

**TEXAS-LOUISIANA GULF COAST SYNOD
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING**

Date of Meeting: January 9th, 2026

Venue: Lutherhill Retreat Center, 3782 Luther Hill Rd, La Grange, TX 78945

Attendees: Bishop Tracey Breashears-Schultz, Kathy Patrick, Caleb Parks, Lori von Heyking, Deacon Brandi Painter, Lucky Sahualla, Diane White, Patrick Otterstad, Rev. Ariel Otterstad, Rev. Chon Pugh, Rev. Anthony Chatmann, Rev. Anders Nilsen

Staff: Deacon Aimee Elles, Rev. Cassandra Nagle

Visitors: Rev Liz Hanley

Devotion led by Kathy Patrick.

Actions Taken

1. Approved the Consent Agenda, which included approving past minutes and retirement requests for Deacon Peggy Hahn and Rev. Beth Marie Halvorsen.
 - a. Moved - Chon, Second - Brandi. Motion carried unanimously.
 - b. We note a profound expression of gratitude for the ministry of Deacon Peggy Hahn and the Rev. Beth Marie Halvorsen
2. Appointed Kathy Collins as Interim Synod Treasurer.
 - a. Moved - Anthony, Second - Anders. Motion carried unanimously.
3. Appointed the finance committee of the Synod Council, comprised of Ariel Otterstad, Kathy Collins, Lucky Sahualla, Kathy Patrick, and Liz Hanley
 - a. Moved - Anthony, Second - Chon. Motion carried unanimously.
4. Authorized the Finance Committee to work with the Mission Table to create a set of reports and requirements for Mission Developers to submit to the Synod Council.
 - a. Moved - Chon, Second - Brandi. Motion carried unanimously.

5. Adjourned the Synod Council Retreat..
 - a. Motion - Ariel, Second - Anthony. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion

1. Overview from Bishop's Tour - Bishop Tracey Breashears-Schultz
 - a. Order of Stops: 1) Bayou Conference, 2) North Houston Conference, 3) Central Houston Conference, 4) Colorado River Conference (Largest Gathering), 5) Brazos Valley Conference, 6) Coastal Bay Conference, 7) Southwest Houston Conference
 - b. Averaged 32 attendees at each stop of the tour.
 - c. Three priorities emerged: 1) Connection, 2) Communication, and 3) Compassion
 - d. Connection - Opportunities to connect with the wider church and each other, fostering a deeper sense of community, desire for conference gatherings more often with Lay People, Equipping Lay Leaders and connecting with leadership beyond clergy, connecting people to our denomination and equipping people to speak about our theology, being aware of cultural differences between urban/suburban/rural contexts and seeing the gifts in both.
 - e. Communication - Better communication channels that don't require a dean to push information out to the conference, expand awareness for the current communication methods, usage of other media sources such as video content, use those channels to tout successes across the synod,
 - f. Compassion - Lean into our expansiveness and inclusivity (RIC Synod), utilize our diversity, teach and model how to have difficult conversations in polarized environments, providing pastoral care for our clergy and recognize the unique challenges of their vocation, provide intentional and relational support to congregations in the call process, provide guidance for congregations in times of conflict (especially around disaffiliation), proactively responding to disasters.
2. Financial Report - Synod Staff
 - a. Update provided by Rev. Liz Hanley, who has been helping with the Synod's Finances. There has been a great deal of cleanup required in the transition from In-House Bookkeeping services to Clergy Financial. Due to a coding error, many offerings had been coded incorrectly. There are likely similar errors with how the expenses have been coded.
 - b. Overall Income is doing fairly well.
 - c. Due to these errors, the Synod has been overspending in some of the restricted funds. This results in the overspent funds being drawn from other accounts, and depleting funds intended for those specific purposes.

- d. While some of these expenses can be expected to be reimbursed to the Synod, there remains a shortfall of approximately \$500,000 in the Synod finances.
- e. Highlights a need for better internal controls.
- f. The Synod Council extends its deepest gratitude to Rev. Liz Hanley for her help in reviewing this situation.

3. Discussion of Re/developments and Mission Funding

- a. The following congregations are considered "Missions (* denotes the Synod serves as a fiscal agent and handles payroll for their pastor's salary and benefits):
 - i. San Jose * - Property is owned by the Synod
 - ii. Principe de Paz
 - iii. Santiago
 - iv. St Francis * - Property is owned by the Synod
 - v. First Taiwanese
 - vi. Celebration
 - vii. Ruach
 - viii. Living Mosaic *
 - ix. Bethlehem New Orleans
 - x. Grace New Orleans
 - xi. Lake Livingston
 - xii. Augustana *
- b. There is likely a need to require these missions to submit monthly reports on finances and missional activity.
- c. There is a need to establish a finance committee for the Synod Council.
- d. The internal controls put in place will, at least initially, be the responsibility of the finance committee of the Synod Council.
- e. Synodical Fiscal Agency needs to become conditional on expectations determined by the Finance Committee.
- f. Will also provide resources and opportunities to teach these missions how to meet these expectations.

4. Strategic Planning

a. Connection - Lori, Lucky, Rev. Anders, and Deacon Aimee

i. Key Verse - 1 Corinthians 12

ii. Objectives:

1. Gathering a list of Feeding Ministries to help churches find models and resources
2. Assist Aimee with getting the Lay School started and champion for the Lay School program
3. Build an event for Lay Leadership (separate from the Lay School) as a breakout group for the next Synod Assembly
4. Develop profiles for Mission Congregations to show needs for non-monetary support from other congregations

b. Communication - Caleb, Patrick, Rev. Ariel, and Bishop Tracey

i. Key Verse - Habakkuk 2:2

ii. Objectives:

1. Create a communication structure for how the Synod shares information across its congregations.
2. Develop a content plan that shines a spotlight on the ministries, leaders, and community found within the Synod.

c. Compassion - Rev. Anthony, Rev. Chon, and Rev. Cassandra

i. Key Verse - Mark 6:34

ii. Objectives:

1. Create a diverse team by March 6th that meets conference expectations but also other affinity groups
2. Teach and model how to have difficult conversations - Hold breakout group at Synod Assembly
3. Provide Pastoral Care for Clergy - creating resources such as a list of churches with Stephen Ministry and Grief Groups