

Minutes of the  
Thirty-Sixth Annual Assembly  
of the  
FLORIDA-BAHAMAS SYNOD  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Held at Embassy Suites by Hilton  
4955 Kyngs Heath Dr., Kissimmee, FL  
May 31-June 2, 2024

Chair: Bishop Pedro Suárez.

Secretary: Rev. Kenneth Blyth.

**Plenary # 1**

**May 31, 2024**

The Assembly opened at 3:00pm with the Order for Opening of Assembly led by Bishop Suárez, followed by words of welcome in which Bishop addressed the theme of the Assembly: Who Comes Up in Your Dreams? Bp. Suárez also introduced the parliamentarian, Mr. Kirby Glad; the secretary, Rev. Kenneth Blyth; and the chaplain, Dcn. Michelle Mehan. Bishop Suárez also gratefully acknowledged the native Peoples on whose ancestral lands the Assembly gathered: The Seminole Tribe, the Miccosukee Tribe, and the Jororo.

**CREDENTIALS REPORT**

Rev. Eric Olsen shared the Credentials Report as follows:

Rostered voting members: 149

Lay voting members: 197

Total voting members: 367 members

Quorum: 184 members.

By direction of the Credentials Committee, Rev. Olsen then moved that the roll submitted be the official roll for this Assembly. As there was no discussion, and no objection, Bishop Suárez called for a vote by show of hands, and declared that the roll was adopted.

**ADOPTION OF STANDING RULES**

Bishop Suárez reminded the Assembly that the Standing Rules and Agenda had been posted on the synod website for review. Rev. Kenneth Blyth, on behalf of the Synod Council, moved the adoption of the Standing Rules. As there was no discussion Bishop Suárez called for a vote by show of hands, and declared that the Standing Rules were adopted as presented.

## ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

On behalf of the Synod Council, Rev. Blyth moved the adoption of the agenda. As there was no discussion, Bishop Suárez called for a vote by show of hands, and declared that the agenda was adopted as presented.

## SYNOD CONSTITUTION BYLAW CHANGES

Rev. Kenneth Blyth, on behalf of the Synod Council, moved the amendments to the Synod Bylaws, located on the assembly website since May 17<sup>th</sup>, be accepted as follows:

1. That the 2024 Synod Assembly be asked to amend bylaw S9.03.01 by striking the word “synodical” and inserting in its place the word “synod.”
2. That the 2024 Synod Assembly be asked to adopt the following bylaw:  
**S8.11.01. When authorized by the Synod Council in order to address special circumstances, the synod bishop may be compensated as an employee or contractor for specified services to another expression of this church. Such an arrangement may be terminated by the Synod Assembly or Synod Council if determined to be detrimental to the function of the office or if the special circumstances no longer apply.**
3. That the 2024 Synod Assembly be asked to amend Bylaw S10.07.01. by striking the current bylaw number S10.07.01 and inserting in its place the number S10.08.01.
4. That the 2024 Synod Assembly be asked to amend Bylaw S7.13.01. as follows:  
**Notice of the time and place of all meetings of the Synod Assembly shall be published in the synodical publication and also sent by United States Mail to each congregation of this synod; each active, on leave from call, on continuing disability, and retired minister of Word and Sacrament on the roster of this synod; and each active, on leave from call, on continuing disability, and retired minister of Word and Service on the roster and to each rostered minister - active, on leave from call, granted disability status or retired - on the rosters of this synod, not less than 30 days prior to the meeting. To the extent permitted by state law, notice of all meetings may be provided electronically.**
5. That the 2024 Synod Assembly be asked to amend Bylaw S7.26.01. as follows:  
**All authorized worshipping communities of this synod shall be entitled to ~~voting membership~~ lay voting members at all Synod Assemblies in accordance with †S7.21.**
6. That the 2024 Synod Assembly be asked to amend Bylaw S10.07.03.c. as follows:  
**A special meeting of the Synod Council may be called by the bishop or the vice president and shall be called at the request of at least one-third of its members. Notice of each special meeting shall be given to all who are entitled to be present ~~at least 10~~ with as much advance notice as is reasonable given the urgency of the question at hand but at least 1 calendar days prior to the date of the meeting and shall include the date, time, and place of the meeting.**

7. That the 2024 Synod Assembly be asked to delete Bylaw S11.01.02..  
~~There shall be a Synod Staff Support Committee, which shall be composed of members of the Synod Council and others appointed by the Synod Council and agreed upon by the bishop. This committee shall seek to give encouragement by its concern for the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of officers and professional staff of this synod.~~
  
8. That the 2024 Synod Assembly be asked to amend Bylaw S9.03.01. as follows:  
The Nominating Committee nominates qualified candidates for ~~synodical~~ volunteer synod positions, committees, and other ministry units as directed by the Synod Council and the governing documents of the synod.
  
9. That the 2024 Synod Assembly be asked to amend Bylaw S9.03.02. as follows:  
The members of the Nominating Committee shall:
  - a. Not include more than one person from any one conference and not more than one member of the Synod Council, when possible;
  - ~~b. Serve for a term of three years, with one-third being appointed by the Synod Council each year, and with a limit of two consecutive full terms;~~
  - ~~c. Maintain a human resource file of qualified and willing personnel as an aid in the process for nominating persons to fulfill the needs of the synod;~~
  - ~~d. b. Provide sufficient nominees for each position as directed by the Synod Council and the governing documents; and~~
  - ~~e. c. Nominate one of its members to serve as Elections Committee Chair for each Synod Assembly. The Elections Committee shall be appointed by the Synod Council to serve for each regular meeting of the Synod Assembly.~~
  
10. That the 2024 Synod Assembly be asked to amend Bylaw S11.01.01. as follows:  
There shall be a Synod Executive Committee composed of the bishop, vice president, secretary and treasurer of this synod and two ~~other~~ additional members ~~designated elected~~ by the Synod Council. ~~Those two other~~ These two additional members will shall be elected at the first meeting of the Synod Council after a Synod Assembly and shall serve ~~for a term beginning at the end of that meeting and ending at~~ from election until the end of the next Synod Assembly or until their successors are elected. In electing additional members of the Executive Committee, the Synod Council shall be mindful of the advantages of diversity of membership. The vice president shall chair the Synod Executive Committee. The secretary shall serve as secretary for the Synod Executive Committee. The Synod Executive Committee shall:
  - a) Assist the bishop in planning, coordinating, and promoting the activities of the synod.
  - b) Report its actions to the Synod Council and the Synod Assembly.
  - c) Be available to give counsel when disputes arise within this synod.

d) Perform such other functions as may be delegated to it by the Synod Assembly or the Synod Council.

11. That the 2024 Synod Assembly be asked to adopt the following bylaw:

**S7.21.03. The recognized Campus Ministry sites within this synod each may elect not more than two lay voting members to the Synod Assembly. The persons elected under this section shall not have attained the age of 30 years at the time of election to the Assembly.**

**VOTED**

**SA24.05.01 Bishop Suárez called for a vote by show of hands, and declared that there being 2/3 in favor the amendments were adopted as presented.**

### NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

Reann Purcell, a representative of the Nominations Committee then presented the Nominations Committee report, referring the Assembly to a Nominations Book which had been posted on the assembly website since May 17th. Reann listed the nominations received as follows:

#### Treasurer

Four-year term

Any district, Layperson or Rostered Minister, male or female

Tracy Moffatt

#### Synod Council

Three-year term

North Mission District

Rostered Minister, male or female

Rev. Thomas Lyberg, Rev. Trixie Richter, Rev. Harry Schenkel

Southeast Mission District

Layperson, male

Richard Eggert

Southwest Mission District

Layperson, female

Louise Hauser, Cindy Kamp

Any district

Young Adult

Aged 18-30, Layperson or Rostered Minister, male or female

Sophia Thomas

Consultation Committee

One-year term

Layperson, male

Steve Eichhorn, Paul Hartfiel

Layperson, female

Pam Fairfax

Rostered Minister, male

Rev. Andreas Stein

Rostered Minister, female

Rev. Lisa Burbank

Discipline Committee

Six-year term

Layperson, male

Ralph Schofield

Rostered Minister, male

Rev. John David Bryant

2025 Churchwide Assembly Voting Member

North Mission District

Layperson, male

Steve Beumer, Dwane Tyson

Rostered Minister, female

Rev. Melinda Plumley, Rev. Julie Schuessler Peralta

Southeast Mission District

Layperson, female

Sue Hall

Rostered Minister, male

Rev. Paul Amlin, Rev. Chad Fair

Southwest Mission District

Layperson, female

Rebecca Bass, Cindy Kamp

Layperson, male

George Algozzina

Rostered Minister, female  
Rev. Jennifer Moore, Rev. Lois Sorensen

Any district  
Young Adult  
Aged 18-30, Layperson or Rostered Minister, male or female  
Sophia Thomas

Raeann Purcell then invited nominations from the floor. Floor nominations were received as follows:

Synod Council  
Three-year term

Southeast Mission District  
Layperson, male  
Brian Kaveh

Any district  
Youth  
One-year term  
High School Student aged 15-17, male or female  
Rico Gordon

Discipline Committee  
Six-year term

Layperson, female  
Kristina Blanche

Rostered Minister, female  
Rev. Carol Gates, Rev. Joyce Guillford

2025 Churchwide Assembly Voting Member  
North Mission District  
Layperson, male  
Jose Lopez

Rostered Minister, female  
Rev. Kari Niedermaier

Any district  
Youth  
High School Student aged 15-17, male or female  
Rico Gordon

When no additional nominations were received, Bishop declared nominations closed.

## INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

Bishop Suárez recognized four special guests at the assembly:

Keynote Speaker, Dr. Rafael Malpica Padilla, the John Damm Chair in Leadership and Director of Latine Ministry and Theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

Serving as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Churchwide Representative, Maryn Olson, Director of Lutheran Disaster Response, the humanitarian assistance ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

Our Full communion partner, from the Episcopal Diocese of Southwest Florida, the Rev. Dr. Douglas Scharf.

Rev. Dr. Douglas Scharf then delivered an address.

## BISHOP'S REPORT

Bishop Suárez delivered his report, which included a slideshow, as follows:

### Theological Frame

Acts 16:6-15

*6 They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. 7 When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; 8 so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' 10 When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. 11 We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district[a] of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. 13 On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. 14 A certain woman named Lydia, a worshipper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. 15 When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.' And she prevailed upon us.*

Dr. Luke, the writer and medical doctor, was with the Apostle Paul. Did Paul need a doctor because of his thorn in the flesh which he mentions in 2nd Corinthians 2:7? Or was Luke a disciple and companion in ministry, or perhaps both?

Did the vision of a man asking Paul to come to Macedonia to help, give him guidance and purpose to his missionary trip? What would have happened, if it would have been a woman that had appeared in the vision?

Europe's first converts happened because Paul and his companions looked for a place of worship, an alternative to a synagogue perhaps, and they engaged in a meaningful conversation with the women in Macedonia Lydia, a wealthy entrepreneur merchant, a seller of purple cloth, a worshiper of God, listened and opened her heart. She extended an insisting invitation to stay, and was hospitable. What we can take from this is that a relationship was built and established by:

1. Sharing the faith, that they had something in common
2. They talked, conversed, listened to each other
3. And a invitation was extended.

It is interesting that we have seen some of our churches being welcoming. Some have gone further as to build a relationship in the community by being the church outside their walls. And others have gone even further in inviting people to important events of their congregations. Now, how many of us have been invited with insistency to share who we are and to stay with them like Lydia did?

In Matthew 28:19 most of our translations say go therefore to "all nations" and it could very well mean go to other countries, but in Greek it is to all "ethnia," all those different from us, from other cultures, other tribes, and make disciples. Here in Florida, we don't have to go far to find people different from us. This gives us our theological frame for this Assembly.

Intention of this Assembly

Last year our Assembly's focus, besides reelecting me to serve as your Bishop, was to be "Renewed in Christ" and our Scripture text was Hebrews 13:6-8, "So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?' Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." We were still dealing with the aftermath of the Covid pandemic. Pastors and lay leaders were tired, worn, and confused about leading into the future.

We are grateful to our previous Directors for Evangelical Mission, Rev. Rob Carlson and Rev. Khader El Yateem, and our Assistant for Leadership, Deacon Connie Schmucker, whom are no longer staff, and to Pr. Rob Rose Assistant for Administration. They worked hard during the pandemic to keep us connected and tried hard to bring vitality into our ministries. New mission initiatives were begun, and today we are proud to welcome The Community Church of Babcock Ranch into this network called the Florida-Bahamas Synod of the ELCA. We began Palm Deaf Church with support from many congregations. Emmanuel Parks also began during Covid times and it keeps growing in Naples. We also started 2 new developments with and among Latinos in the south, which are growing with young families; and much more happened.



This year we are presenting a vision for our future with continued new hope of even more growth in mission and evangelism. Our new Directors for Evangelical Mission, Pastor Derek Hoven and Pastor Carlos Ham, also come with experience and will be trained more to help all of us in this coming endeavor. Since our demographics are so diverse in our synod, we invited Rev. Dr. Rafael Malpica-Padilla to share with us spiritual learnings that will inspire us for more action and growth.

#### Accomplishments

Allow me to share some of the happenings of the past 12 months. We lost our two Directors for Evangelical Mission, Pr. Rob Carlson who took a call in Minnesota, and Pr. Khader El Yateem who was called to be the Director for Service and Justice unit of the ELCA. Today we are happy to welcome our new Assistants to the Bishop and Directors for Evangelical Mission, Pr. Derek Hoven and Pr. Carlos Ham.

Since our last Synod Assembly, I have had the honor of ordaining Pastor Donna Batchelor, Pastor Eric Locke, Pastor Kerri True, Pastor Alisha Unga and Deacon Macy Kennedy. I also helped to ordain our Candidate, Pastor Ignacio Estrada, who is serving now in Puerto Rico!

In addition, I or one of my Assistants have installed 12 Pastors and 1 Deacon into ministry here in our Synod. Actually, that's 15 Pastors including my 3 new Assistants!

Together we have also celebrated the ministry and retirement of 14 of our faithful clergy, and we thank God for your ministry. In addition, we have had 9 retired Pastors move down to Florida and transfer into our Synod. Welcome!

For our congregations in transition, my assistant, Pastor Nicole is guiding some of our call committees in using a new curriculum called "Discover and Invite." Our hope is that this will aid congregations in their discernment, and maybe even make the process a little bit faster.

The Interim Ministry has had many challenges this year, and we have met it with lots of creativity... I have appointed Interim Pastors and Interim Teams. Interim Pastor Teams include Vice Pastors, Stated Supply Pastors, Pastoral Care Pastors, and Chaplains. I am grateful to all our clergy who serve our congregations in the vital role of Interim Pastor. Just last month we were able to gather with our Interim Pastors and Deans for a respite retreat, thanks to a grant that we received from Lutheran Disaster Response.

I want to pause for a moment to thank our Conference Deans. These Pastors gather their colleagues and provide assistance to our congregations in transition. They serve as a link between the Synod and congregations, and I am grateful for their leadership. Please join me in thanking these Deans who have served last year:

Pr. Bill Weicher  
Pr. Jonathan Gantt  
Pr. Steve Winsor  
Pr. Jack Diehl  
Pr. Andre Keeley

Pr. Ross Worch  
Pr. David Thoreson  
Pr. Harry Schenkel  
Pr. Lynn Fonfara  
Pr. Jenn Kopacz  
Pr. Jhon Freddy Correa  
Pr. Jeff Gross  
Pr. Eric Friedrichs  
Pr. Paul Gibson  
And Pr. Joy Michaud Waters

As we look to the future, we prayerfully join those who are discerning a call to the ministry of Word & Sacrament or Word & Service. In the ELCA, this is called the Candidacy Process, and includes 3 steps in addition to a Seminary education. Last year we granted entrance to 7 new candidates, endorsed 7 candidates to continue the process, and approved 6 candidates for ministry!

I am often asked about Seminary graduates, and you may note that 4 years ago it was 2020, a year when not many people started Seminary! But our numbers seem to be rising with people answering God's call. So I ask you, dear friends, who are the leaders that God is raising up in your midst? Be sure to stop by the Candidacy Committee's booth in the exhibit hall.

One of the ways that we support our Candidates for ministry is through the ELCA and Synod Fund for Leaders Scholarships. We are pleased to be able to offer a \$2,500 scholarship to 2 of our candidates this year. Be sure to come to my reception tomorrow night as we celebrate our Synod's candidates for ministry!

One of my priorities for the future is to support the Youth and Young Adults of this Synod. My staff is working with a few of our congregations to establish or re-establish campus ministry here in our Synod. Last summer I was privileged to celebrate the opening of "Redeemer House" - a ministry of Jacksonville Campus Ministries that offers affordable housing to students. In addition, this year Jacksonville Campus Ministry celebrated 50 years of ministry! For our youth, we will have 200 participants in New Orleans this summer for the ELCA's Gathering: "Created to Be." I look forward to joining them at this wonderful event. By the way, those students that applied for scholarships for the National Youth Gathering by the deadline will receive \$500.

I was very glad to see that for our Synod's Advocacy Days in Tallahassee, the number of participants tripled. We had pastors and lay leaders attending and speaking on committees while debating bills. We met and prayed with members of both parties, senators, and representatives.

Over \$400,000 were awarded in the first year of the Vision to Action grants. A special shout out to Pastor Katie Carroll and Pastor Rob Rose for the countless hours they've invested to help congregations innovate as they reach out into their communities and work to make disciples.

We came alongside Messiah Lutheran in Panama City and created an Easter plan. The local congregation decided that their fruitful ministry had concluded, and it was time to close as a

congregation. But we both agreed that there needed to be a Lutheran presence in the Panama area. To make that happen, the congregation made the bold and faithful move to sell the property and release the funds to bring in a new mission developer to find a new and viable way to reach the greater Panama area. They did well on being bold and realizing the assets of the building don't define who we are in Christ, rather it is our ministry to the community that does.

We had another clean audit. Congratulations to the finance team and especially Kim Raymond, our Director of Finance, for all the work that makes this possible. We always want to be beyond reproach when it comes to how we handle the tithes and gifts that are given to support the ministry of the church. These annual audits allow us to show we value and use each penny as best we can.

We continue to have a strong relationship with Lutheran Disaster Relief both at the national level and what we do in the local areas. We are partnering with several organizations as we bring relief to folks in Ft Myers, the Bahamas, Panama City, Pensacola, and other areas around the state.

If you don't know, the Synod Parish Deacons is a program that groups many volunteer lay leaders around our synod. They are a dedicated bunch of workers that are helping pastors to carry on the mission of their congregations. They enjoy fellowship, they support one another, and they serve their congregations with passion. The picture was taken at the most recent retreat they had. Thank you for your willingness to serve, and for your love for God's work!

One of the JustLove team's most recent resources was an impactful Lenten call for peace in the Middle East. Lent is a season of reflection, repentance, and purification, as we journey deeper in our relationship with God. Christ's love invites us to speak out against the violence of the world and our complicity towards it. This past Lenten season, we joined the Just Love team as we confront the trauma and terror in Palestine and Israel and accompany our siblings calling for a lasting peace rooted in the justice and love of God.

I am excited to share with you the organizing of a new congregation of the FB Synod and the ELCA – The Community Church in Babcock Ranch. Under the leadership of Pastor Matthew Shapton the worship community voted unanimously to organize as our newest congregation. In a minute we will vote as Assembly to officially receive them.

#### A Vision in Progress

As we look ahead at the next five years, our vision builds upon the three prongs that guided us the previous 6 years:

1. developing healthy leaders inspired to share the gospel of Jesus Christ,
2. nurturing ministerial vitality where discipleship is primary,
3. and embracing intentional diversity to enrich our communities of faith.

These remain crucial foci, aligning with the three synod missions of: boldly sharing Christ, passionately making disciples, and faithfully pursuing justice in our communities.

Our Vision to Action initiative has empowered congregations to act missionally in discipleship and by extending the Lutheran expression contextually. Moving forward, we will think strategically while keeping our values in mind, fostering healthy leadership focused on evangelistic mission for discipleship, and we will have these emphases:

*Engaging Generations in the Mainline Culture*

- Serving those who are newly retired, long-term retired, and retired in need.
- Ministering to young families, young adults, youth, and children.

*Cultivating Latino Ministries*

- Engaging Latino communities from Caribbean, Mexico, and South and Central American backgrounds.
- Preparing leadership for both Anglo and Latino contexts
- Increasing evangelism efforts among and alongside existing Latino ministries

*Embracing African Descent Ministries*

- Reaching Afro-Caribbean and African American communities
- Focusing on young families, young adults, youth, and children

*To actualize this vision, we need to:*

- Educate on approaches for these focused areas
- Identify pilot congregations to test and learn from effective models.
- Promote the many different cultures in our communities
- Prioritize service and justice initiatives
- Develop homegrown leaders
- Appeal to external leaders

Structurally, a realigned but similar staff configuration will position us for success, including a new role focused on environmental resilience given Florida's increasing storm impacts. This progressive vision expands our contextual approaches to make disciples among varied cultural and intergenerational communities.

Words of Gratitude

Volunteers (Julie Noya, coordinator)

Committee Members

Guest Speaker (Rev. Dr. Rafael Malpica from LSTC)

ELCA Representative (Maryann Olson from LDR)

Thank you, Synod Council, for your many hours of work and dedication; for your readiness in hours of distress, for the countless committee meetings, and your valuable contribution to the wellbeing of our network. Please stand as we recognize your hard labor. Thank you!

Synod Staff ... In the picture you can see the 2 DEMs that left us but worked for a good portion of this year, and our brand new DEMs whom we welcome today. I want to thank all the amazing staff of the Florida Bahamas Synod. Day in and day out they handle countless situations that help us do ministry together. From synod assembly to finding pastors, to dealing with conflict, disaster relief, QuickBooks training, leadership development, church resourcing, and so much

more. If you are synod staff and are in the house, please stand so we can recognize all you do!  
Thank you, thank you, thank you!

#### RECEPTION OF THE COMMUNITY CHURCH AT BABCOCK RANCH

Bishop Suárez included in his report, the following: One of the privileges of our assembly is to welcome new congregations. This afternoon we are privileged to welcome The Community Church which has made application for membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Will members of The Community Church please come forward?

The Community Church at Babcock Ranch was started in September of 2020. They are a community that believes in the radical grace and hospitality of God. The Community Church's mission is to follow Jesus Christ in the world and to lead with love. They are living out the vision to grow in love for Jesus Christ through worship, life-long learning, service to their neighbors, development of spiritual gifts, and in caring for creation. And they value biblical study, discipleship, inclusion, encouragement, sustainability, innovation, stewardship, and outreach. Our Director for Evangelical Mission at the time, the Rev. Khader El-Yateem, accompanied the congregation during their months of discernment; and on Sunday, April 14, 2024, they voted unanimously to organize as a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. On Thursday, May 30, 2024, the Synod Council of the Florida-Bahamas Synod voted to receive The Community Church as a congregation of the synod and the ELCA.

Since The Community Church has met the requirements for becoming a congregation of the ELCA, I call on Synod Council Vice President, Michel Hilton, to make a motion to receive The Community Church as a congregation in the Florida-Bahamas Synod of the ELCA.

*[At this point Ms. Michele Hilton joined Bishop Suárez on the podium].* My name is Michele Hilton, a member of St. Mark by the Sea Lutheran Church in Palm Coast, and I serve as the vice president of the Synod. On behalf of the Synod Council, it is my honor to move this resolution.

**Be it resolved that the Florida-Bahamas Synod in Assembly receive through acclamation The Community Church as a congregation of the Florida-Bahamas Synod, and be it further,**

**Resolved, that The Community Church join the Caloosa Conference of the Florida-Bahamas Synod, and be it finally,**

**Resolved, that the Florida-Bahamas Synod Bishop promptly report reception of The Community Church into the Florida-Bahamas Synod to the ELCA Secretary for addition into the ELCA roster of congregations.**

#### **VOTED**

**SA24.05.02 As this resolution came from the synod council, it did not require a second. Bishop Suárez called for a vote by show of hands, and declared that the resolution was adopted as presented.**

Bishop then led the assembly in prayer: Almighty God, your Holy Spirit equips the church with a rich variety of gifts. We give you thanks for the distinct gifts of The Community Church, and we ask your blessing upon them as they seek your will and advance the work of the gospel. Help us to see how we can best be in partnership with one another and bring forth rich fruit from our ministries. In all that we do, grant that we may use your gifts to bear witness to Christ in lives that are built on faith and love, so that the world may see in us the unity and mutual care that is your will for all people, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

## CHURCHWIDE REPORT

Maryn Olson, Director of Lutheran Disaster Response, the humanitarian assistance ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), delivered the Churchwide Report.

## REPORT FROM REFERENCE & COUNSEL

Rev. Walt Lichtenberger reported on behalf of the Reference and Counsel Committee that they had received two Resolutions. The first is entitled “Annual Synod Spending Plan” which would be presented in Plenary Session 2, during the Treasurer’s report.

The second resolution numbered 24-02, titled Palestinian Advocacy and Dismantling Christian Zionism in our Churches had been posted on the assembly website since May 17th for review. Rev. Lichtenberger then read the resolved clauses, and on behalf of the committee presented the resolution to be considered.

The resolution reads as follows:

### **Resolution 24-02 Palestinian Advocacy and Dismantling Christian Zionism in our Churches.**

**Whereas, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 2005 established the initiative, “Peace Not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land” (recently renamed “SUMUD: for Justice in Palestine and Israel”); and**

**Whereas, The ELCA, in its Social Statement For Peace in God’s World, has committed to serve as “a reconciling presence” and to promote respect for human rights, particularly for “groups most susceptible to violations, especially all minorities, women, and children”; and**

**Whereas, The ELCA is in relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL); and**

**Whereas, The ELCA Presiding Bishop, Elizabeth Eaton, on October 13, 2023 denounced the attacks and hostage-taking on October 7, 2023, by Hamas and has denounced the subsequent disproportionate death toll among Palestinian civilians; as reported by the United Nations, more than thirty-four thousand civilians have been killed in Gaza since October 7, 2023; <https://elca.org/News-and-Events/8207>; therefore**

**Be it Resolved, The Florida Bahamas Synod in Assembly laments both the destruction of Gaza’s infrastructure, housing, schools and universities, hospitals, and places of worship, and the millions of people who are experiencing displacement, facing malnutrition, and starvation, as a result primarily of Israel’s continuing air strikes and blocking entry of humanitarian aid trucks; and**

**Be it further Resolved, That individuals and congregations of the Florida Bahamas Synod are recommended to:**

**Become informed about the SUMUD initiative of the ELCA: <http://elca.org/sumud>; and**

**Devote at least 3 hours of adult education time or special events within the next three months to learn more about the conflict and occupation, Christian Zionism<sup>4</sup>, and its effects using books, articles video or online ELCA approved resources provided by [Palestineportal.org](http://Palestineportal.org) or SUMUD; and**

**Become informed that there are Christians and Christian Churches in Gaza; and**

**Use ELCA, SUMUD, Kairos Document and other recommended resources to learn about the history of the region and current causes for conflict; and**

**Consider signing up for ELCA monthly Advocacy Alerts - “Middle East Network” at <http://elca.org/sumud>; and**

**Pray for Palestinians and Israelis who work to create a future of justice, equality, reconciliation, and peace for all in both communities; and**

**Stand in solidarity with all who are suffering in Palestine and Israel and support the work of the ELCJHL (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land), LWF (Lutheran World Federation), ALAMEH (Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage), in bringing comfort, support, accountability, and relief.**

Submitted by: The Congregation Council of St. Michael Evangelical Lutheran Church, Wellington, Florida.

Discussion followed.

Rev. Bill Weicher proposed an amendment as follows:

In the last Resolved, striking the words “Stand in solidarity...” and add “Pray for all in both communities, and denounce the following Palestinian groups that have been involved in politically motivated violence to include the Palestinian Liberation organization (PLO), Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC), The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Organizations, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Abu Nidal Organization, the Palestine Islamic Jihad, and Hamas.”

## **VOTED**

**SA24.05.03** After ten minutes of discussion, Bishop Suárez ended debate, called for a vote by show of hands, and declared that the amendment was lost.

## **VOTED**

**SA24.05.04** Bishop Suárez then declared that the original resolution was before the assembly. Discussion followed. At the conclusion of the debate, Mr. Tom O'Reilly led the assembly in prayer. Bishop Suárez then called for a vote by show of hands and declared that the resolution was adopted.

## **GENERAL BALLOT #1**

Ms. Raeann Purcell, representing the Elections Committee, shared how the first ballot would be taken, following which the Assembly was led in prayer by Mr. George Algozzina. Subsequently, electronic Ballot #1 was taken.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Following announcements and prayer, Bishop declared the Assembly adjourned until 8:00am the next day.

## **Plenary # 2**

**June 1, 2024**

The session opened at 8:00am, with prayer led by Dcn. Michelle, Chaplain to the Assembly.

## **CREDENTIALS REPORT**

Rev. Eric Olsen shared the Credentials Report as follows:

Rostered voting members: 158

Lay voting members: 223

Total voting members: 381 members

Quorum: 191 members.

By direction of the Credentials Committee, Rev. Olsen then moved that the roll submitted be the official roll for this Assembly. As there was no discussion, and no objection, Bishop Suárez called for a vote by show of hands, and declared that the roll was adopted unanimously.

## **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

Keynote Speaker, Rev. Rafael Malpica Padilla, the John Damm Chair on Leadership and Director for the Latine Ministry and Theology Program at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, delivered the first part of his keynote address, titled "So, who is showing up in our dreams?"



## REPORT ON GENERAL BALLOT #1

Ms. Raeann Purcell, representing the Elections Committee, shared the results of the unopposed positions as follows:

### Treasurer

Four-year term

Any district, Layperson or Rostered Minister, male or female

Tracy Moffatt

### Synod Council

Three-year term

Any district

Young Adult

Aged 18-30, Layperson or Rostered Minister, male or female

Sophia Thomas

Any district

Youth

High School Student aged 15-17, male or female

Rico Gordon

### Consultation Committee

One-year term

Layperson, female

Pam Fairfax

Rostered Minister, male

Rev. Andreas Stein

Rostered Minister, female

Rev. Lisa Burbank

### Discipline Committee

Six-year term

Layperson, male

Ralph Schofield

Layperson female

Kristina Blanche

Rostered Minister male

Rev. John David Bryant

2025 Churchwide Assembly Voting Member

Southeast Mission District

Layperson, female

Sue Hall

Layperson, male

George Algozzina

Any district

Youth

High School Student aged 15-17, male or female

Rico Gordon

Any district

Young Adult

Aged 18-30, Layperson or Rostered Minister, male or female

Sophia Thomas

**VOTED**

**SA24.05.04 Bishop Suárez declared the aforementioned persons elected.**

Ms. Purcell then shared the results of General Ballot # 1 as follows:

Synod Council

Three-year term

Southwest Mission District

Layperson, female

Legal votes cast: 284    Illegal ballots: 4    Votes need to elect: 143

Cindy Kamp 150 (elected)

Louise Hauser 134

North Mission District

Rostered Minister, male or female

Legal votes cast: 285    Illegal ballots: 4    Votes need to elect: 143

Rev. Trixie Richter 159 (elected)

Rev. Harry Schenkel 85

Rev. Thomas Lyberg 41

Southeast Mission District

Layperson, male

Legal votes cast: 283    Illegal ballots: 4    Votes need to elect: 142

Richard Eggert 167 (elected)

Brian Kaveh 116

Consultation Committee

One-year term

Layperson, male

Legal votes cast: 279    Illegal ballots: 4    Votes need to elect: 140

Steven Eichorn 166 (elected)

Paul Hartfiel 113

Discipline Committee

Six-year term

Rostered Minister, female

Legal votes cast: 269    Illegal ballots: 4    Votes need to elect: 135

Rev. Carol Gates 142 (elected)

Rev. Joyce Guillford 127

2025 Churchwide Assembly Voting Member

North Mission District

Rostered Minister, female

Legal votes cast: 284    Illegal ballots: 4    Votes need to elect: 143

Rev. Kari Niedermaier 150 (elected)

Rev. Julie Schuessler Peralta 77

Rev. Melinda Plumley 57

Southeast Mission District

Rostered Minister, male

Legal votes cast: 272    Illegal ballots: 4    Votes need to elect: 137

Rev. Chad Fair 142 (elected)

Rev. Paul Amlin 130

Southwest Mission District

Layperson, female

Legal votes cast: 279    Illegal ballots: 4    Votes need to elect: 140

Rebecca Bass 147 (elected)

Cindy Kamp 132

Southwest Mission District

Rostered Minister, female

Legal votes cast: 274    Illegal ballots: 4    Votes need to elect: 138

Rev. Jennifer Moore 152 (elected)

Lois Sorensen 122

**VOTED**

**SA24.05.05    Bishop Suárez declared each of the aforementioned persons elected.**

## 2025 Churchwide Assembly Voting Member

North Mission District

Layperson, male

Legal votes cast: 279    Illegal ballots: 4    Votes need to elect: 140

Jose Lopez 116 (runoff)

Steven Beumer 105

Dwane Tyson 58

Bishop Suárez declared a runoff between Jose Lopez and Steve Beumer.

## VICE-PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Ms. Michele Hilton delivered her report as Vice-President, as follows:

I am Michele Hilton, the Vice President of your Synod Council, now serving the third year of my first four-year term.

It has been a year of transition for us all serving you. On behalf of the Synod Council, we want to thank especially Pastor Rob Rose and Pastor Nicole Eastwood, who shouldered a lot of extra work, all while Pastor Nicole was herself ‘new.’ They were both agents of calm and peace and we appreciate their work on our behalf. We also need to thank all of the office staff who also had more responsibilities. Everyone pitched in and worked without complaints...well, maybe there were a few. At any rate, we are feeling blessed to be walking forward fully staffed and we are anxious to see what the Holy Spirit has in mind for us now.

Now if you’ve been to this Assembly in the last couple of years you have heard me share that the two main things the VP has to do, constitutionally: Preside over Council meetings and report to each Assembly what the Council has been doing since we last met. I am happy to say, if you don’t already know, that Highlights of our Synod Council meetings are now posted on the Synod website, as was announced in E-Spirit, our weekly digital newsletter. If you are not receiving E-spirit, please sign up! As leaders of this synod, you need to be in the know.

I want to let you know that in March the VPs from all over the ELCA met in Chicago, at what we fondly call, ‘The Mothership.’ It was the first time since pre-Covid, almost 5 years, since we had been able to meet in person, and it was an amazing time of sharing information, problems, processes and getting updates from all the major departments of the churchwide organization. The VPs actually meet every month by Zoom, and all of this is to get as much of the ‘business’ of the synod out of the way so we can focus on ministry. This type of collaboration is exactly what Bp. Eaton talks about when she says we are Lutheran, We are Church, We are Church Together, we are Church Together for the Sake of the world.

While I preside over the Synod Council, it is good to remind all of us that this Assembly, made up of all of us voting members, is the highest governing authority in the Synod. When the ELCA was formed, it was agreed that all three expressions of our Church would govern themselves according to interdependent Constitutions of the churchwide organization, the synods and the

congregations. Each Congregation Council, Synod Council and the Churchwide Council has a fiduciary duty to adhere to and carry out the requirements of their Constitutions. Each Assembly does important work and this afternoon this Assembly will hear an appeal of a Synod Council decision. This is part of a process that the Bishop will explain and lead us through later this morning; part of our work as an Assembly. It is not listed on the agenda, and I just wanted to give you a heads up that we expect that to happen around noon.

So now that we have the business of the Synod Council shared with you, let me talk to you about a ministry that is near and dear to my heart, the School of Lay Ministry, which I chair. Some exciting stuff is going on there. The Holy Spirit is moving and the waters are getting stirred up. We now have a robust contingent of students doing self-study through our on-line program and we have in-person sites in Sarasota and Jacksonville. Additionally, in collaboration with the Global Mission Table and Pr Katie Carroll and Rev Dr Carolyn Schneider in Guyana, we are sharing our resources, so that the laity in Surinam and Guyana can be formed, because they have figured out that the only way they can care for their 14 congregations with just four rostered ministers is with a strong, faith formed laity!

But we need more students. Yes, we have graduated more than 225, but that is a tiny percentage of our synod membership! We need more Instructors, and we need more sites! We will open a site with as few as three people! Rostered Leaders, the time commitment as Instructors for each course is five short weeks and your gifts!

Now for the students we need! Please stand up if you are a School of Lay Ministry or Diakonia graduate or student. Please stand up if you have been or are an instructor for the School of Lay Ministry or Diakonia. People sitting, look around you. Ask these people about the program; ask them if it changed them. People standing, you need to tap someone on the shoulder and nudge them to consider this program for themselves. Jesus said Go! Make disciples! That doesn't sound like a question to me!

Why is this important? Because We don't have enough people in our seminaries to fill the vacancies in our congregations; just ask Pastor Nicole! But, in the past 10 years many of the folks who did go into seminary from Florida were Diakonia graduates. It is one way for people to discern and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. And with the vacancies on the roster; with not enough clergy for every congregation; strong lay people with a grounded formation in being Christian and Lutheran will be vital for our message of Grace – a message that the world wants to hear and needs to hear.

I want to leave you with some words from Andy Stanley and then some for me, from the title of one of Andy's Bible Studies: Once Upon a Time, There Was a Version of our Faith That Was Irresistible. Now From me: In this day and time, as ELCA Lutherans, we need to share our irresistible version of faith; and I PRAY you will do that with me.

Thank you and God Bless!

## REFERENCE AND COUNSEL REPORT

Rev. Walt Lichtenberger reported on behalf of the Reference and Counsel Committee that they had no other business to present to the assembly, and he thanked the committee for their labors over the previous several weeks.

## RECOGNITION OF YOUTH VOTING MEMBERS

Bishop Suárez recognized those in attendance who serve a youth ministers, youth worker, youth volunteer, confirmation teacher, or Sunday school teacher. He also recognized the youth voting members of the assembly; and the assembly volunteer coordinator, Julie Noya.

## MISSION SUPPORT RECOGNITION

Bishop Suárez announced that if a voting member's name tag has a ribbon with the words "All Star" it means their congregation donated 100% of its mission support. If a name tag has a ribbon on it that says "Superstar" their congregation went above 100% of their pledge for mission support.

Bishop Suárez then recognized the top five congregations with the highest amount of Mission Support in 2023: Hope, The Villages; Emmanuel, Venice; Emmanuel, Naples; St Armands Key, Sarasota; and Prince of Peace, Largo.

Bishop Suárez then recognized the following congregations that grew their Mission Support between 2022 and 2023 by at least 20%:

From 20-49% increase: Christ the King, Miami; St Paul, Sarasota; Lord of Life Latino, Miami; St John, Jacksonville; Trinity, New Smyrna Beach; St Philip, Mt Dora; Reformation, Lakeland; Our Saviour, Ocala; Grace, Lakeland; Christ, Ft Lauderdale; Resurrection House, Dade City; Messiah, Cape Coral; The Community Church, ELCA, Babcock Ranch; Lord of Life, Miami; and St Mark, Dunedin.

From 50 – 99% increase: Ascension, Ocala; Grace Alone, Ft Lauderdale; Memorial, St Augustine; Trinity, Pembroke Pines; and Hope, Satsuma.

With 100% increase from 2022 to 2023: Our Saviour, The Bahamas; Our Lady of Guadalupe, Ft Lauderdale; and St Stephen Latino Mission, Pompano.

Over 100% increase between 2022 and 2023: Living Lord, Vero Beach; Spirit of Life, Jacksonville; Trinity, Kissimmee; St Michael, Wellington; The Hearth, Orlando; Holy Cross, Spring Hill; Faith Latino Mission, Lehigh; Lord of the Seas, Big Pine Key; Grace, Ormond Beach; and St Paul, Pensacola.

## TREASURER'S REPORT

Mr. Tom O'Reilly presented the Treasurer's Report, directing the Assembly to data previously shared. Tom also reported, "Every year the transactions of the synod are audited by an outside auditing company. I'm pleased to share with you that our audit this year for the year that ended in January of 2024 was a clean audit. We want to make sure that all of our transactions are beyond

reproach. And we're thankful for the dedication of both the staff and the volunteers.” Mr. Tom O’Reilly gave his report as follows and presented the revised spending plans for Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026.

Congregational Giving: \$ 1,996,854  
 Other Income \$492,050  
 Total \$ 2,488,904

Operating Income  
 \$ 2,488,904  
 Operating Expense  
 \$ 2,604,819  
 Deficit -\$ 115,915

Unrestricted Funds  
 Revised Spending Plan, Fiscal Year End - Jan 31, 2025

Income	
Congregational Giving	\$ 1,980,289
Other Income	\$ 675,592
Total Unrestricted Income	\$ 2,655,881
Expense	
Churchwide Mission Support [46%]	\$ 910,933
Other Expense	\$ 1,744,948
Total Unrestricted Expense	\$ 2,655,881

Unrestricted Funds  
 Proposed Spending Plan, Fiscal Year End - Jan 31, 2026

Income	
Congregational Giving	\$ 1,980,289
Other Income	\$ 650,592
Total Unrestricted Income	\$ 2,655,881
Expense	
Churchwide Mission Support [46%]	\$ 910,933
Other Expense	\$ 1,744,948
Total Unrestricted Expense	\$ 2,655,881

On behalf of the Synod Council, the treasurer moved the adoption of the Spending Plan for Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026 as follows:

**Resolution 24-1**  
**Resolution to approve the Revised Year End January 31, 2025**  
**and Proposed Year End January 31, 2026**  
**Ministry Spending Plans**

**Whereas, the previously approved spending plan for fiscal year-end January 31, 2025 and a proposed spending plan for fiscal year end January 31, 2026, was submitted to the Synod Council for review and approval; and**

**Whereas, the Synod Council has approved this revised spending plan for the year-end January 31, 2025, anticipating \$1,980,289 in unrestricted congregational giving, other unrestricted income of \$675,592 for an income total of \$2,655,881; and**

**Whereas, the revised January 31, 2025, year-end spending plan supports the ministries of the Synod and our regional partners including a covenant of 46%, representing congregational giving of \$910,933 for churchwide ministries and other unrestricted expense of \$1,744,948 for total unrestricted expenses of \$2,655,881; and**

**Whereas, the Synod Council has approved this proposed spending plan for the year- end January 31, 2026, anticipating \$1,980,289 in unrestricted congregational giving, other unrestricted income of \$675,592 for total unrestricted income of \$2,655,881 and**

**Whereas, the proposed January 31, 2026, year-end spending plan supports the ministries of the Synod and our regional partners including a covenant of 46%, representing congregational giving of \$910,933 for churchwide ministries and other unrestricted expense of \$1,744,948 for total unrestricted expenses of \$2,655,881; now therefore be it;**

**Resolved, that the Ministry Spending Plan for year-end January 31, 2025, of \$2,655,881 and the proposed Ministry Spending Plan for year-end January 31, 2026, \$2,655,881, columns “D” and “E” in the Ministry Spending Plan summary, respectively, be adopted as presented.**

**VOTED**

**SA24.05.06 As there were no question nor discussion, Bishop Suárez called for a vote by show of hands, and declared that the resolution was adopted as presented.**

Bishop Suárez thanked Tom O’Reilly for his years of service as treasurer which concluded at this assembly. He thanked him also for his “wise counsel, and gracious and giving heart.”



## **GENERAL BALLOT #2**

Bishop Suárez announced that Jose Lopez who ran on Ballot #1 for the position of 2025 Churchwide Assembly Voting Member, North Mission District, Layperson, male, was ineligible as he is from the Southeast Mission District. Therefore, the names of the two other nominees, Steve Beumer and Dwane Tyson, would appear on Ballot #2.

**The assembly was led in prayer. Subsequently, electronic Ballot #2 was taken as follows:**

### 2025 Churchwide Assembly Voting Member

North Mission District

Layperson, male

Steven Beumer

Dwane Tyson

## **REPORT ON GENERAL BALLOTT #2**

Following a thirty-minute refreshment break, Ms. Raeann Purcell, representing the Elections Committee, shared the result of Ballot #2 as follows:

### 2025 Churchwide Assembly Voting Member

North Mission District

Layperson, male

**Legal votes cast: 311    Illegal ballots: 2    Votes need to elect: 156**

Steven Beumer 198 (elected)

Dwane Tyson 113

## **VOTED**

**SA24.05.07    Bishop Suárez declared Steve Beumer elected.**

## **RECOGNITION OF ORDINATION ANNIVERSARIES**

**Bishop Suárez stated,** “I want the assembly to recognize some of the finest servants in the synod. The following pastors and ELCA deacons have accomplished much over the years and we want to recognize their ordination anniversaries of 25 years or more”:

25

Rev. Scott Hagen

Rev. Ida Iverson

Rev. Jean-Pierre Marc-Charles

Deacon Sharon O’Brien

Rev. Jeffrey Unga

30

Rev. Annette Crickenberger

Rev. Jaime Dubón

Rev. M. Joe Glymph

Rev. Jeffrey Gross

Rev. Earnest Tate

35

Rev. Christopher Gentile  
Rev. Wynemah Hinlicky  
Rev. Christine Hunziker  
Rev. Andre Keeley Sr.  
Rev. Pedro Martin  
Rev. Curt Snare  
Rev. Stephen Thrash  
Rev. William Wiecher

40

Rev. Reginald Hansome Jr.  
Rev. Russell Meyer  
Deacon John Renfroe  
Rev. Robert Schaefer  
Rev. Frank Wagner  
Rev. Steven Wigdahl

45

Rev. David Dangerfield  
Rev. Richard Dow  
Rev. Jon Hugus III  
Rev. Jon Keiser  
Rev. William Knott  
Rev. Dennis Schmidt  
Rev. Paul Skatrud-Mickelson  
Rev. Dale Young

50

Rev. Terry Danger  
Rev. Peter Fauerbach  
Rev. Kerry Hinkley  
Rev. Barry Huntman  
Rev. Thomas Osterfield  
Rev. Robert Salzgeber  
Rev. Wayne Schmidt Jr.

55

Rev. Robert Berger  
Rev. Michael Breznen  
Rev. Lenier Gallardo  
Rev. John Hagedorn Jr.  
Rev. Frank Livingston  
Rev. Timothy Nehls  
Rev. John Spittal

Rev. Peter Stiller  
Rev. Ronald Weagley  
Rev. Peter Zieg

60

Rev. Richard Claybaker  
Rev. Donald Fagerberg  
Rev. Keith Grill  
Rev. Richard Hafer  
Rev. Donald Hillerich  
Rev. Arnold Hilpert  
Rev. Marcus Pera  
Rev. Walter Schuman

65

Rev. Clement Rader  
Rev. Warren Schave

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Keynote Speaker, Rev. Rafael Malpica Padilla, the John Damm Chair on Leadership and Director for the Latine Ministry and Theology Program at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, delivered the second part of his keynote address, titled “So, who is showing up in our dreams?”

## IMMANUEL, MIAMI: APPEAL OF SYNOD COUNCIL DECISION TO PLACE IMMANUEL UNDER SYNOD PRESERVATION

Bishop Suárez reminded assembly that they are the highest legislative body in the synod, and it is in that role the next agenda item will be engaged. Bishop reminded all that as the chair of the assembly he must remain neutral, and he therefore declined to describe the issue at hand. He assured the assembly that a full explanation would be given once all were present. A ten-minute standing break was then called, after which Bishop Suárez called to podium the chair of Reference and Counsel Committee, Rev. Walt Lichtenberger, who delivered the following report: “On April 28, 2024, the Florida-Bahamas Synod Council placed the Immanuel congregation of Miami under synod preservation in accordance with ¶S13.24. of the Synod Constitution. To be under synod preservation means the Synod Council takes charge and control of the congregation’s operations and property to hold, manage, and convey the same on behalf of this synod. In accordance with a section of that article, the congregation has appealed this action. The committee presents the following appeal without recommendation. Immanuel Lutheran, Miami, appeals the decision of the Florida-Bahamas Synod Council to place the Immanuel congregation under synod preservation.”

Bishop Suárez then stated that the decision of the Florida-Bahamas Synod Council to place Immanuel, Miami, under synod preservation is appealed by Ms. Nevada Alba. The chair assumed the motion and placed the question before the assembly was whether the decision of the synod council should be upheld. Upholding the decision means that synod preservation of the

Immanuel congregation will remain in place. If the decision is not upheld, synod preservation of Immanuel will immediately end. The process of appeal will have four steps:

The first will be the presentation by Immanuel's congregational members in good standing or Immanuel's rostered leader on why the synod preservation decision by the synod council should not be upheld. This will be done via Zoom at their request. The time allotted for this is 10 minutes.

The second step will be a presentation by Ms. Michele Hilton, Vice President of the Florida Bahamas Synod, on why the synod preservation decision by the synod council should be upheld. The time allotted for this is 10 minutes.

The third step will be the assembly's debate and/or questions related to the appeal. Questions may be asked of either the Immanuel or synod council delegation. The time allotted for this is 10 minutes.

The last step will be the voting. A simple majority is needed to uphold the decision of the synod council.

Bishop Suárez invited the delegation from Immanuel to the screen for their presentation and reminded them that they had ten minutes to present their case. The sole speaker from Immanuel was Ms. Nevada Alba, treasurer of the congregation. Michele Hilton, Vice President of the Florida Bahamas Synod then spoke on behalf of the synod council.

Bishop Suárez then opened the appeal for debate or clarifying questions under the terms of assembly's standing rules, which gave each speaker one minute. Bishop Suárez informed the assembly that those who wished to speak in support of upholding the decision of the synod council to place Immanuel under synod preservation, were to hold a green card when speaking; while those speaking to oppose upholding the decision of the Synod Council to place Immanuel under synod preservation should hold a red card. If someone wished to raise a point of order, they were to hold a white card. When coming to the microphone, speakers were to state their name and the congregation to which they belong.

Discussion then followed. At one point a point of order was raised which asked if Bishop Suárez could address the issue at hand. After consulting with the parliamentarian, Bishop Suárez vacated the chair for the remainder of the appeal. Ms. Michele Hilton, Synod Vice President, then assumed the chair. Bishop Suárez spoke for one minute.

Chair Michele Hilton stated that the ten minutes allowed for debate under the standing rules had been reached and that the assembly would move to a vote. The assembly then entered into a time of prayer. Chair Hilton reiterated that raising a green card was a vote to keep the congregation under synod preservation, and that raising a red was a vote to release the congregation from synod preservation.

## **VOTED**

**SA24.05.08 Chair Hilton declared that, with only one nay vote, the ayes had it; that the decision of the synod council was upheld, and that Immanuel, Miami, remained under synod preservation.**

Ms. Hilton then vacated the chair, which Bishop Suárez assumed. Bishop thanked the assembly for the manner in which they dealt with this difficult situation. He stated, “Please know that these decisions aren’t lightly made. My commitment to you, as your bishop, is to come alongside of you and help you make disciples, have healthy congregations, and share the love of Christ with our communities.”

## **ADJORNMENT**

Following announcements, Bishop Suárez declared the Assembly adjourned until 8:30am the following day.

### **Plenary # 3**

**June 2, 2024**

The session opened at 8:30am, with prayer led by Dcn. Michelle Mehan, Chaplain to the Assembly.

## **CREDENTIALS REPORT**

Rev. Eric Olsen shared the Credentials Report as follows:

Rostered voting members: 161

Lay voting members: 225

Total: 386 members

Quorum: 193 members.

By direction of the Credentials Committee, Rev. Olsen then moved that the roll submitted be the official roll for this Assembly. As there was no discussion, and no objection, Bishop Suárez called for a vote by show of hands, and declared that the roll was adopted unanimously.

## **REPORT ON SERVICE PROJECT**

Bishop Suárez stated that he was once again amazed at what we can do when we serve our neighbors because of the love of Christ. The service project for this Assembly served the Orlando Union Rescue Mission. Tina Fritz reported that cash and gift card donations of approximately \$2540 have been received, along with approximately 9000lbs. of food.

## **CHAPLAIN RECOGNITION**

Bishop also recognized others who impact our communities in so many different ways: chaplains including hospital chaplains, police chaplains, hospice chaplains, military chaplains, community chaplains, and so forth. Bishop then asked serving and retired chaplains to stand and be recognized by the Assembly.

## CONGREGATION ANNIVERSARIES

Michele Hilton, Synod Vice-President, recognized the following congregation anniversaries, and asked that God may continue to bless their ministries in the communities where they are located.

25 years

Hope, Daytona Beach

Hope, The Villages

Spirit of Joy, Orlando

35 years

Reformation, Lakeland

40 years

Christ Our Redeemer, Temple Terrace

Joy, Ocala

Joy, Palm Bay

Lamb of God, Estero

45 years

All Saints, Port Orange

Emmaus, Orange City

Lutheran Church of the Palms, Palm Harbor

Messiah, Cape Coral

Our Saviour, Ocala

Redeemer, Sun City Center

50 years

Jacksonville Campus Ministry

Living Waters, North Port

Shepherd of the Glades, Naples

St. Mark by the Sea, Palm Coast

St. Stephen, Longwood

60 years

Prince of Peace, Fernandina Beach

St. Stephen, Pompano Beach

65 years

Ascension, Indian Harbour Beach

Atonement, Sebring

Gloria Dei, Holmes Beach

Luther Memorial, Hollywood

Reformation, Orlando

Resurrection, Avon Park

St. Timothy, Miami Springs

70 years  
St. John, Winter Park  
St. Paul's, Clearwater  
Trinity, New Smyrna Beach

75 years  
Grace, Miami Springs

100 years  
Memorial, St. Augustine

105 Years  
Zion, Groveland

115 years  
Grace, Lakeland

140 years  
Ebenezer, Pierson

165 years  
Bethlehem, Lake City

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Bishop Suárez thanked his staff, the members of Synod Council for their support and their service throughout the year and at this Assembly. He also thanked the voting members of the Assembly for their participation.

Bishop stated that the 2025 Assembly will be held at the Embassy Suites, Kissimmee, from June 12-14, 2025.

Bishop Suárez encouraged voting members to complete the Assembly Survey which they shall receive in due course.

Bishop Suárez declared plenary session #3 closed at 8:56am. A worship service followed which included the installation of those elected during the Assembly and the installation of the Camp Counselors of Luther Springs, at the conclusion of which the Synod Assembly was declared closed.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Kenneth C Blyth, Secretary