



## **Renewed by the Spirit**

2025 Synod Assembly

June 5-7, 2025

### **Thursday, June 5 - Plenary Session 1**

The Central States Synod Assembly began with a land acknowledgment, recognizing the Indigenous people who have called Kansas and Missouri home. We specifically named and honored the Kaw, Kickapoo, and Osage peoples, upon whose ancestral lands we gathered, and acknowledged that the Central States Synod is located on the original and ancestral lands of the Comanche, Kaskaskia, Kiowa, Pawnee, Sioux, and Ute peoples.

Before she officially opened our assembly, Bishop Susan Candea read the synod's welcome statement and offered the following introductions: Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, churchwide representative. Bishops Becca Middeke Conlin (Arkansas-Oklahoma), Scott Johnson (Nebraska), and Sue Briner (Southwestern Texas) from ELCA Region 4, Dr. Laura Crawley, President of Bethany College, Region 4 Candidacy and Leadership Manager, Deacon Shannon Johnson, and Bishop Amy Dafler Meaux from the Episcopal Diocese of West Missouri. Bishop Candea also recognized and thanked synod council officers, Nancy Nagel (Vice President), Scott Schulte (Treasurer), and Chad Langdon (Secretary) and the synod staff Rev. Dave Whetter (Associate to the Bishop), Tim Anderson (Director of Communications), Rich Gates (Synod Administrator), Rev. Donna Simon (Director of Evangelical Ministry), and Rev. Adam Wutka (Director of Lay Ministry).

### **First Ballot -**

We began our assembly in prayer and then Bishop Elizabeth Eaton led us through the first ballot. In Central States Synod the first ballot is ecclesiastical. Any name of a rostered minister of word and sacrament can be put forward on the ballot. Dallas Rakestraw presented our credential report. As ballots were passed out our worship team led us in a prayerful song to help center our hearts and minds. Kay Zeit offered a word of prayer and then the assembly cast their ballot to uplift the name of the next bishop of the Central States Synod. After the ballots were collected the assembly was released into a break before dinner.

## **Opening Worship -**

After breaking bread together, we entered into a time of worship together. Bishop Elizabeth Eaton preached on John 14. Before the close of worship, the results of the first ballot were given. Total votes cast: 284. Total legal votes cast: 283. Number of legal votes needed for election on this ballot (75%): 213.

Donna Simon – 80	Adam Wutka – 2	Janice Kibler – 1
Zac Sturm – 59	Linda Anderson – 1	Ashley Masoni-Huber – 1
Chad Langdon – 52	Aimee Appell – 1	Kristin Neitzel-Woelk – 1
Peter Rehwaldt – 42	Scott Benolkin – 1	Cassandra M Overcash – 1
Dave Whetter – 4	Nadia Bolz-Weber – 1	Michael Peck – 1
Josh Brecht – 3	James Brandt – 1	Jim Peters – 1
Kendra Nolde – 3	Roy Christell – 1	William Peterson – 1
Jill Seagle – 3	Austin English – 1	Amy Stewart – 1
Jon Brudvig – 2	Ryan Fletcher – 1	Jordan Stone – 1
Ethan Feistner – 2	David Frerichs – 1	Gary Teske – 1
Winston Persaud – 2	Ben Fulton – 1	Thomas Wehrman – 1
Delvin Strecker – 2	Dan Hanson – 1	Kathrn Whitney – 1
Sue Tarkka – 2	Michael Kern – 1	Stephen Zeller – 1

Worship concluded with the singing of The Canticle of the Turning, an invitation to look towards how our synod has and continues to change and turn.

## **Friday morning, June 6 – Plenary 2**

Rev. Mandy Todd led us through morning prayer. Bishop Sue Briner offered a reflection on Genesis 1:1-5. Bishop Becca Middeke-Conlin offered a reflection on John 5:2-9. Bishop Scott Johnson offered a reflection on Ephesians 4:11-16.

After worship, we heard from the Right Reverend Amy Dafler Meaux, the Bishop of the Episcopal Dioceses of Western Mo. She brought us greetings and a reminder that the Spirit is moving and God is with us as we elect a new bishop. Dr Laura Crawley, President of Bethany College, brought us a brief update about what is new on campus.

Jane Byrda, the chair of the nominating committee, brought forward the report of the nominating committee including names for open synod council, discipline, and consultation committee positions.

Bishop Candea brought us her final report. She spoke about how she approaches life and her ministry from a place of grace. “Grace is at the center of who we are and what we are about. It is all about grace.” Following her report, the assembly voted on synod council and committee nominees.

## **Ballot 2 -**

Bishop Eaton called for the credential report from Dallas and then turned the floor over to Cathy Hohl, the Chair of the Bishop’s Election Team, to give instructions for the second ballot. As an assembly we sang, prayed, and gathered our thoughts. After ballots were collected the floor was turn back over to Bishop Candea.

The assembly heard from Scott Schulte, Synod Council Treasurer, who presented both the treasurer's report and the 2026 budget. After some questions and answers, the budget passed as it appeared in the assembly materials.

Results of the synod elections were announced:

At large, lay female, person of color - Tullia Hamilton

At large, deacon – Joanne Hickey

At large, lay male – Robert Corrothers

At large, young adult – Bethany Hill

For the consultation committee

Clergy – Rev Melissa Woeppel

Clergy – Rev Karen Sherer

For the discipline committee

Lay member – Douglas Reed

Clergy – Rev Chris Deines

Different ministries from around the synod were lifted up and presented. Jennifer Prinz from Portico sent us a greeting via video. We heard from our mission developers and SAWCs (Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities). Claire Lozano, pastor of Kaw Prairie, offered the prayer for our lunch.

### **Friday afternoon, - Plenary 3**

After lunch, the results of the second ballot were given. Total votes cast: 311. Total number of legal votes cast: 311. Number of votes needed for election on this ballot (75%): 234.

Donna Simon – 109

Zac Sturm – 73

Chad Langdon – 66

Peter Rehwaldt – 35

Nadia Bolz-Weber – 12

Jill Seagle – 5

Linda Anderson-Little – 4

Dan Hanson – 3

Ryan Fletcher – 2

Sue Tarkka – 2

The top 7 candidates were each given 5 minutes to answer the question "Considering what you understand about our world, the Central States Synod, and your calling to be bishop, what do you see the Spirit calling the Central States Synod to do and be?" We heard answers from Rev Jill Seagle, Rev Donna Simon, Rev Chad Langdon, Rev Peter Rehwaldt, and the Rev Zac Sturm.

### **Ballot 3 -**

We moved to the third ballot and heard the credential report from Dallas. Our worship team led a song, and a prayer was offered as ballots were passed out. Once ballots were collected, the ballot was closed.

As we continued with assembly business, Nancy Nagel came forward to present the Synod Vice-President Report. Nagel pointed out a few emphases. The decrease in our budget and revenue comes from a decrease in congregational giving. Our synod staff has worked to be as efficient as possible. The focus of the synod council over the last 18 months has been the transition from Bishop Candea to our new bishop. Nancy Nagel brought up different ways the synod has been renewed by the spirit and working across different contexts in Missouri and Kansas.

Bishop Elizabeth Eaton brought us the Churchwide Report. She discussed some experiments the ELCA is participating in over the next 5 years. The Central States Synod has several members who serve the greater church. Susan Boxberger serves on Church Council. Kevin Boatright serves on the Committee on Discipline. Krista Harris and Todd Maloy serve on the Board of Pensions (Portico). Lisa Peck serves at the Augsburg Fortress Publishing House. Ruth Ellen Howard served on the Commission for the Renewed Lutheran Church. She thanked the Central States Synod for their financial commitment to supporting missions around the ELCA. She shared a video about how the ELCA is changing and shaping itself in new ways so that we can meet people where they are.

Rev Sue Tarkka was invited forward to present the following resolution.

SA25.01 – Commitment to the Development of New Congregations

The following amendment was offered.

“new ministries-congregations, Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities and Synod Authorized Outreach Ministries” in place of “new congregational ministries of Word and sacrament” in numbers 1, 2, 5, and 6.2.A, and in place of “new congregations starts” in number 6.1.

The amendment passed. After further discussion, the resolution as amended passed. The assembly watched ministry videos from KU Campus Ministry (Westwood House), Hollis, and Camp Tomah Shinga and broke into a recess.

Bishop Eaton had Cathy Hohl present us the results of the third ballot. Total number of votes cast: 308. Total number of legal votes cast: 308. Total number of votes need for election: 206.

Zac Sturm – 130

Donna Simon – 100

Chad Langdon – 50

Peter Rehwaldt – 24

Linda Anderson-Little – 2

Nadia Bolz-Weber – 2

Jill Seagle – 0

We moved into a time of Question and Answer where the top three nominees were asked the following questions:

- As the number of rostered clergy continues to decline, how would you encourage and equip lay leaders to keep congregations active in ministry?
- Given that about one-half of our synod's congregations average fewer than 40 people in worship, and financial resources continue shrinking, how would you encourage vitality in the midst of scarcity?
- The synod covers a large and widely diverse geographic area that includes both rural and urban areas. Describe your experience and how you would keep us connected.
- The positions and values of the ELCA on such topics as racial justice, human sexuality, gender equity, care for creation, immigration, and poverty are countercultural to many. How would you lead the Central States Synod in the midst of this tension?
- What book are you currently reading?

#### **Ballot 4 -**

Following the questions and answers, Bishop Eaton and Cathy Hohl gave us information and instructions. The assembly was led in song and prayer and the ballots were cast and collected. The assembly business was concluded for the day, and we enjoyed a time of celebration with a banquet to celebrate milestone anniversaries.

#### **Saturday, June 7 - Plenary 4**

Rev Dave Whetter led the assembly in a time of morning devotion, sharing the Good News found in John 13. After the time of devotion was finished, Bishop Eaton and Cathy Hohl were invited to lead us in the next ballot. Ms. Hohl presented the results of the fourth ballot. Total number of votes cast: 304. Total number of legal votes cast: 304. Total number of votes needed for election on this ballot (60%): 183. The results were as follows:

Donna Simon – 138

Zac Sturm – 103

Chad Langdon – 63

#### **Ballot 5 -**

Our assembly went straight into the fifth ballot. Dallas Rakestraw presented the credentials, our worship team led us in song, and a prayer was offered as we cast our final vote for the next bishop of the Central States Synod. Once all of the ballots were collected, the vote was officially closed.

Rev Sue Tarkka was brought forward to present the remaining resolutions. SA25.02 – A Season of Global Awareness passed. SA25.03 – Thanksgiving for Ministry was not voted on. Instead, we took a moment of silence and Bishop Candea offered a prayer of thanksgiving for the different people and ministries named in the resolution. Rev Dave Whetter came forward to present us the updated compensation guidelines and recommended changes for 2026. The compensation guidelines as presented were voted on and passed.

The Central States Synod Assembly was placed into recess while we were called into order as the general membership of the Bethany Home Association of Lindsborg, Kansas. Jackie Thornton, Bethany Home Board Member, brought us greetings and updates from Bethany Home CEO, Kris Erickson. The proposed amendments to the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws were presented to the assembly, voted on, and passed. The meeting for Bethany Home Association was adjourned.

After resuming the Central States Synod Assembly, we watched ministry updates from KIFA (Kansas Interfaith Action), Hearts Across the Heartland, Lutherans Restoring Creation, and our Companion Synod team.

Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and Cathy Hohl came forward to read us the report of the fifth ballot. The number of votes cast: 295. The number of legal votes cast: 295. The number of votes needed for election: 148. The results were as follows:

Zac Sturm – 144

Donna Simon – 151

Bishop Eaton declared “Based upon the report of Ballot 5, the Rev. Donna Simon has been elected bishop of the Central States Synod.” Bishop-Elect Donna Simon was invited forward to give us her remarks. She thanked everyone who went through the election process, specifically Rev. Sturm and Rev. Langdon. She mentioned her history of synod assemblies and uplifted the ways this synod has grown and changed. She asked to be invited to the congregations to continue the conversation about culture and what the Gospel is teaching us. Bishop-Elect Simon named the outgoing synod staff and how their work has been to support the congregations. She thanked her congregation who have been walking alongside of her for these past years. Lastly, she named her wife and her son, her biggest supporters.

The 2025 Central States Synod Assembly ended with worship together. Bishop Susan Candea brought us Good News from Luke 5. “We can open our hearts, our minds, our lives, our communities, and let the Spirit blow as she will. Renewing us and this church so that we can participate in healing this world. I don’t know about you, but is there any greater celebration.” Bishop-Elect Donna Simon offered the closing blessing.