



# Slovak Zion Synod

2022 Synod Assembly Reports  
December 13-18, 2022 • Norwegian Getaway

## PLEASE NOTE:



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These materials are current up to December 2022; that is, the time of the synod assembly at which they were distributed. Accordingly, these materials contain reports and references to events and mission projects as of December 2022, financial data from *completed* fiscal cycles at the time of the Assembly, and Minutes from the assembly previous (2019) to this past 2022 assembly.

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# SYNOD ASSEMBLY 2022

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From December 13-18, 2022, the Slovak Zion Synod gathered in Assembly aboard the *Norwegian Getaway*, embarking from New York, NY with two days scheduled in Bermuda as the main port of call for the voyage before returning home.

The theme of this year's assembly was: *Emmanuel: God With Us*. The theme built on the ELCA 2022 Churchwide Assembly theme of *Dwelling in the*

*Word* and was based on the biblical texts in John (1:14) and Matthew (1:23) that the "Word became flesh and dwelt among us" and "they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, "God is with us." Assembly worship, enrichment, and reports integrated advent themes of preparation and joyful anticipation of the coming of Jesus in Bethlehem and into our lives and ministries, by reflecting upon the ways that Emmanuel has been with us since our last assembly, dwells among us in our lives and ministries today, and promises to be with us in the future as we do the work of Christ and anticipate what God calls us to do next in our lives and ministries.

In addition to the main theme of this assembly, the assembly continued to integrate the underlying themes of previous years, including the importance of the various kinds of wellness for the healthy witness and mission of the church. Enrichment was woven throughout the assembly in the form of edifying presentations, song, worship and spiritual reflection, and light-hearted illustrations.

Conversations with voting members and guests revealed how they were inspired by ways they could respond to the needs of a wider world; fellowship with those from other congregations provided opportunities to share with each other joys and challenges, best ministry practices, and life in their various congregations.

Bishop Wilma S. Kucharek inaugurated our assembly theme as she addressed the assembly in her sermon during the opening service of Holy Communion. Synod Vice-president Jerry Owen served as assisting minister, and members of the assembly served as readers, worship leaders, and in other capacities.

Among the most notable acts of business conducted during this year's plenary sessions was the re-election of our Bishop, the Rev. Wilma S. Kucharek, on the first ballot, with a historic unanimous vote. Other elections included Mr. Jerry Owen who was re-elected to serve as Vice-President, Ms. Sheila Welch who was elected as Treasurer, and the Rev. Marjorie Keiter who was elected Secretary. The lengths of these terms are six years for Bishop and four years for the other executive officers.

The Bishop's Report highlighted the ways in which synod ministries were adapted and augmented to respond to the challenges presented during the Covid-19 pandemic. Bishop Kucharek pointed out that the variety of creative responses in our synod and among our congregations during challenging times were signs of Emmanuel's presence among us and of our faithful response to the mission of Christ. The bishop noted that, during the pandemic, our more frequent online contact with each other and sharing of ministry practices has deepened relationships. The bishop also reminded us that in her ministry as bishop, whether domestically or internationally, during times of celebration such church anniversaries, times of transition or challenge in congregations and leadership, or times of consultation, she does that ministry with Emmanuel and the synod and its members present with her. Bishop Kucharek commended the synod for responding to the needs of others in the face of our own challenges, citing especially the sending of \$21,500. to aid congregations and ministries in Slovakia tending to the needs of Ukrainian refugees. The bishop also commended the synod for our faithfulness in completing our parochial reports, as she shared that, in spite of the pandemic, our Synod attained the distinction of 100% congregational participation for the years 2019, 2020, and 2021.

The Rev. Dr. Thomas S. Drobena reported on the work of the Ecumenical and International Relations Committee since our last assembly. His report on ministries among our companion churches in Central and Eastern Europe cited events and anniversaries in which the synod participated in Slovakia, Serbia, and Romania, most notably centennials of the Evangelical Theological Seminary at Comenius University in Bratislava, the Slovak Lutheran Church in Serbia, of the birth of the first woman ordained in the Lutheran Church in Slovakia, and a bicentennial of the Slovak Lutheran Church in Romania. It was also noted that two of our synod-supported PhD students have now completed their studies and, due to the lifting of Covid travel restrictions, we are now back on track to resume hosting seminarians from Central and Eastern Europe this coming summer 2023. In addition, our synod has provided lectures and conferences at the seminary in Bratislava and, in addition to aid for refugees from Ukraine, supported the addition of additional building space for the Agape nursing home in Sväty Jur.

The ELCA Report built on the challenges of ministry today by juxtaposing the Gutenberg printing press technology of Luther's day with our current use of technology in ministry today. The Rev. Dr. Javier Goitia, the ELCA Churchwide representative, lifted up our synod's participation in a variety of ministries in the synod, the ELCA, and globally as a faithful response to the mission we are all called to do. In addition, he shared words given to him by Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton for the assembly, expressing her fond memories of time shared with us in previous years and her congratulations to our bishop on her re-election.

The Report of Synod Treasurer Sheila Welch shared the shift in expenditures since the last assembly; for example, how synod travel expenses were lower during the pandemic, while

technology-related costs had increased. She noted that the increased giving from some congregations helped to offset the decreased giving from those experiencing financial challenges, and thanked all for their faithful giving and partnership in the ministries and mission we share as a synod.

The Communications Report highlighted the current expanded use of technology in our synod and the supportive work of the Communications Desk in getting congregations' websites up and running. Enhancements to the Slovak Zion Synod app were explained, and goals to provide resources to congregations via the synod app were shared. It was noted that, in addition to synod news, a lectionary, a number of videos regarding the mission of our synod, as well as access to videos of the claymation series *Davey and Goliath* are available through the synod app. In addition to Presiding Bishop Eaton's assembly video, the assembly experienced the use of video reports from several synod committees, which will also be available on the synod app in the future.

Enrichment sessions explored the biblical sources and significance of the *O Antiphons*, which are recognized by many from the hymn verses of *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*. In addition, there was an enrichment session regarding the Slavic custom of the use of *oblatky/oplatky* during the solemn family Christmas Eve meal. Pastor Thomas J. Drobena shared the historical background and significance of this practice, joined by Pastor Eric Markovich, Pastor Rastislav Mičovsky, and Pastor Michal Mišina as they shared the variety of customs among the Slovaks both here in our congregations and in Central and Eastern Europe in making, distributing, and the use of these Christmas wafers.

The Assembly passed a resolution, presented by the Rev. Dr. Thomas S. Drobena and the Rev. Dr. Kathleen Mills, concerning the upcoming 1700th anniversary in 2025 of the Council of Nicaea, memorializing the next ELCA Churchwide Assembly "to acknowledge and celebrate this anniversary with thanksgiving to Almighty God who gives the Church its unity." The resolution also directed the Synod Council to communicate to the ELCA Church Council its request that "in the interim, the Office of the Presiding Bishop arrange for the development of resources to assist congregations and synods in observing this anniversary, especially in ecumenical settings, and encourage study of the Nicene Creed and canons as an opportunity for deepening Lutheran identity and as an impetus to nourish ecumenical relationships between churches and congregations." Discussion regarding this resolution included a willingness and consensus in the Slovak Zion Synod to facilitate the compilation of such a resource, in consultation with the presiding bishop's office, to be made available to the whole church. Discussion also recognized a desire that full-communication partner churches and ELCA companion churches be made aware of these efforts and be invited to do similar work.

Our Synod Assembly affirmed our on-going commitment to encourage and pray for church vocations and the raising up of future leaders for ministry. We gave thanks that our prayers in this regard at the last assembly have resulted in an increase in our synod of new "home-grown" candidates for seminary.

Certificates were presented by the Bishop to those the Synod Assembly recognized with gratitude who have served in and built up Christ's church and, since the last assembly, have celebrated milestone ordination anniversaries. In addition, the assembly acknowledged the Rev. Javier

Goitia, our Churchwide representative, for his presence among us and his work in the ELCA overseeing the formation of future church leaders, an area dear to our hearts in the Slovak Zion Synod as we continue to provide for the education and formation of future pastors and leaders in Central and Eastern Europe. The assembly also recognized Joshua Drobena for his various efforts over these past years through the synod's Communications Desk and in his work in synod event coordination.

The Assembly concluded with the *Affirmation of Ministry at the Re-election of a Synodical Bishop*, with the laying on of hands and prayer for Bishop Kucharek; this was followed by a *Service of Blessing and Sending*, in which those called to serve in the synod, their congregations, the ELCA, or in their communities, made commitments to assume the duties to which they have been called, be it through baptism, ordination, or election, and were blessed and sent out by our Bishop to serve in the name of Christ.



# Slovak Zion Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Synod Assembly • December 13-18, 2022 • Norwegian Getaway



## Assembly Schedule & **Plenary Agenda**

This report and its contents have been prepared and submitted for the Synod Assembly. Eyes Only.

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## Tuesday, December 13, 2022

4:00 PM: **Departure from Port of New York**  
Dinner (on your own)

## Wednesday, December 14, 2022

### Plenary 1 (Moderno Churrascaria Restaurant, Deck 8 aft)

9:00 AM: **Opening Service of Holy Communion / Order for the Opening of an Assembly**

10:30 AM: Call to Order, Welcome of Visitors & Guests  
Acceptance of the Agenda, Approval of the Minutes  
Report from the Registration Committee  
Rules of Procedure, Elections Committee  
**First Ballot for Bishop**

11:15 AM: **Report of the Ecumenical & International Relations Committee**  
—Rev. Dr. Thomas S. Drobena

Report of the Elections Committee, First Ballot for Bishop Results

12:00 PM: Break for Lunch

### Plenary 2 (Moderno Churrascaria Restaurant, Deck 8 aft)

1:30 PM: Deadline to submit *Request for Withdrawal from Ballot for Bishop Form*  
Deadline to submit *Disclosure and Consent to Background Check Form*  
Deadline to submit *Biographical Information Form*  
Gathering  
**Report of the Bishop** — Bishop Wilma S. Kucharek

2:30 PM: Report of the Registration Committee  
**Second Ballot for Bishop**  
**Enrichment — O Antiphons: Biblical Sources & Significance**  
**Report of the Elections Committee & Second Ballot for Bishop Results**

3:30 PM: Break for Dinner (on your own)

## Thursday, December 15, 2022

Port Call: Royal Naval Dockyard, Bermuda  
PM: Evening Devotions, Time & Location as announced

## Friday, December 16, 2022

Port Call Continues: Royal Naval Dockyard, Bermuda  
11:30 AM: **Be back on the ship** (departure at 12:00 PM)  
Dinner (on your own)

## Saturday, December 17, 2022

### Plenary 3 (*Moderno Churrascaria Restaurant, Deck 8 aft*)

- 9:00 AM: Gathering & Morning Devotions  
Report of the Registration Committee  
~~Question and Answer Session with Nominees~~  
**Third Ballot for Bishop**
- 9:30 PM: **Enrichment — *The Slavic Custom of Oblatky/Oplatky***
- 10:00 AM: **Report of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
—Rev. Dr. Javier Goitia, ELCA Representative
- 10:30 AM: **Communications Report** — Mr. Joshua Drobeno
- 11:00 AM: **Report of the Treasurer & Presentation of Budget** — Ms. Sheila Welch  
  
Report of the Elections Committee & Third Ballot for Bishop Results
- 11:45 AM: Assembly Group Picture
- 12:00 PM: Break for Lunch

### Plenary 4 (*Moderno Churrascaria Restaurant, Deck 8 aft*)

- 1:30 PM: Gathering  
Report from the Registration Committee
- 1:45 PM: Elections  
Unfinished Business  
  
Recognitions & Anniversaries
- 2:30 PM: **Affirmation of Ministry at the Reelection of a Synodical Bishop**  
**Service of Blessing & Sending / Order for the Closing of an Assembly**
- 3:30 PM: Break for Evening  
Dinner (on your own)

## Sunday, December 18, 2022

- 7:00 AM: Arrival / 9:00 AM: Debarkation  
Port of New York

**Thank you for participating in the 2022 Assembly of the Slovak Zion Synod.  
Good health and Blessings to you in your steadfast service of Proclaiming the Love of Christ!**





# Slovak Zion Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Synod Assembly • December 13-18, 2022 • Norwegian Getaway



## Report of the **Bishop**

Respectfully Submitted by:  
The Rt. Rev. Wilma S. Kucharek

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submitted for the Synod Assembly. Eyes Only.

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Report of the Bishop - Slovak Zion Synod Assembly 2022  
Bishop Wilma S. Kucharek

*Emmanuel — God with Us!*

*"...and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us'" (Mt 1:23)*

*"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...." (Jn 1:14)*

The theme for this year's assembly is *Emmanuel - God with Us!* It is based on the words spoken to the prophet Isaiah and recorded in Matthew: "...and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us'"; it also reminds us of the words from John: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Our assembly takes place during the season of Advent, perhaps a bit unusual for a synod assembly, but not so unusual for our "think outside the box synod." Advent: a time of the church year to reflect upon the ways that Emmanuel lives and dwells among us, and a time that looks with hope and joyful anticipation for what God will do next in our lives.

Since our last assembly, and especially during the coronavirus pandemic, Emmanuel dwelt and remained with us as we adapted to new challenges. Even when our churches were empty, the promise of the empty tomb and life in Christ sustained us; God was with us and God's church was alive. And God's Grace multiplied in ways that helped the church grow in other ways. In my conversations with people throughout the Synod, I am touched by the many ways in which God and God's blessings have been present. Many of those things were so unexpected, that they can only be attributed to the presence of the Word who dwells among us; Emmanuel, God with us, was carrying us through as God always had, just now perhaps, we could see that we really were in God's hands through thick and thin.

Congregations expanded in their ways of ministering to people, using various forms of technology, some familiar like telephone and e-mail, others newly learned, like online meetings and streaming worship; many of these learnings have changed us, and will continue to be used in ministry.

Our Synod also used technology to continue the work of the church, as we connected with pastors and congregations, committees of the synod, seminaries and colleges, the ELCA Churchwide organization, ELCA bishops and committees, our global partners in Central and Eastern Europe, and others. We thank Joshua Drobena, our coordinator for technology and communications, for his work in overseeing our synod office technology as well as a number of our congregational websites. In fact, as recently as this October, one congregational member noted how he appreciated the pan-Synod worship service done on Trinity Sunday 2021.

In many ways, our contacts with each other, which began out of deep pastoral concern for our members during those initial days of the pandemic, grew into more frequent, deeper, and on-going relationships, as we shared experiences, goals, and new ways of doing things.

For example, our Synod applied for \$5,000 in Covid grant money from the ELCA and distributed this to those congregations who were known to be in need due to the pandemic and unable to access technology for use in addressing the spiritual and worship needs of their congregations. We learned that some of the adaptations we used during the pandemic are useful for the work of God's church as we go forward. Many of those adaptations would have taken much longer to learn or utilize. So the changes we were forced to make quickly during the emergency days of the pandemic can now enrich our church mission and ministries both now and in the future.

As I met with each of our three conferences' pastors during the pandemic, about 90 meetings in total, I was impressed with the variety of ways our pastors were connecting with our parishioners for pastoral care, spiritual and educational enrichment, and administration of the congregation. In our time together, we shared updates on the local situations in our congregations, we reflected on biblical texts for enrichment, got updates about what others were doing, shared resources, and grew in our relationships with one another. Even though our synod has always been relational by our nature, this increased regular contact is another unique milestone for us, especially after I learned that other bishops were surprised that we were doing this so regularly. This is a further example of the importance we place on relationships in our Synod and in the church.

During the pandemic, the Conference of Bishops and the Region 7 bishops groups began to meet weekly on Zoom. This increase from 2 or 3 in-person meetings per year, also deepened relationships, as we shared our challenges and practices across the various synods. Now that Conference of Bishops meetings have returned to meeting in person, online meetings have been added as regular meetings in addition to the weekly meetings for check-in and enrichment.

Perhaps our non-geographic nature as a synod gave us a head-start in addressing the challenges of the pandemic as a synod, since we were already using technology heavily in our operations and contacts within the synod, while other synods were learning how to be non-geographic in their staff and synodical operations.

As your Bishop, I serve in various capacities in the wider church. On your behalf, I serve on the Board of Trustees of Muhlenberg College and on their Student Experience Committee and Nominations and Governance Committee. On the Board of United Lutheran Seminary, I serve on behalf of the Region 7 bishops of the ELCA, along with the Rev. Marjorie Keiter who serves on behalf of the Slovak Zion Synod. I also serve on behalf of the Conference of Bishops as the Advisory Bishop to the Executive Board of the Women of the ELCA, participating in Board meetings, committee work, and the WELCA Convention.

On August 8-12, 2022, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly met in person in Columbus, Ohio, preceded by a meeting of the Conference of Bishops. In addition to myself, attending as voting members from the Slovak Zion Synod were: Vice-President Jerry Owen [lay male], the Rev. Eric Markovich [clergy], Nancy Owen [lay female], Jennifer Welch [PCL], and Joshua Drobena [young adult]. The Assembly met under the theme: "Embody the Word," which this Assembly

builds upon by using the Advent theme of the Word dwelling among us and “Emmanuel - God with Us!”

At the previous Churchwide Assembly in 2019, Slovak Zion Synod was recognized as having 100% of our congregations completing the parochial report of our statistics for pastoral acts, financial operations, and program information for the year 2018, a distinction only shared with 2 other of the 65 synods. I am pleased to now report that, in spite of the pandemic, our Synod attained the distinction of having 100% congregational participation for the years 2019, 2020, and 2021 as well. Well done, Slovak Zion Synod! And many thanks to you pastors and lay leaders who helped accomplish this milestone! Pastors who have reviewed their reports with me each year have said that they appreciate these one-on-ones with the Bishop and view them as a good review of their ministry in the previous year, as well as an opportunity to evaluate their financial stewardship and giving goals for supporting Synod, ELCA, and international ministries.

Of course, a number of pastoral and administrative responsibilities continue to happen behind the scenes, such as: ministry covenants and call process; candidacy and roster; archives; church cemetery matters; congregation parochial reports; records requests; Portico concerns; attorney consultations; insurance matters; church building security, safety, and inspections; congregation constitutions; and pastoral care to individuals and congregations in times of conflict and distress.

Since our last assembly, we have also tended to our global relationships. In addition to our International and Ecumenical Relations Report, I would especially highlight:

—the on-going use of technology, especially email in communicating our solidarity during the pandemic with our companions in Central and Eastern Europe, while working on emerging goals for mission;

—the Slovak Zion Synod response to the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine and the collection of funds to support the needs of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia. To date, \$21,500 has been sent to our companions and various sites in the Lutheran Church in Slovakia;

—the reinstatement and completion of interviews for the coming summer 2023 Student Immersion Program after travel restrictions pausing our ability to host students in congregations during the pandemic were lifted. This program of the Slovak Zion Synod is not only valued by the Lutheran Theological Faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava, but has the distinction of being unique and valuable in other ways, since our Synod is the only ELCA synod to provide such an experience for foreign theological students prior to ordination, having hosted about 150 of these future pastors, teachers, and leaders since the fall of the Iron Curtain;

—as Bishop, representing the Synod at both the 100th anniversary celebration in Novi Sad of the Slovak Lutheran Church in Serbia and the observance in Kokava nad Rimavicou of 100 years since the birth of the first woman ordained in the Lutheran Church in Slovakia in 1951; and

—the Rev. Dr. Thomas S. Drobená representing the Synod in Nadlak at the 200th anniversary of the Slovak Lutheran Church in Romania, as well as serving as a guest lecturer at the Evangelical Theological Faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava.

Milestone Congregational Anniversaries which occurred since our last assembly include: Holy Trinity, East Pittsburgh, PA which celebrated 100 years in 2022.

Ordination anniversaries which occurred since our last assembly include:

2022—Rev. Thomas J. Drobená (60), Rev. John Keiter (55), Rev. Karen Knutson (50),  
Rev. Wilma Kucharek (40), Rev. Michael Johnson (15), Rev. Katie Johnson (10)  
2021—Rev. Michal Mišina (20), Rev. Silvia Mišina Crowe (20), Rev. Sarah Hinlicky Wilson (15)  
2020—Rev. Rastislav Mičovský (35), Rev. David Jones (30), Rev. Eric Markovich (30)

Roster changes since our last assembly include the Rev. Chris Anderson, who transferred to our retired roster from the Northwest Lower Michigan Synod; the Rev. Katie Johnson, who was called to Dr. Martin Luther in Muskegon; the Rev. James Kuemmerle, who is now on the disability roster; and the Rev. Robert McGurn, who has left the ELCA and joined the Roman Catholic Church. We especially grieve the passing of the Rev. Kenneth Michnay, who died as a result of coronavirus on December 4, 2020 and was laid to rest in Michigan this past April.

And, in spite of a pandemic, this Synod is in the process of preparing two individuals for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Brian Buzik, from St. John's, Lansford and Christine Pelfrey, from Holy Trinity, Trumbull are both studying at United Lutheran Seminary. Many thanks to our candidacy committee and its chair, the Rev. Silvia Mišina Crowe, as well as to their pastors, the Rev. Marjorie Keiter and the Rev. Kathleen Mills for shepherding their formation.

During this Assembly, we lift up the ways that Emmanuel has been with us, walks with us, and will continue to be with us! We give thanks that Emmanuel has been with us since his birth in Bethlehem, since our baptism into his death and resurrection, and continues to be with us in our lives and in the ministries of our church. We celebrate that the Word of God was made flesh in the person of Jesus and dwelt among us, becoming one of us, so that we may be one with Him, sewn together with Him and each other in the body of Christ, the Church. We give thanks to God for all the opportunities we have to be church together and make a difference in Christ's name.

This Bishop's Report is a mere glimpse into the many ways in which Emmanuel has been with us during the last three years. There are so many more examples of our gracious God's presence among us, and many more opportunities for us to answer God's call upon us to serve and be the hands and feet and voice of Jesus as we proclaim that God is with us and dwells among us.

Thank you, dear Slovak Zion Synod, for being the church during these difficult times, and for walking with me and each other to make the love of Christ known in our churches, communities, and the world! May Emmanuel continue to dwell with you, each and every one, and bless you, that God may be glorified in all that you do!



# Slovak Zion Synod

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## Report of the Ecumenical & International Relations Committee

Respectfully Submitted by:  
The Rev. Dr. Thomas J. Drobena  
&  
The Rev. Dr. Thomas S. Drobena

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## **Report of the Ecumenical & International Relations Committee Slovak Zion Synod Assembly 2022**

September 2019 — November 2022

Prior to our previous synod assembly, we reported a change in leadership in the Lutheran Church in Slovakia with the election of General Bishop Ivan Elko and Western District Bishop Ján Hrobon. Bishop Kucharek then met with the new General Bishop in October of 2019, a little over a month following our previous synod assembly. They discussed the relationship of our churches with each other, past, present, as well as future, and enjoyed positive dialogue about future opportunities to support and sponsor one another. Our initial impression of the new church leadership was that it is very open to international Lutheran fellowship and ecumenical dialogue; we are pleased that this optimism about our rekindled relationship has continued into the present.

Around this same time in 2019, the Evangelical Lutheran Theological Faculty of Comenius University (Evanjelická Bohoslovecká Fakulta—Univerzity Komenského, or EBF-UK) kicked off an international academic conference marking the celebration of their 100th anniversary. This conference featured lectures from esteemed guest scholars from Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany and Italy, in addition to our own “home-grown” academics local to the Bratislava seminary. On behalf of the Synod, Bishop Kucharek delivered remarks and presented the seminary with a token of our gratitude and recognition for their service and achievements during these 100 years. This award was received on behalf of the faculty by the Dean of the Seminary, Mgr. Milan Jurík. This conference was sponsored in large part by our generous support, which through works such as these, helps to cultivate future pastors and leaders of Christ’s church; this school is considered the foremost theological seminary for all of Central and Eastern Europe, and therefore we consider its continued growth to be vital. We’ve spent much time in reflection over the past few years observing our own centennial as a synod, making it especially noteworthy that the foremost Lutheran school of theological thought in this part of the world also celebrates a centennial.

Another anniversary that had been fervently celebrated was the 30th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. This anniversary, observed on November 15th of each year, was observed with a private gala event hosted by the Slovak Ambassador to the United Nations at his Manhattan residence. The Velvet Revolution (sometimes also referred to as the Gentle Revolution) was a non-violent transition of power in what was then Czechoslovakia, occurring from November 17 to December 29, 1989. Popular demonstrations against the one-party rule of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia included students and older dissidents. This gala occasion highlighted the seven demands made by students in Czechoslovakia over thirty years ago as they called upon the citizenry to join them in these protests. The demonstrations of that time led to the resignations of top government officials and the dissolution of the Communist regime, and culminated in the first democratic elections in Czechoslovakia. The Slovak Ambassador to the United Nations, His Excellency, the Honorable Michal Mlynar, is a lay member of the Slovak Zion Synod, maintaining his membership at the Slovak Evangelical Congregation of the Augsburg Confession of the Holy Trinity of the City of New York. Both the Rev. Michal Mišina and Bishop Wilma Kucharek were in attendance. The event was marked

with prayer, reflections of remembrance, and musical selections on the piano. At the reception which followed, guests enjoyed a wide array of Slovak culinary delights.

In Svätý Jur, Slovakia, now stands a new expansion of the Lutheran Home for Seniors for seniors of the village needing elder care. We've generously supported the construction and furnishing of the facility, and are deeply proud of the fellowship it creates and the services it provides for the elderly of that area. Since its original opening, this convalescent living facility has been filled to capacity, with a considerably long waiting list—a true sign that this kind of facility was sorely needed in this community. In March of 2020, we worked with Bishop Emeritus (of the Slovak Lutheran Church) Julius Filo to transmit additional support for the final completion of this ambitious expansion project for this facility, whose original facility opened nearly a decade ago.

Our Synod, in response to requests that the Synod host another familiarization tour of Slovakia, had announced that a trip would be held in May of 2020. This ten day tour would have explored the Slovak capital city as well as many religious, historical, and cultural sites throughout the country, including sites in Bratislava, the Tatra Mountains, the Orava and Liptov regions of Slovakia, and places in between. Included would have been stops to see some of our synod's most notable Slovak ministries, as well as amazing Central European castles, snow-capped mountains, and a relaxing spa break in natural volcanic spring baths at the foot of the mountains. Unfortunately, this tour was broadsided by the pandemic's lockdowns necessitated by the spread of the COVID-19 pathogen, which made travel across international borders impossible.

The rescheduled tour will now be held as soon as late spring of 2023, if enough interest is shown, and will also include visits to the articular wooden churches of Slovakia that have stood for centuries and were built under intense and impossible building requirements by the ruling governments of an oppressive past. By keeping our group sizes small, we can offer a more flexible and personalized experience that avoids the crowds and delays which can occur in large groups; a smaller group size also allows us the ability to see more and travel more freely, ensuring a positive experience during your travels. As a result, those who sign up will be accepted on a first-come first-served basis, and once we reach our cap for the group size, any additional participants will be waitlisted for a possible trip to take place at a future date.

The COVID pandemic had a significant impact on our international missions. We not only had to postpone events requiring travel, like our tour of Slovakia (as well as this very assembly) for several years, but we also saw a three-year hiatus in our Student Immersion Program. We had interviewed students for the 2020 summer term back in the fall of 2019, but those students have since graduated from seminary in the three years since they were interviewed. While we remained hopeful year after year, uncertain of the long term impact the pandemic might have on international travel or of the speed of vaccine development, we ultimately didn't see international borders begin opening until mid-2022.

As we've now begun resuming our normal international operations, we're pleased to have interviewed eight brilliant and talented seminary students this past fall, and we're excited to begin pairing some of them with congregations as they begin applying to host a student in



summer 2023. Our Student Immersion Program looks to be as robust as ever, and we encourage you to discuss participation with your congregation.

Our sponsorship of graduate student Michaela Prihracki has been a fruitful and reliable constant against the backdrop of our pandemic setback, and we are pleased to have been able to bring her PhD to reality. We are also happy to have sponsored Ivan Belanji in his PhD studies, another past participant of our Student Immersion Program; Ivan has since completed his studies and been ordained, and has begun a new leadership role in the seminary as spiritual advisor to the students.

We've been in ongoing dialogue with faculty members at United Lutheran Seminary, mostly over Zoom, throughout the pandemic regarding their hosting of select students from the Lutheran seminary in Bratislava. We're hopeful to soon resume this agreement, and possibly pursue further developments of this program, such as perhaps offering a reciprocal opportunity with full course credit. Most recently, dialogue between Bishop Kucharek and the President of United Lutheran Seminary is what helped cement hope for this continued partnership.

The political unrest in Eastern Europe has also had its effect on the Lutheran churches in Slovakia, for which we've taken special offerings and sent support. Following Russia's invasion of the Ukraine, thousands of displaced refugees have taken to the roads with their families and with nothing more than what they could carry. Heading west, many of these refugees have found themselves in Slovakia, and recipients of aid and shelter from many of our Lutheran churches in Slovakia. Conversations with leaders of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia, leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava, and with a number of Slovak pastors revealed how through their congregations, conference centers, and seminary, they have been providing humanitarian aid to these refugees, welcoming them into their midst, into their congregations, and into their homes, providing them with food, shelter, and basic needs. Thanks to the generous response of people within and even beyond our Slovak Zion Synod, we have been able to partner with the Lutheran Church in Slovakia in meeting these ongoing needs and make a difference in the lives of those whose homes have been ravaged by war.

Another centennial celebration was held this year in June in Novi Sad, Serbia, where they observed 100 years of being an autonomous (from the Hungarian Lutheran Church) Slovak Lutheran Church. This celebration was attended by bishops, pastors, state dignitaries, and ecumenical guests from the Serbian Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, as well as numerous international church bodies, including the Lutheran Churches in Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Germany, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Bishop Jaroslav Javornik, bishop of the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church in Serbia, another alumnus of our synod's Student Immersion Program, presided over the festivities. Present from the ELCA were Bishop Wilma S. Kucharek and the Rev. Dr. Thomas S. Drobená, both from the Slovak Zion Synod.

In September, our companions in the Slovak Lutheran Church in Romania celebrated a 200th anniversary, at which greetings were given on behalf of the Bishop and our Synod. The congregation in Nadlak celebrated the 200th anniversary of the dedication of their church building. The occasion was combined with the blessing of a new day-center for seniors. Situated

in western Romania on the Hungarian border, Nadlak is the center of the Slovak Lutheran community in Romania. Of its 7000 residents, approximately half are Slovaks and members of the Lutheran Church. The congregation was founded by migrants from the neighboring county town of Slovenský Komlôš (Currently Tótkomlós in modern-day Hungary). The service was conducted bilingually by local pastors, Ludovit Bobčok and Dušan Vanko, who serve as co-deans of the Slovak conference of the Romanian Church, and Bishop Adorjáni Dezső Zoltán of the Romanian Evangelical Lutheran Church. A sermon was delivered by Bishop Ivan Elko of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia. Bishop Kucharek and the Slovak Zion Synod were represented by Pastor Thomas S. Drobena, who brought greetings on behalf of the Slovak Zion Synod. The dedication of the new day-center for seniors was followed by the opening of an exhibit of handmade liturgical paraments and other artifacts, and a traditional banquet.

Rounding out our season of centennials, the Lutheran Church in Slovakia celebrated this past November what would have been the 100th birthday of their first woman ordained into ministry. Darina Banciková was ordained in 1951, following years of controversy within the church. Her ordination was among the first of women pastors in Europe to have taken place in the Lutheran church, effectively putting the Slovak Lutherans in the spotlight for this milestone of the church. The celebration was marked by a special service which took place in Kokava nad Rimavicou, Slovakia, the congregation where Rev. Banciková was born and where she was also interred following her death. Bishop Kucharek brought greetings and reflections and participated in the service, which was nationally televised and is available to rewatch on our Youtube channel's featured videos, available in the mySynod app. The service concluded with a procession into the courtyard of the church of family, worshippers, the community, and ecumenical guests, where a commissioned bronze bust of Rev. Banciková was unveiled.

Rev. Dr. Thomas S. Drobena further represented the Slovak Zion Synod at gatherings of our sister churches in Slovakia and in Serbia. Pastor Drobena was invited to give a guest lecture at the Lutheran School of Theology of Comenius University in Bratislava on the occasion of the end of the fall 2022 academic semester. The lecture, entitled "Becoming like Christ: The Chalcedonian Luther and Holiness" explored the Lutheran doctrine of sanctification in light of Luther's Christological commitments. The same day, Pastor Drobena presided at a service of Holy Communion for the students and faculty of the seminary, at the invitation of the Rev. Dr. Ivan Belanji, seminary chaplain and graduate of the synod's student program. Another set of lectures was given for members of the Lutheran Church in Serbia on the topic of prayer in the Christian life, hosted by the congregations of Padina and Vojlovica, at the invitation of Pastor Sladjan Srdic, dean of the Banat Conference, and Pastor Lidia Zloh, also a graduate of the synod's student program.

We're grateful for our ecumenical and international mission partners and hold them and our mission projects in our hearts and prayers. As we reflect on the past century of relationships and work together, we can be proud that we have made a difference in people's lives. We look forward to the further development of these partnerships and the fruit of these mission programs and projects which have been carefully cultivated especially over the past forty years. Please remember to invite others in your congregation to consider the opportunity of hosting a seminarian student, supporting our student program or other international project, as well as the

possibility of signing up to attend the 2023 tour as a family or as part of a group. In addition, if you're not signed up for email updates on our website, we strongly encourage that you do so to keep in touch with these updates as they take place. It is a great gift indeed, when the people of our synod support these missions and proclaim Emmanuel through our ministries abroad, and our partners in Central and Eastern Europe can also say "God is with us!" Thank you for your prayers and generous support of these vital ministries in Christ's church abroad.



## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

*“And [Jesus] said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15).*

Dear siblings in Christ,

When I talk about our goal of engaging a million new, young, diverse people I get asked a lot, “I’m not new, young, or diverse. Am I not important to the church anymore?” My answer is always the same, “You’ve never been more important.”

When we committed to our new goal, we identified our purpose as “Activate each of us so more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love.” This goal does not happen without the people who are already part of this church. Theresa of Avila talked about the church as the hands and feet of Christ in the world, the very way God will work to engage new people.

Those aren’t easy things to do and certainly not ones that only a few of us can do alone. God has blessed us with so many resources to do this work: nearly 3.6 million people, 65 synods, and 350 CWO staff, plus colleges, universities, seminaries, social ministry organizations, and other affiliated organizations, and our separately incorporated ministries. We truly are a church of abundance.

So, what can you do right now?

- Pray. For our church. For one another. For those whom we have yet to meet.
- Find time to listen to people who are new to the ELCA, young, and/or diverse. Share the story of Jesus with them.

Along the way, don’t forget: You are important.

Grace and peace,

*Elyse L. Eaton*



# Slovak Zion Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Synod Assembly • December 13-18, 2022 • Norwegian Getaway



## Report of the **Treasurer**

Respectfully Submitted by:  
Ms. Sheila B. Welch

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# Slovak Zion Synod - 2022 Assembly

## Income and Expense Report

The constitution of every ELCA Synod outlines the responsibilities of the Synod. In +\$6.03., in addition to partnership with the churchwide organization, four areas of ministry are noted. In summary, they are: Care of Congregations and Ministers, Facilitating the Mission of God's Church, Strengthen Relationships with Partners, and Proclaiming the Story. These four areas of ministry are being used in this report to show how God's work is being done among us and to emphasize that it is God's Holy Spirit that inspires us into ministry in Christ's name.

### INCOME

	2020	2021
Regular Income	37,243	20,393
Restricted Income	134,080	157,188
Designated Income	49,267	26,911
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>220,590</b>	<b>204,492</b>

### EXPENSE

#### SHARING GOD'S GIFTS WITH OTHERS

Used to support ELCA mission/benevolence, which funds such things as resources for renewal, worship, starting new congregations, and global partnerships. It was also used to support designated giving through the Synod to support those in need through ELCA World Hunger, Disaster Relief, Lutheran World Relief, Hurricane Response, Missionaries, and many others.

	2020		2021	
<b>TOTAL SHARING GOD'S GIFTS WITH OTHERS</b>	60,165	% Total Expense 23%	51,035	% Total Expense 20%

#### CARING FOR CONGREGATIONS AND MINISTERS

Used to provide for the pastoral care of congregations and ministers. This occurs during times of crisis, times of celebration, and times of transition. It includes vacancy self-study, call processes, and working with councils, committees, pastors, congregational leaders and members for enrichment and leadership development as well as providing consultations during crisis and conflict

	2020		2021	
<b>TOTAL CARING FOR CONGREGATIONS AND MINISTERS</b>	65,398	% Total Expense 25%	68,897	% Total Expense 27%

# Slovak Zion Synod - 2022 Assembly

## Income and Expense Report

### FACILITATING THE MISSION OF GOD'S CHURCH

Used to plan for, facilitate, and provide for the mission of the church. This area includes the many ways by which congregations, pastors, and lay leaders are strengthened and supported for service. It includes the work of the synod council, synod committees, candidacy, workshops, conference meetings, assembly enrichment, and congregational worship and visitation.

	2020		2021	
		% Total Expense		% Total Expense
<b>TOTAL FACILITATING THE MISSION OF GOD'S CHURCH</b>	44,470	17%	43,379	17%

### STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNERS

Used for ministries that are related to and go beyond our Synod. These include our significant partnerships with our companion churches in Central and Eastern Europe, ecumenical partners, ELCA Region 7, and other ELCA groups. In addition, this represents connections with the Board of United Lutheran Seminary, the Board of Muhlenberg College, and the Executive Board of Women of the ELCA.

	2020		2021	
		% Total Expense		% Total Expense
<b>TOTAL STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNERS</b>	57,549	22%	58,690	23%

### PROCLAIMING THE STORY

Used to tell the Good News and build up the body of Christ through our congregations, ministry partners, and communities. This includes such things as congregation, assembly, and conference enrichment opportunities, media resources, and Synod communications.

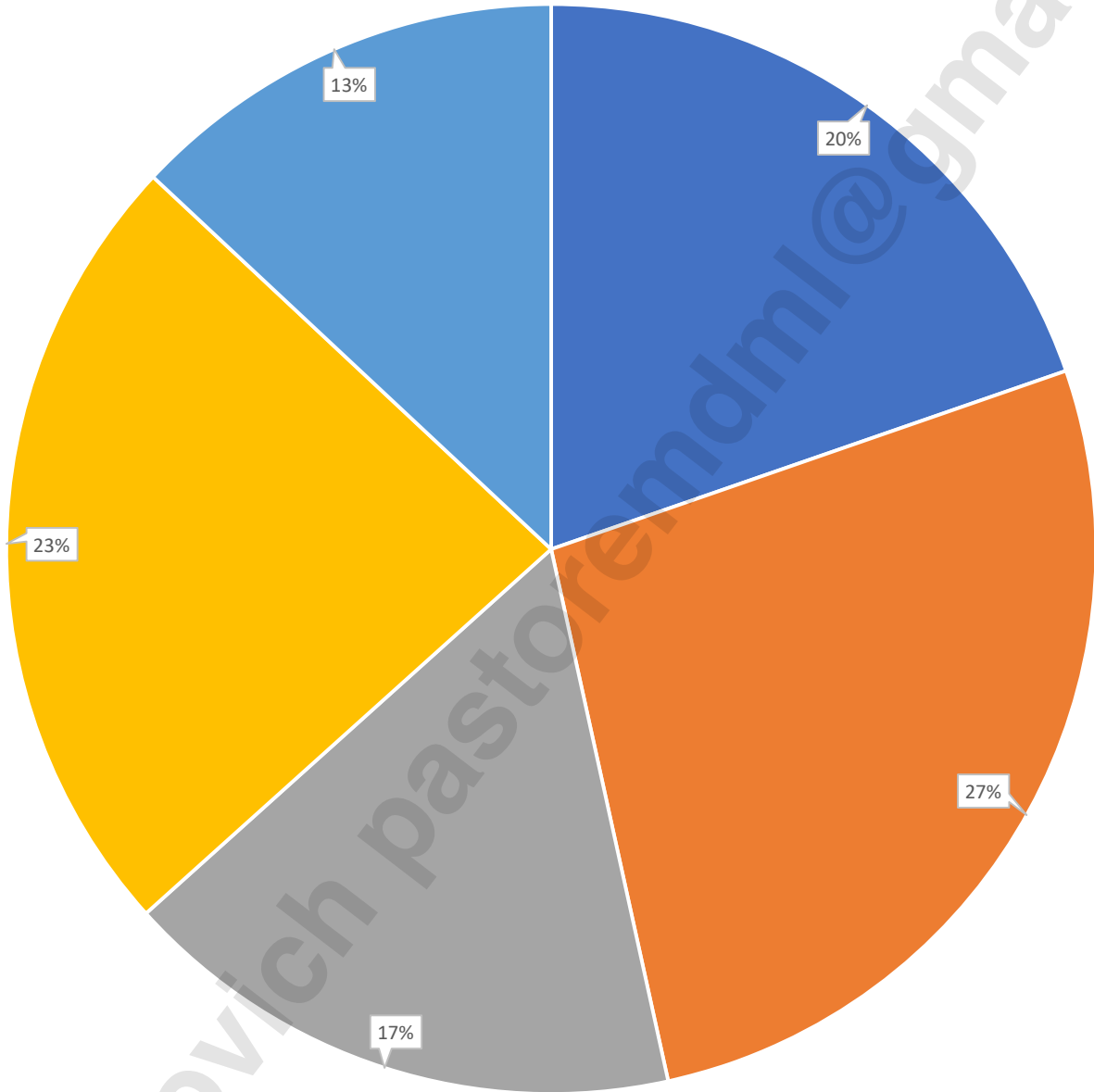
	2020		2021	
		% Total Expense		% Total Expense
<b>TOTAL PROCLAIMING THE STORY</b>	34,007	13%	33,174	13%

<b>TOTAL EXPENSE</b>	261,589	255,175
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### **ASSETS**

	2020	2021
General Checking	11,137.58	17,232.56
Electronic Funds Depository	6,242.19	109.34
SZS Reserves	11,891.17	2,864.50
GBU Church Growth	43,733.57	43,742.91
Mission & Education	20,293.33	255,203.92
Ministry & Eldercare	20,511.54	2,012.42
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>113,809.38</b>	<b>321,165.65</b>

## 2021 INCOME EXPENSE



- TOTAL SHARING GOD'S GIFTS WITH OTHERS
- TOTAL CARING FOR CONGREGATIONS AND MINISTERS
- TOTAL FACILITATING THE MISSION OF GOD'S CHURCH
- TOTAL STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNERS
- TOTAL PROCLAIMING THE STORY



# Slovak Zion Synod

## Congregational Mission Support and Designated Giving FY 2019 ~ FY 2021

	Mission Support Shared With ELCA			Mission Support Slovak Zion Synod			ELCA Designated Giving			Non- ELCA Designated Giving		
	Feb '19 - Jan 20	Feb '20 - Jan 21	Feb '21 - Jan 22	Feb '19 - Jan 20	Feb '20 - Jan 21	Feb '21 - Jan 22	Feb '19 - Jan 20	Feb '20 - Jan 21	Feb '21 - Jan 22	Feb '19 - Jan 20	Feb '20 - Jan 21	Feb '21 - Jan 22
Alverda, PA												
Blue Island, IL	481			3,200	3,142	3,400	895	520	440	113		
Brooklyn, OH	3,025	3,000	3,200				3,978	4,071	723	2,412	277	100
Charleroi, PA	3,417	3,348			145	3,294	35		30	194	1,500	1,067
Chicago, IL							2,500	1,000			10,000	
Danbury, CT	203			1,374	492	1,000	130			50		
E Pittsburgh, PA	1,750	4,375				7,500						
Hazleton, PA	2,000	2,000				2,000				100		
Lansford, PA	1,824	1,644	844	50		616	135			200		
Little Falls, NY	2,179	2,101				2,023						
Mount Carmel, PA			500	500	600					100		
Muskegon, MI	675			5,425	11,223	10,051			400	4,553	150	
Nanticoke, PA												
New York, NY				6,500	6,000	6,500	225					
Riverside, IL	4,000	4,666	2,000		1,334							
Stafford Springs, CT						2,691				100		
Torrington				3,968	2,145	5,441						
Trumbull, CT	13,826	16,109	13,550	1,187			7,379	7,930	4,838	1,000		
Windsor, Ontario			299			93			108	400		
Youngstown, OH				5,200	7,000	7,500						
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33,380</b>	<b>37,243</b>	<b>20,393</b>	<b>27,404</b>	<b>32,081</b>	<b>52,109</b>	<b>15,277</b>	<b>13,521</b>	<b>6,539</b>	<b>9,222</b>	<b>11,927</b>	<b>1,167</b>

Eric Maloney@pastor.com

**SLOVAK ZION SYNOD  
MISSION SUPPORT AND DESIGNATED GIVING  
SENT TO ELCA**

		<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
	Mission Support/Benevolence	<b>13,597</b>	<b>10,483</b>	<b>6,067</b>
WHG0006	LWR through ELCA World Hunger	3029	2922	1846
WHG0031	Domestic Hunger	110	280	
WHG0038	ELCA World Hunger	4946	4931	3352
WHG0051	Give where needed most: Good Gifts	60	810	
WHG0054	Lutheran World Ministry	165		30
	<b>Total to World Hunger</b>	<b>8310</b>	<b>8943</b>	<b>5228</b>
WHG0000	Disaster Relief - Puerto Rico	120		
DDG0010	Lutheran Disaster Response, US	4165	1750	125
DDG0060	Lutheran Disaster Response	75	1346	1186
DDG0087	Hurricane Response	1660	95	
DDG0074	US Severe Storms	532		
	<b>Total to Disaster Relief</b>	<b>6552</b>	<b>3191</b>	<b>1311</b>
E270134	ELCA Fund for Leaders		100	
WHG0141	Malaria Campaign	5		
CSG0016	Immigration & Refugee Services	120	120	
	Global Missions	100		
	<b>Total Designated</b>	<b>15,087</b>	<b>12,354</b>	<b>6,539</b>
	<b>Total Mission Support &amp; Designated Giving</b>	<b>28,684</b>	<b>22,837</b>	<b>12,606</b>
	% of Total Giving for Mission Support	47%	46%	48%
	% of Total Giving for Designated Giving	53%	54%	52%



# Slovak Zion Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Synod Assembly • December 13-18, 2022 • Norwegian Getaway



## Report of the **Communications Desk**

Respectfully Submitted by:  
Mr. Joshua Drobena

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## **Report of the Communications Desk Slovak Zion Synod Assembly 2022**

Our synod has always stood out prominently in how one well-regarded former Episcopal Bishop described us: As an extra-geographic synod, ministering in traditional ways, but with an extra global emphasis on relationships beyond ourselves. We're not the North-South-East-West synod. We're not just in one place; we're all over and inter-related in our approach as we respond to the work God has called us to do.

Our synod's voting members to the 2019 Churchwide Assembly proudly wore the very same royal blue T-shirt that many of you in this room may also wear. It features a bold declaration that "We were non-geographic before Facebook made it cool." I've found it quite fitting that, in spite of the terrible losses brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic following our synod's 100th anniversary celebration year, we've been able to innovate once again, over a century later. Our forebearers in this synod emigrated from Slovakia and settled in a new land; their communities often reflected not only the topography of their old country homes, but the grit of the people too. Now, a hundred years later, our non-geographic synod rode out the pandemic by meeting in homes like we did a century ago. Except that nowadays we're engaging in fellowship through digital means: on Facebook, by watching livestreams of worship on YouTube and from Facebook, and by hosting church council or conference meetings on Go-To Meeting. These online platforms allowed us to surmount borders and keep each other company throughout the earliest days of our quarantine and isolation, and continue to serve us as we move into the future.

It's interesting to note that many of our congregations responded to the pandemic by offering regularly scheduled weekly worship on a free online video platform, even before most congregations in the geographic synods did. This should be no surprise, since we have always been trailblazers in doing things online in our synod. Our clergy engaged in meetings of their respective Synod Conferences at least monthly with Bishop Kucharek ever since the beginning of the pandemic, meeting for spiritual enrichment and sharing updates and best practices about how they've stayed connected with each other in their respective church communities. And many of our congregations reported that they'd experienced the most productive and focused church council meetings via Zoom than they'd been able to have in person before the pandemic changes affected their lives: What an amazing example of Emmanuel dwelling with us and remaining with us as we adapt to new challenges and overcome them!

Some of the congregations who had been regularly live-streaming their worship joined together to participate in a hybridized multi-stream of worship on Trinity Sunday 2021. This stream showcased not only our swift adoption of streaming technology (and perseverance to regularly meet through its utilization), but also our synod's living into the transformative concept of what it means to worship together in every time and every place. We encourage you to review the recording from that special Trinity Sunday worship, which remains available on our Synod app, as we look forward to future streaming opportunities.

Also live-streamed was the funeral of the Rev. Kenneth Michnay, whose service of remembrance in April of 2022 was attended digitally by over a hundred individuals in the United

States as well as in Central and Eastern Europe, where many clergy and former English pupils of his still reside today. These streams, in spite of the compounding and isolating effects of the pandemic, were the vital next step in our Synod's video strategy. In fact, our video portfolio has been under continuing development since it started with the commissioning of three reflection pieces for our milestone centennial anniversary; these will continue to be featured on our website and in our app as we add to them over the coming year.

Another notable update which our website and app have undergone, while small and easily forgettable to most of us, concerns the vital importance of legal compliance. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation went into effect since our last assembly convened, which applies broadly and squarely to websites for organizations which conduct business within (or have a substantial user audience within) the EU. It requires that our site clearly disclose what kinds of information we collect about our website and app users, as well as offer a clear and simplified way for the user to decline that data collection or delete any of their data that may be stored on our systems. Fines can potentially be assessed for organizations with websites that do not comply with the new law's protective approach to the fundamental right of human privacy; our early compliance and adoption of these upgrades to our systems also gets us prepared 'ahead of the curve' for changes by the United States' Department of Justice as they amend existing regulations for websites in a similar manner.

Of particular note this year, I'm sure you'll appreciate that the assembly reports and resources have now been integrated into the SZS app, now rebranded as 'MySynod'. This is the completion of a process we began three years ago at the conclusion of our previous assembly, as we remain committed to upgrading and modifying our web systems to facilitate more in-house processing of functions that had previously been outsourced. For example, in previous years our assembly utilized a separate event app that was developed just for the one event. Guidebook and Attendify were and are still the leaders in the niche market for event apps; however, they charged exorbitant rates (albeit extending some discounts to Churches/NGOs) because they usually cater to stockholder meetings and large events of a grander commercial nature. When you open the MySynod app, it intelligently checks your nearby surroundings to provide you with a contextually-appropriate menu of interactive options to choose from. Today, it opened on your phones or tablets and, using bluetooth, discovered that you're sitting at the Synod Assembly. As a result, it provides you with the assembly binder of reports and resources. By developing our own event app features and baking them into our existing MySynod app, we save money and stretch the value of the services we already pay for.

In the spirit of stretching the value of our current offerings even further, we'll be looking at rolling out the contextual-awareness of our MySynod app to make it into a supercharged new way to connect with parishioners. Interested congregations who might pilot this program can expect a digital hymn board, the daily lessons and prayers for worship, electronic giving, and more, all rolled into the MySynod app — and, reliably appearing for your parishioners when they sit in your pews. This cutting edge technology would be a valuable asset in the toolbox of every one of our congregations, as another pivotal way in which our Synod supports congregational ministry. We can celebrate that our Slovak Zion Synod Lutheran experience is not only resilient to worship, despite the world's circumstances, but also has the ability to be technologically cutting-edge. It is also an important asset to share beyond the members of our

congregations, to seekers in our communities who are in need of a new church home as well as to our brothers and sisters in our communities belonging to the local geographic synod.

As we look to continue to stretch the value of each dollar we spend, by piggybacking more and more functionality onto the shared server we pay our web host for, we must remain mindful of the proper stewardship of those funds as well. The cost effectiveness of our congregations hosting their websites on the synod server has been an obvious savings to those congregations; at the same time, those congregations who do host their websites with us are aware of the cost of their custom domain names that point to their site. Nevertheless, one challenge going forward is the ballooning costs due to the effects of inflation, the increased cost of security add-ons which became necessary as global use of the internet and digital platforms increased during the pandemic, and our increasing dependence on these technologies to meet and to function.

Our Synod can be proud of how we have used technology to address the challenges of the pandemic, while setting goals for the most effective use of technology in the future. I encourage you to take advantage of the digital and communication resources we currently offer, as we work toward providing further enhancements to support ministry in our Synod and congregations.



# Slovak Zion Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Synod Assembly • December 13-18, 2022 • Norwegian Getaway



## Official Minutes of the **2019 Synod Assembly**

Respectfully Submitted by:  
The Rev. David Jones

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submitted for the Synod Assembly. Eyes Only.

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Slovak Zion Synod Assembly 2019 Minutes  
“A Century of Resilience and God’s Blessings”  
*Carnival Magic, Ft. Lauderdale, FL*  
August 25-31, 2019

Sunday, August 25:

Ship check-in, dinner, Synod registration/check-in

Monday, August 26:

**Service of Holy Communion, Assembly Offering, Order for the Opening of an Assembly.** Bishop Wilma Kucharek presided and preached. Assisting minister: Vice-President Jerry Owen; reader: Pr. Marjorie Keiter. The assembly then recessed until conference meetings beginning at 3 PM. Other plenary sessions were rescheduled to a time when Carnival could make appropriate meeting rooms available.

**Conference Meetings.** Meetings of the Western Conference, Central Conference, and Eastern Conference took place Monday afternoon with the Bishop. Elections of deans in the conferences also took place.

**Evening Worship.** Worship leader for Monday evening (Evening Prayer): Pr. Michal Misina.  
Worship leader for Tuesday evening (Evening Prayer): Pr. Kathleen Mills.  
Worship leaders for Wednesday evening (Healing & Anointing): Pr. Mike and Pr. Katie Johnson

Thursday, August 29:

**Plenary 1**

Gathering Song, Call to Order, Welcome of Visitors: Included the singing of the Slovak Zion Anniversary Hymn, *Zion, Dwelling of our Lord*. Bishop Kucharek acknowledged the visitors present:

- Patricia Sara Simkova, Intern at Dr. Martin Luther, Muskegon, MI
- Family of the Rev. Kathleen Mills, whose parents-in-law will be celebrating their 50th Anniversary during the cruise

**Report of the Registration Committee—Sheila Welch**

32 present: 3 visitors, and 29 voting members. Bishop declared that we have a quorum and are in session.

**Motion** to approve the agenda, with the right of the chair to change the agenda as needed, by Nancy Owen, with a second by Sheila Welch. Motion carried.

**Report of the Bishop—Bishop Wilma S. Kucharek**

The 100th Anniversary of the Synod demonstrates both our resilience and God’s blessing. It is an opportunity to celebrate the past and vision for future. Our ancestors have left us a legacy, one which connects us to those who have lived in relationship with God and have passed on their life experiences to us. The faith of our predecessors included Cyril and Methodius, the first to translate the Bible in the language of the Slavic peoples hundreds of years before Luther and other reformers. Also, Jan Hus, who restored the giving of both the elements of bread and wine, body and blood, to the laity. He was also prophetic of Luther and those Reformers who were yet to come. At his execution, by being burned at the stake, Hus is said to have proclaimed, “You may cook the goose, but within a hundred years, a swan will come that you will not be able to destroy.” Luther’s symbol became that of the swan, and it was he who emphasized the centrality of grace, faith and scripture for the laity.

We are connected to all the people of faith who have come before us, many who have suffered persecution. Soon after Luther’s reformation, Lutherans became the predominant Christians in Slovakia; however, due to a harsh counter-reformation, they became the minority. The 17th century Articles of Toleration, which allowed for some freedom of worship for the Lutherans, did so with significant limitations. However, it was these Lutherans who made an impact far in excess to their size, sponsoring education for the people and the codification of the Slovak language.

Many of these ancestors, some of whom were indentured servants, came to the U.S. in hopes of a better life. They made many sacrifices for their family and faith communities, and in the process, formed



our Slovak Zion Synod so that we might walk together in faith. This Synod worked, on behalf of the ELCA, to do mission work behind the Iron Curtain: everything from the giving of financial aid, resources, books, catechisms, Bibles and more, to assist the churches in Eastern Europe. What the Synod has done may seem meager to those outside of us, but this work made a significant difference in laying a foundation of trust for our continued work in the life of the church since the Velvet Revolution. Now the question is: What legacy will we leave for those who come after us?

In the last 1-1/2 years, we have celebrated many great joys: we have installed a new pastor, Rev. Marjorie VanderWagen from the Reformed Church in America, at Blue Island; we have observed the 2019 anniversary celebrations of pastors Jennifer Oaks (20 years), Marjorie Keiter (15 years), Thomas S. Drobena (5 years), and Kathleen Mills (10 years in 2018); we have celebrated the faithful service of Rev. Allen German, who has begun his retirement. We have seen St. Paul's, Danbury, enter into a study of their mission and future and Trinity, Chicago, re-instating their council.

We also celebrate that our Synod is one of only three of the 65 ELCA synods that has achieved a 100% response rate for the ELCA congregation report form. We have also observed multiple griefs, with the loss of: the Rev. Hans–Fredrik Gustafson, Rev. Melissa Kuemmerle; and the closure of Ascension, Binghamton, NY. In both our joys and sorrows, God “synods” (walks together) with us so that we might “synod” with each other and with a world in need. We are nourished and then sent out.

Our bishop is not only the pastor of our pastors, but of our congregations as well: therefore, each of our congregations has two pastors. As the pastor of the synod (per our constitutions), our bishop is responsible for the stewardship of our relationships in the synod and of the pastoral roster and congregations; our records and reports; representing our Synod in the ELCA and on various boards; and working, on behalf of ELCA, with our ecumenical partners. She has represented our Synod and ELCA with our partners in Eastern Europe. This work includes helping with the mentoring of future students and leaders in Slovakia, supporting the home for senior citizens in Svätý Jur, and a preschool for children in the Liptov region. This year also marks the 100th anniversary of the seminary in Bratislava; therefore, the Synod is sponsoring a theological conference in celebration of this anniversary.

God accomplishes this work through us. We are “resimble” [a misspoken contraction of resilient and nimble]. Our community and our relationships, we all do in the name of Jesus on behalf of the whole church. It is not about us or our size: it is God who does the mighty things through our Synod. Therefore, we should be confident that, while the church is changing, it is not dying. God's blessing may just be breaking forth in new and unseen ways. Just like God whittled down Gideon's army to demonstrate that it is God that wins the victory, so our smallness in size, in view of the magnitude of work, is a demonstration that it is God who is doing the work, and to whom belongs the glory.

*Illustration sharing:* Pr. Eric Markovich and VP Jerry Owen shared stories for our reflection.

#### **Report of the Ecumenical & International Relations Committee—Joshua Drobena**

There has been a leadership change in the Slovak Lutheran Church: the election of 2 new bishops. We are looking forward to these new relationships. Our internship program now goes back 30 years into the past, and many of our students have moved into leadership positions in the Slovak church and seminary: this program has been pivotal in their development. We hosted three interns in 2018, and two in 2019. We continue our support of Michaela Prihracki in her PhD studies. The seminary in Bratislava will be celebrating their centennial jubilee this October with a conference that is sponsored by our SZS. We are also sponsoring a mission to provide for a church renovation of rooms for a community pre-school. Over the last six years, the program sponsoring a home for seniors in Svätý Jur has been successful and has now had to expand to the construction of a second building. We are hosting a religious rock concert called “Genesis” which was designed to reach out to those who are not inclined to the church. The new General Bishop of Slovakia sent a video greeting to our Synod, which we viewed. Also shared, was a video interview of Samuel Pecka, one of our 2018 interns from Slovakia, about the importance of his internship experience in the United States.

#### **Report of the ELCA**

The letter from Bishop Eaton and the full ELCA report are included in our app. Our Synod has partnered with the ELCA for the work done at the national level through our benevolence. The 2019 video of the

ELCA for synods was shared. The assembly also viewed the ELCA Report from Bishop Eaton. Lastly, we viewed a personal video greeting from Bishop Eaton in celebration of our Synod's 100th Anniversary.

**Motion** by David Justian and second by Katerina Kopcok to direct the SZS Council to communicate to the ELCA's Church Council that the definition of "Person of Color and Language" should be defined to be more inclusive than those constituents listed in the ELCA Constitution, allowing for those who were raised in another country and whose primary language is other than English to be included in the PCL category. Two voting members spoke for the motion, none against. Rev. Marjorie Keiter moved to close debate. Second by Bruce Kuenzi. Motion to close debate carried. Voting on the motion was approved unanimously.

*Illustration sharing:* Bishop Kucharek shared a story for our reflection.

**Lunch Break:** Noon to 2 PM; Session resumed at 2:23 PM.

*Illustration sharing:* Bishop Kucharek shared a story for our reflection.

### **Plenary 2:**

Gathering Song. Registration reflects 32 present in this session.

**Video Enrichment:** In observance of the 75th Anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising. The Rev. Michal Misina shared some of the history of the uprising. The assembly chaplain, the Rev. Marjorie Keiter, led us in prayer and thanksgiving for those who sacrificed.

### **Enrichment: Slavic Roots in Biblical Texts**—the Rev. Thomas J. Drobena

Rev. Drobena discussed the history of the Slavic language Bible. In 860 AD, Prince Rastislav asked the Pope to provide missionaries to Slovakia, since his people could not understand the language of the missionaries that the Pope had sent to Eastern Europe. The pope failed to respond, so Rastislav sent a request to the Eastern church, requesting a Bishop to be sent in order to instruct his people in the Christian religion. Brothers Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius were sent to represent the church, and to expand the influence of the Eastern Church. They traveled to Moravia, accompanied by Slavs and a military escort, and were welcomed by Prince Rastislav. From 863-867, they taught the liturgy and trained students. They designed an alphabet called Glagolitic in order to translate the liturgy and bible for the Slavic people. The alphabet created is rich in Christian symbolism: the first letter is a cross, since worship begins with the sign of the cross. The triangle represents the Trinity, and the circles represent eternity. They made use of several Hebrew forms. The Cyrillic alphabet was a later invention of the disciples of Cyril and Methodius.

### **Video Enrichment**

#### **Communications Report**—Joshua Drobena

Information technology is the most visible result of the communication department. In addition, the department provides news articles and releases, data management, internet, chat and meetings, AV content and equipment, attendance tracking for the assembly, the modernizing of websites and, the helping of congregations with websites and apps. The Rev. Marjorie Keiter called for a standing ovation in thanks for Joshua's work, to which the assembly responded as requested.

*Illustration sharing*—VP Jerry Owen shared a story for our reflection.

**Video Presentation:** Celebrating 100 Years. This included reflections from members of the Synod regarding our relationships.

### **Elections**

*Consultation Committee*

The council has submitted the following names:

- Clergy (3 positions): Rev. Marjorie Keiter, Rev. Eric Markovich, Rev. Karen Knutson
- Lay (3 positions): Katarina Kopcok, Andrew Fisher, Rose Justian

**Motion** to close nominations by David Justian with a second by Bruce Kuenzi. Motion carried. A unanimous vote on the ballot was cast.

#### *Discipline Committee*

The council has submitted the following names:

- Clergy (3 positions): Rev. Michal Misina, Rev. Kathleen Mills, Rev. Michael Johnson
- Lay (3 positions): Andrea Micovsky, Victoria Dieska, Jerry Owen

**Motion** to close nominations by Rev. Kenneth Michnay, with a second by Kristie Hanas. Motion carried. A unanimous vote on the ballot was cast.

**Enrichment**—Bishop Wilma Kucharek

“All that we have...

All that we are...

All that we hope to be...

We are an offering.”

I Peter 4:7-10

Everyone has received a gift from God. We are meant to open and use these gifts of grace to serve others. They are not intended to promote ourselves. Notice that Peter mentions two common gifts: speaking and service. However, they are to be done as though for God, so that God’s grace is known. Notice how these relate to the Apostle’s Creed. 1st Article: one who may seem to be unremarkable is given remarkable gifts from God (“all that we have”). 2nd Article: we are gifted with salvation (“all that we are”). 3rd Article: “all that we hope to be,” our sanctification, we receive on our spiritual walk with God. We are an Offering. Our work is in the world: we are God’s co-workers. The bishop invited us to note that the Women of the ELCA, on their website, has resources to help us understand this giftedness we have from God for the sake of others: e.g., “Gifts for You: Opening your Spiritual Gifts.” We have gifts, but are we using them? Be creative. Be positive. Negativity destroys creativity, and it hampers the creative work of God’s Holy Spirit.

**Report of the Treasurer:** Sheila Welch

\$1,158 Assembly Offering

\$3,853 100th Anniversary Offering

\$5,011 Total Offering. It was noted that some congregations have indicated that they will be sending their assembly offering in the Fall.

**Presentation of Financial Report 2017/2018:** Sheila Welch

A motion to receive the report was made by Bruce Kuenzi, with a second by Nancy Owen. Motion Carried.

#### **Video Presentation.**

Group Picture.

Recess for Dinner.

**Evening Prayer** – Rev. Ken Michnay

#### **Plenary 3:**

Unfinished Business.

**Presentation of 2020 Budget:** Sheila Welch

The 2020 recommended budget reflects a 2.6% estimated COLA on honoraria and compensation-related items, with options for percent increases in addition to the COLA. Motion by Victoria Dieska that the

ministry honoraria be increased by COLA plus 3%, and that the Bishop's compensation package be increased by 10%, with the understanding that the actual amount for Portico benefits will be determined by Portico. Rev. Marjorie Keiter called the question to end debate, with a second by Carolyn Michnay. Motion carried.

The budget was moved, as amended, by David Justian, with a second by Rev. Marjorie Keiter. Motion carried unanimously.

The Bishop extended her thanks to Sheila Welch for her work, to which the assembly responded with applause.

The Bishop acknowledged that the year 2020 will be the 50th Anniversary of the ordination of women in ELCA. She noted that it is our privilege to have in our Synod the first woman ordained and called to ministry in a congregation: Rev. Karen Knutson.

Rev. Marjorie Keiter closed our evening with prayer.

Friday, August 30, 8 PM:

### **Synod Council Reception honoring the Bishop**

**Certificates of Recognition.** During the reception, certificates were given to those celebrating ordination anniversaries, those who hosted and mentored seminarians from Slovakia, and certificates of thanks to congregations for their 2018 Mission Support giving (Benevolence).

**Servus Dei Award.** Vice-President Jerry Owen presented a motion to the Assembly to bestow upon Bishop Wilma S. Kucharek the Servus Dei Award, the highest award given by the Slovak Zion Synod, in recognition and gratitude for the Bishop's faithfulness in service.

### Resolution

WHEREAS, the Rt. Rev. Wilma S. Kucharek has faithfully executed the office of Bishop of our great Synod for many years, and

WHEREAS, she has seen our great Synod through the best of times and the worst of tribulations with a steady hand and a positive outlook, never compromising in the utmost pride she has in our synodical identity, and

WHEREAS, she is widely known to be the strength of this Synod, and has become a true inspiration for leaders across God's beautiful church, both here in our Slovak Zion Synod, as well as in other ELCA Synods and the greater Churchwide Expression of this Church, even in the leadership of foreign churches abroad, and

WHEREAS, she skillfully weaves the story of scripture into every aspect of her personal life, witnessing to God's compassion and steadfast care for creation with her every breath and every step, and

WHEREAS, she promotes the good work of the Synod to those who worship and participate in the congregations within, and represents us to all she meets, through her cheerfulness and delight on every occasion, and

WHEREAS, she is known by many in our Synod to preach and teach in every moment, even when a brief greeting to a congregation she visits at the beginning of their worship becomes a skillfully crafted impromptu sermon that reignites the child-like faith of every person witnessing her from the pew, and

WHEREAS, she is protective of and watchfully looks out for her flock, with both the crook of her crosier, as well as the stabby, pointy end of it all the way at the bottom, and doesn't mind letting everyone know it, and

WHEREAS, she avidly and exuberantly strikes up meaningful relational conversation with every single layperson of God's Church, no matter how big their desk is, or how small their role in the church structure, fulfilling a personal commitment she has to meaningful relationship with each and every person, and appreciating them for the fine work of creation that the Almighty God has crafted them to be, and

WHEREAS, she is compassionate, and full of strength and wisdom for those rostered individuals in her Synod and in all of God's church who have fallen on trying times, ministering to them with endless patience and love and living into her own role as "pastor to the pastors", as she believes all Bishops should be, and

WHEREAS, no moment of silence can be found in her presence, where she hasn't vocalized her admiration for the mysterious nature of God's works, and the good humor that can be always found therein, for all those who care to look...therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, that on this day, the 30th of August, in the year of our Lord 2019, the Slovak Zion Synod Assembly officially recognizes and honors the Rt. Rev. Wilma S. Kucharek with the Servus Dei Award, the highest honor our Assembly can confer, and furthers its significance by conferring it on the occasion of the Synod's 100th Anniversary, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Synod commends her with utmost gratitude for a lifetime of dedication to leading and nurturing our great Synod, and all of God's church, whether it has been in peril or in celebration, and thanks her for her many years of service as well as for her ongoing commitment, without either of which, our great Synod would not shine nearly as bright.

Motion carried, and award presented.

**Service of Installation, Blessing, and Sending** for those elected to positions in the synod, and for all in leadership in the synod and in our congregations.

#### **Order for Closing of an Assembly**

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. David L. Jones, secretary