worshipping Communities.

Council Action

SC 25.11.62. Approval of Authorization for **The Milwaukee Wild Church**

The Council voted to approve the authorization of **The Milwaukee Wild Church** as a Synodical Authorized Outreach Ministry.

#### **F. Actions Regarding Property**

## **G. Actions Regarding Synod Budget and Finances**

*The Treasurer's Reports were reviewed and accepted by the Council at all regular meetings.*

### Council Action

SC 25.05.36. Approval of Urban Internship Grant

The Council voted to approve the request from **the Rev. John Bischoff** on behalf of **United Lutheran/Racine** and **Journey of Faith/Racine** to receive a \$10,000 Urban Internship grant for an intern to work for both congregations.

### Executive Committee Action

ECSC 25.05.24. Deny Providing Funding for "Wisconsin for Environmental Justice."

The Executive Committee voted to deny the request for funds.

### Council Action

SC 26.01.06. Approval for the ETS Campaign Funds Received after January 1, 2026 will go to the ETS Annual Fund.

The Council voted to approve that all remaining ETS Campaign Funds received after January 1, 2026, will go into the ETS Annual Fund.

### Executive Committee Action

ECSC 26.03.06. Recommendation to the Synod Council

The Executive Committee voted to recommend to the Synod Council that the 2025-26 budget surplus of \$17,485 be transferred to the Salary Retention Reserve Fund.

### Executive Committee Action

ECSC 26.03.07. Recommendation to the Synod Council

The Executive Committee voted to recommend to the Synod Council the amended 2026-2027 Synod Budget for approval.

### Executive Committee Action

ECSC 26.03.09. Recommendation to the Synod Council

The Executive Committee voted recommend to the Synod Council to distribute the title from the remaining Equipping the Saints (ETS) Campaign Funds (\$4,083) to the following ministries: LSS Refugee Resettlement Office; ELCA Innovations Fund; Diocese of Meru; Lutheran Church of El Salvador.

### Council Action

SC 26.03.16. Approval of Allocation of the 2025-2026 Budget Surplus

The Council voted to approve the allocation of the 2025-2026 Budget Surplus of \$17,485 be transferred to the Salary Retention Reserve Fund.

### Council Action

SC 26.03.17. Approval to Revise the current 2026-2027 Budget

The Council voted to approve the revisions presented to the current 2026-2027 Budget.

Council Action

SC 26.03.19. Authorization to Distribute the ETS Tithe.

The Council voted to approve the distribution the tithe from the remaining Equipping the Saints (ETS) Campaign Funds (\$4,083) to the following ministries: LSS Refugee Resettlement Office; ELCA Innovations Fund; Diocese of Meru; Lutheran Church of El Salvador.

Council Action

SC 26.03.20. Authorization to Disperse Remaining Funds in the ETS Campaign Fund

The Council voted to approve that all remaining ETS Campaign Funds received after January 1, 2026, to go into the ETS Annual Fund.

**H. Actions Regarding Synod Calls**

Council Action

SC 25.11.56. Approval of Synod Call

The Council voted to approve **the Rev. Casey Sugden** to interim ministry at **Resurrection Lutheran Church/Pewaukee** effective 10/1/2025 and **Our Savior's Lutheran Church/Hartland** effective 10/1/2025.

Council Action

SC 25.11.57. Approval of Synod Call

The Council voted to approve **the Rev. Sheila Rawn** to interim ministry at **Grace Lutheran Church/Kenosha** effective 8/15/2025.

Council Action

SC 25.11.58. Approval of Synod Call

The Council voted to approve **the Rev. Robb Kosky** to interim ministry at **Trinity Lutheran Church/West Bend** effective 12/31/2025.

Council Action

SC 26.01.02. Approval of Synod Call

The Council voted to approve **the Rev. Sheila Rawn** to Supply Ministry effective 12/11/2025.

**I. Actions Regarding Synod Constitution, including Continuing Resolutions Approved or Modified**

Council Action

SC 25.07.44. Approval of the Amendments to the Existing Continuing Resolution S11.01.D22.

The Council voted to approve the amendment to the existing Continuing Resolution.

**J. Actions Regarding Synod Initiatives**

Council Action

SC 25.11.60. Approval of GMS Sexual Misconduct Policy  
The Council voted to approve the GMS Sexual Misconduct Policy.

Council Action

SC 26.01.04. Approval of Anti-Bias/Discrimination Policy  
The Council voted to approve the Anti-Bias/Discrimination Policy as presented.

Council Action

SC 26.01.05. Approval of \$50,000 Grant Application to Siebert  
The Council voted to authorize the synod staff to submit a grant application to Siebert Lutheran Foundation.

Council Action

SC 25.06.38. Motion to Authorize the Joining of the Sensitive Locations Lawsuit and Authorize the Bishop and Synod Vice President to sign any required documents to participate in this lawsuit  
The Council voted to authorize the joining of the Sensitive Locations Lawsuit and authorize the Bishop and Synod Vice President to sign any required documents to participate in the lawsuit.

**K. Approval of Appointments and Nominations**

Council Action

SC 25.07.43. Ratification of **the Rev. Eli Henry** to the Lutheran Campus Ministry Board.  
The Council voted to ratify **the Rev. Eli Henry** to the Lutheran Campus Ministry Board, effective immediately.

Council Action

SC 25.09.48. Approval of Consent Agenda  
The Council voted to approve the following items from the consent agenda as presented:  
...Approval of Outreach for Hope Board Members for **Stephen Marsh** (3 year term ending May 2028) and **Tim Knutson** (3 year term ending May 2028); Approval of Outreach for Hope Executive Committee for **Julie Starks** (Chairperson), **Tim Muth** (Vice-Chairperson), **Scott Manske** (Treasurer), and **Carol Witt** (Secretary); Approval of Ministry Team Chairs for: Authentic Diversity Accountability Team – **Chuck Ellingson**; El Salvador Partnership Team – **the Rev. Edwin Aparicio** and **Sarah Wehmeier**; The Healing Network – **the Rev. Molly Doreza**; Immigration and Refugee Ministry Team – **Sarah Halstead**; Latino Strategy – **the Rev. Edwin Aparicio**; Lutheran Campus Ministry – **the Rev. Eli Henry**; Meru Partnership – **the Rev. Lindsay Jordan**; Mt. Meru Coffee Project – **Rick Frowein**; Outreach for Hope – **the Rev. Chris Manke**; Reconciling in Christ – **the Rev. Tyler Rasmussen** and **the Rev. Char Guiliani**; Racial Equity and Justice Team – **the Rev. Aida Muniz**; and Gather MKE – **Dustin Spears** and **Michael Novotny**.

Council Action

SC 25.09.51. Nomination to the Lutheran Campus Ministry Board  
The Council voted to nominate **Jean Nelson** to the Lutheran Campus Ministry Board, effective immediately.

Council Action

SC 25.11.55. Approval of Consent Agenda

The Council voted to approve the following items from the consent agenda as presented:  
...Ratification of election of members of the Meru Coffee Board, Past President **Walt Chosseck** – three-year term begins 1/1/2026;...

Council Action

SC 26.01.09. Ratify **the Rev. Chris Marien** to Serve as Chair of the Meru Partnership Board  
The Council voted to ratify **the Rev. Chris Marien (Ascension Lutheran/Waukesha)** to serve as chair of the Meru Partnership Board.

Council Action

SC 26.01.12. Approval to Appoint a Hearing Committee  
The Council voted to appoint **Vice President Rose Dotson, the Rev. Deb Trakel, Jeff Kehoe, Secretary Sarah Stobie, Todd Beutin, and Bishop Paul Erickson** to a special Hearing Committee.

Council Action

SC 25.05.35. Approval of the Nomination Lay Male Voting Member for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly

The Council voted to approve the nomination of **Tom Schaus** as replacement for the Lay Male Voting Member for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Council Action

SC 26.03.14. Approval of Consent Agenda  
The Council voted to approve the following items from the consent agenda as presented:... Ratify the appointment of **Sophie Levas (Galilee Lutheran/Pewaukee)**, at large member, Lutheran Office of Public Policy Council; and ratify the appointment of **Deacon Jennifer Elsenbroek** to the Candidacy Committee. Term: 5/4/2026 – 5/3/2030.

**L. Approval of Disability Status**

**M. Approval of On Leave from Call Status**

Council Action

SC 25.05.27. Approval of Consent Agenda  
The Council voted to approve the following items from the consent agenda as presented:  
...Approval of On Leave from Call Status – family and study leave is 6 years, standard leave is 3 years: **the Rev. Kimberly Jordan**, effective 2/28/2025; **the Rev. Larry Harpster**, effective 4/28/2025; Approval of Retired Status: **the Rev. Brian Halverson**, effective 6/1/2025;...

Council Action

SC 25.09.48. Approval of Consent Agenda  
The Council voted to approve the following items from the consent agenda as presented:  
...Approval of Retired Status for **the Rev. Cristy Schoob**, effective 09/01/2025 and **the Rev. David Schoob**, effective 09/01/2025...

Council Action

SC 26.01.01. Approval of Consent Agenda  
The Council voted to approve the following items from the consent agenda as presented:  
...Approval of Retired Status: **Deacon Ellie Schmidtke**, effective 11/30/2025.

Council Action

SC 26.03.14. Approval of Consent Agenda

The Council voted to approve the following items from the consent agenda as presented:... ; Approval of On Leave Status – family, study and regular leave are up to 6 years and may receive an extension: **the Rev. Dean Willich**, regular leave effective 12/2/2025; Annual approval of continuing On Leave status: **the Rev. Grant Applehans** standard leave began 3/20/2024, **the Rev. Susan Bowen** standard leave began 7/22/2023; **the Rev. Brad Brown** standard leave began 5/4/2024, **Deacon Jen Elsenbroek** standard leave began 5/16/2025, **the Rev. Larry Harpster** standard leave began 4/28/2025, **the Rev. Michael McAllister** standard leave began 2/26/2024, **the Rev. Joseph Wilkinson** standard leave began 4/29/2024; Approval of Retired Status: Review retired roster list J-Q...

N. **Employment, Compensation, and Personnel Policies**

Council Action

SC 25.09.52. Approval of Healthcare Coverage for GMS Staff

The Council voted to approve the following motion: The GMS will provide health care benefits with Portico Benefit Services at either the Select HDHP 2000 with an HSA contribution or Select Copay 2000, at the employee's discretion.

Council Action

SC 25.09.53. Approval of 2026 Compensation Guidelines for Rostered Ministers

The Council voted to approve the 2026 Compensation Guidelines for Rostered Ministers

Council Action

SC 25.11.55. Approval of Consent Agenda

The Council voted to approve the following items from the consent agenda as presented: ...Approve Designation of 2026 Staff Housing Allowances: **Bishop Paul Erickson** - \$40,000, **the Rev. Afi Dobbins-Mays** - \$17,700, **the Rev. Kristin Nielsen** - \$30,000, and **the Rev. David Rebey** – \$26,708.65.

It is my pleasure to serve as the Secretary for our synod.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Sarah Crance Stobie*

The Rev. Sarah Crance Stobie, Synod Secretary