



## Message from the Bishop



Adopted in 2019, our synod's statement of Vision, Mission, Values, and Practices has served us well, providing us with a framework to organize our work and focus our conversations. Our theme for this year is based on the fourth of our synod's core values, **collaboration**: "We believe that, just as God walks with us in our journey of faith, God invites us to walk with and work with each other and with our neighbors in relationships of authentic mutuality and equity."

Several years ago, I was able to visit our partners in the Diocese of Meru in northern Tanzania. Bishop Elias Kitoi Nasari asked me to speak to the pastors of the diocese about the values of accompaniment that undergird our Global Mission partnerships in the ELCA. As an icebreaker, I asked for two volunteers, had them stand side by side and I tied their middle legs together, so that they became a three-legged unit. I then asked them to simply walk as fast as they could across the room. After a good amount of laughter and some stumbles, they eventually got the hang of it and made their way across the room and back. When I asked them what they learned in this experience, they said, "we had to communicate," "we had to go slow at first," and "we needed to find our own pace."

While there may be many ways to define and practice collaboration, the simple truth is that God calls us to work and walk together, and the only way we will succeed is if we slow down, pay attention to our neighbors, and find a pace that works for all of us. The challenges of life and ministry in this day and age are many, and I don't think it's going to get easier any time soon. The only way forward is to move together, listening and learning and laughing, trusting that God is with us every step of the way.

In Christ

*Bishop Paul Erickson*

### Included in this issue:

**Equipping the Saints Annual Fund:** How our ministries are making an impact

**Synod Assembly 2026:** Event details, guests of honor, important dates and more

**The Community Mural Project:** What this project means and how people are getting involved



# Synod Assembly

Friday, May 29 - Saturday, May 30 | Brookfield Conference Center



When we gather for our annual synod assembly at the end of May, we'll come together under the theme of Collaboration: God Has Called us to Work Together. Collaboration is one of our four core values adopted at the 2019 Synod Assembly.

This year, our collaboration focus began with an exciting mural project led by Milwaukee artist Tia Richardson (see back page). Tia led us through an imagining and design process and a community painting day where people of all ages could join together to bring the mural to life. Our new mural will be finished later this year and installed at The Table: A 1st Century Style

Community in the 21st Century, 5305 W Capitol Dr. Milwaukee. Tia will be our keynote speaker for our Friday evening dinner and she'll share how her work has created collaboration, new relationships in our community.

We are also excited to welcome our two companion synod bishops: Bishop Elias Kitoi Nasari from the Diocese of Meru and Bishop Guadalupe Cortés from the Salvadoran Lutheran Church. Artist Christian Chavarria Ayala, whose work is featured on our processional cross, will also join us. Bishop Elias and Bishop Guadalupe will both participate in worship on Friday evening and will address the assembly.

This rich weekend will also give us the opportunity to consider the business of the synod, including elected positions, resolutions, annual budget, and more. It is an opportunity to gather together in worship, devotions, and song and to deepen our community relationships. While voting members conduct the business of the assembly, everyone is welcome to join us in worship on Friday evening and we also offer individual dinner tickets on Friday night for our keynote with Tia Richardson.



Bishop Guadalupe Cortés



Bishop Elias Kitoi Nasari



Tia Richardson



Christian Chavarria Ayala in his workshop  
Photo: Juan Arrieta

*Register and learn more about our annual assembly and Tia Richardson here:*  
<https://milwaukee-synod.org/event/synod-assembly-2026/>

## Important Dates

**April 30, 2026:** Final day of early bird pricing

**May 1, 2026:** Registration prices increase

**May 14, 2026:** Cancellation deadline (cancellations after this date cannot be refunded)

**May 14, 2026 –** Advance registration closes (including registrations with childcare)

## 2026 Registration Fees

**Voting Members/Non-voting members:**

\$245 (early bird pricing – register by April 30)

\$270 (standard pricing – register May 1 or later)

**Retired Rostered Ministers, Youth, Young Adults:**

\$145 (early bird pricing – register by April 30)

\$170 (standard pricing – register May 1 or later)

**To see all upcoming events visit: [milwaukee-synod.org/events](https://milwaukee-synod.org/events)**



# Equipping the Saints

## Walk With Us

The Equipping the Saints Annual Fund invites you to participate in the vibrant ministries of the Greater Milwaukee Synod. ETS funds support Authentic Diversity, Lutheran Campus Ministry, and Outreach for Hope.



Scan to donate to Equipping the Saints Annual Fund

Through your generous giving, these ministries continue to bring the love of Christ to our communities: offering hope, support, and belonging. Donations to Equipping the Saints Annual Fund are above-and-beyond congregational Mission Support giving. We invite individuals and households to prayerfully consider giving generously to the ETS Annual Fund as, together, we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

Read on to learn about how the Equipping the Saints fund is impacting these ministries.

## GMS Authentic Diversity

At Hephatha Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, the authentic diversity work led by Pastor Afi Dobbins-Mays is impacting the congregation in significant ways. Pastor Mary Martha Kannass shares her thoughts below.

“Scripture tells us again and again that hardness of heart is a sin against God, humanity, and ourselves. Authentic diversity work invites us to a change of heart relative to diversity; a change of heart that is evident in action, justice, prayer and commitment. Pastor Afi’s presence on our Synod staff is a constant guide toward the pathway to which we are called: to do justice, love, kindness and walk humbly with our God.

Camp Hero is a camp experience that cares for families impacted by mass incarceration, held annually at Lutherdale, where the best is offered to those whom society constantly deals the worst. We see the joy and affirmation that the campers experience and hear of their close experiences with God as they participate in this ministry.

The ministry of authentic diversity carried out by Pastor Afi Dobbins-Mays is life-giving to our congregation and to the community we serve. She brings a depth of faith, hope, love, justice, and commitment to her role among us.”

*Pastor Mary Martha Kannass, Hephatha Lutheran Church*

## Lutheran Campus Ministry in Greater Milwaukee



“When I walked through the doors of The Corner House for my first Monday night Bible Study, I knew I had found my church. The Corner House has given me a safe space to openly explore what faith looks like to me. The messages I heard gave a voice to my own view of how God’s love fits in the world, and helped me feel more confident talking about faith with family and friends of diverse faith backgrounds. I am excited to act on my passion of fostering connections with the community through Lutheran Campus Ministry... I could bring anyone to the Corner House, and they would feel loved and welcomed”.

*Kamila Gutierrez, LCM Peer Minister and UW-Milwaukee Class of 2026*

## Outreach for Hope

Donald knows what it feels like to run out of hope. “I was hitting walls everywhere I turned,” he shares. But through Racine Kenosha Vocational Ministry, something changed. “They helped me focus—on God, on serving others, on moving forward.” Today, Donald is giving back, especially to fellow veterans. “I want them to know they’re not alone. No one is left behind.” His life is steady, purposeful, and grounded in faith: “With God in my life, I can never be alone.” Thank you for supporting Racine Kenosha Vocational Ministry through your donations to Outreach for Hope—your generosity makes stories like Donald’s not just possible, but powerful.



# Community Mural Project

In Collaboration with Tia Richardson

On Saturday, March 7, about 40 people joined together at Ascension Lutheran Church, Milwaukee to begin to paint the mural that we announced at Together in Mission. Tia Richardson and her team guided each volunteer through the steps to add the first and second coats of paint to the large images featured on each panel. We welcomed people of all ages from across our synod to collaborate on this project.

"[This project] makes me feel good to be part of something bigger than myself, and to see so many different people come to participate."



A member of the community who has been involved throughout the process told us, "I love the whole idea. I was at the unveiling the other night and it was cool to go over it and hear what Tia was thinking, and to have some input was very uplifting. I came home and was all excited about it. It's so beautiful." Another attendee said "[This project] makes me feel good to be part of something bigger than myself, and to see so many different people come to participate", when asked "the theme of this whole thing is collaboration... how does this make you feel?".

Every aspect of the mural is very intentional, from the design to the process. Tia explains "This mural project means a lot to me because we were talking about race relations, something I feel very passionate about healing. When I say race relations, I mean the human race, and how we're all minorities of that. We all share the same greater human spirit. So I think we need to come together as one, even though we can be different. We need to help the planet we all share and call home and help each other belong to the same immutable fabric".



Tia's viewpoint is that "as different cultural groups we each have our own unique expressions, but together our musical tones make a richer harmony. When we come together with that intent – unity happens." When asked to describe the process she followed for the mural, Tia says "For ideas I facilitated two workshops using a three-step healing process. The first step is offering people a chance to name what they believe the problems are with race relations in the synod community. From there, they can think of choices they believe they or others can do to help make it better. The third and final step is imagining a future as a direct result of those choices."

Thanks to all who participated in the community design workshops or painting. We are better together!



Tia & UWM students add layers to finish the mural



Design process from Together in Mission

Scan to purchase tickets for the Synod Assembly Banquet with Tia Richardson, May 29

