

***Minutes of the 2021 Assembly  
Of the  
Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod of the ELCA***

**Date: May 21-22, 2021**  
**Venue: Tree of Life Lutheran Church, Conroe Texas**

**Minutes**

The 43rd Assembly of the TX-LA Gulf Coast Synod was called to order by President Bishop Michael Rinehart and Vice President Robert Rivera. The Assembly was conducted electronically via the Whova application.

We adopted the Credential Committee's Report to be the official roll of the voting members of this assembly.

We approved the Consent Agenda, which included the Standing Rules and the Assembly Agenda.

We approved the minutes of the last Assembly.

We had nominations for eight Synod Council positions and eight positions each on the Discipline and Consultation Committees, and 7 for Churchwide Assembly. All of the Council nominees and Committee nominees were running unopposed.

Our Central African Republic (CAR) companion Synod sent video report from President/Bishop Joseph Ngoe and Vice President Rachel Dumbaye. This was followed by a video report from Carolyn Jacobs, chair of our CAR team.

We viewed a video from the ELCA Global Response on the Covid pandemic.

Bishop Mike then gave us his report. Much has happened since the last Assembly: the Covid pandemic, the freeze of 2021, hurricanes, and flooding. But together the Synod provided mutual support that allowed us to help others in need. More people tuned in to Easter services remotely than attended in person in many years past. People were hungry to hear Gospels and were looking for community, even by Zoom. While offerings were down 7.5% overall, some congregations had increased giving. We relearned that we can be church without buildings, that what works in the major cities is different that works in smaller towns. We learned to be creative and to try different things to find what works best for each congregation. The Bishop closed with a video celebrating the pastors and deacons who have retired since the last Assembly.

Our first keynote speaker was Deacon Peggy Hahn, executive director of LEAD. She noted that there are three windows to through which to view the future:

- Through a cherished past, which is a church living in the rearview mirror. But that is not enough for those who wish to follow Jesus. We become the resistance – resisting grief and loss of things held dear
- Through a scarcity of resources, which is a church with a fear of change. Traditions are our greatest resources, but must change as the world changes. Buildings can be repurposed to serve the community.
- Through an unknown future, focusing on those not involved yet as a focus on just member is not enough. We need to accept that if we don't know failure that we won't know success.

Peggy then lead the Assembly through two breakout sessions where Assembly members discussed the potential of the digital world and how God meets us in the liminal space between the past and the future.

After viewing video presentations by Portico and the Mission Investment Fund, Assembly members voted, and the Election Committee reported that all the nominees for Synod Council, Consultation and Discipline Committees members, and delegates to the General Assembly were elected.

After the Assembly viewed video updates from the Live On Foundation and the Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest, Tom Wildrick presented the audit results to the Assembly and moved the Assembly adopt that audit. The motion was passed.

Then Tom reviewed the 2021 financial results and presented the 2022 budget. Tom noted that since there was no 2020 Assembly, the Synod Council approved the 2021 budget.

Next the Assembly saw videos from Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and the ELCA Disaster Response. After that Deacon Peggy Hahn gave a video report on LEAD activities.

The second day of the Assembly began with a devotion followed by Matt Kindsvatter, Lutherhill Executive Director who reported that Lutherhill is now open for campers 6 – 13, and that the camp has the opportunity to buy 70 acres adjacent to the current property.

Rev. Dr. Tracey Breashers Schultz offered her first impressions of the call process and candidacy, followed by a report recognizing those clergy new to the Synod and the seminary graduates. She then presented the 2022 compensation guidelines. The Assembly approved the 2022 compensation guidelines.

Next the Assembly viewed videos showing Rostered Minister anniversaries and Congregational anniversaries. Following that was a report and video presentation by Brother Chris Markert on the Synod's Disaster Response, Campus Ministries, generosity/stewardship, and hospitality. Included was a report from Treehouse Ministries, serving Texas A&M and Blinn college.

The 2022 budget was approved.

Next was a video from our Presiding Bishop, Elizabeth Eaton. After that was a presentation by Rev. Lamont Anthony Wells, Program Director for LuMin/Campus ministry. He is also National President of the African Descent Lutheran Association.

Pete Reuss, GSB Fundraising, joined the Assembly to present an overview of the Stewardship for All Seasons program that is being done with the Synod and is available to all congregations in the Synod. The program cost is shared by the Synod and each participating congregation.

The final keynote speaker was Rev. Dr. Kimberly Wagner, assistant professor of homiletics at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, who talked about the traumatic effects of the pandemic on clergy and congregations. She that a traumatic event is a single point in time, but trauma is ongoing. Impacts of trauma include a crisis of time (flashbacks) and a crisis of coherence (the world doesn't feel safe/meaningful/comprehensible). These impacts result in a loss of the sense of self, community, and faith. Clergy need to recognize that they are participating in the trauma too, be truthful about what is happening, and be honest with fears and brokenness, but to hold out hope.

We closed the Liturgy for the Closing of an Assembly.

Respectfully submitted:

Paul Antolik  
Synod Secretary