

# 2023 SWCA Synod Assembly Nominations Report:

Updated (6/2/2023)

## -----Synod Vice-President-----

*The Synod Vice President position must be filled by a layperson. As chairperson of the synod council and executive committee, the vice president is expected to be present at all meetings and to report the actions of the Synod Council to the Synod Assembly. The term of office is 3 years with one reelection. The vice president will need a vision of the mission of the church, a record of leadership in their local congregation, and a commitment to Christ expressed in the stewardship of one's gifts. They must be able to share openly in the decisions concerning the policies and mission of the church, and be ready to assist the bishop of the synod in working with the agencies, institutions, conferences, and congregations in implementing the work of the synod. The Synod Vice President serves as the principal lay leader of the synod.*

Term: 3 years

Layperson

(alphabetical order)

**Name:** Lisa Curtis

**Southwest California Synod Congregation (Name and City):**

St. Luke Lutheran Church, Woodland Hills

**Congregational service, currently and within the last three years:**

I am the choir director at St. Luke, Woodland Hills, I lead the women's weekly bible study, and have served on the church council.

**Community service, currently and within the past three years:**

I help lead the women's non-denominational bible study in Malibu.

**Synod involvement, currently and within the past three years:**

I was elected to a two year Synod Council term in 2020. Serving on Synod Council has been a meaningful and amazing learning experience. I am currently heading up the mutual ministry committee which supports and encourages the Synod staff. I also serve on EOMT - the Evangelical Outreach Mission Team. I am now co-chair of this group that supports the D.E.M., is working to define strategic ministries for our Synod, determine Synod funding for these ministries, and helps the Synod Council in their visioning for future ministries.



**Sense of calling to serve in this specific capacity or capacities:**

Serving on Synod Council for the past two years during this time of transition has given me a much deeper understanding of the work of the Synod, and the complexities of being the Church within such a wonderfully and beautifully diverse community. It has been a joy to serve, and learn, to listen and ask questions, to think critically and deeply about the issues being faced and the needs that need meeting. It has been sobering to think through the challenges, and uplifting to realize we do have the resources in people and assets to accomplish what God is calling us to do. It would be an honor to serve as Vice President to continue guiding this process and welcoming as many new voices as possible into this very important conversation. This is an exciting time to think creatively about our current situation while building a vision for years to come!

**Name:** Shandra Dawson-Hines

**Southwest California Synod Congregation (Name and City):**  
Messiah Lutheran Church Los Angeles

**Congregational service, currently and within the last three years:**

I am a member at Messiah Lutheran LA. I am the wife of Pastor Rod Hines. I am allowed to serve as a liaison to our community. I currently serve as a worship leader and share the gospel in song. I also serve as a hospitality representative. I serve as a hospitality worker and a liaison to the community.

**Community service, currently and within the past three years:**

While advocating for seniors I have been fortunate enough to volunteer at two local residential care facilities for elderly. My passion for young and old has also led me to lead the charge for Angel Tree the past three years and prior to covid . I lead the charge for our Christmas and Thanksgiving community outreaches impacting children and families.

**Synod involvement, currently and within the past three years:**

I have had the pleasure of attending and voting in the past 5 years. I have also participated in several synodical events.

**Sense of calling to serve in this specific capacity or capacities:**

I believe as a part of the inner workings of such a great body. I will be able to facilitate the expediting of growth and equity. I believe we will be able to expand our reach and breach spaces and places that have been unattended.



**Name:** John Halbert

**Southwest California Synod Congregation (Name and City):**

Hope Lutheran Hollywood

**Congregational service, currently and within the last three years:**

I am currently serving as president of our church council; previously I was vice president. I was chair of our Communications Committee. I have taught Bible study for the last year. I was on our recent Call Committee. I served as de facto office administrator while we searched for a new one.

**Community service, currently and within the past three years:**

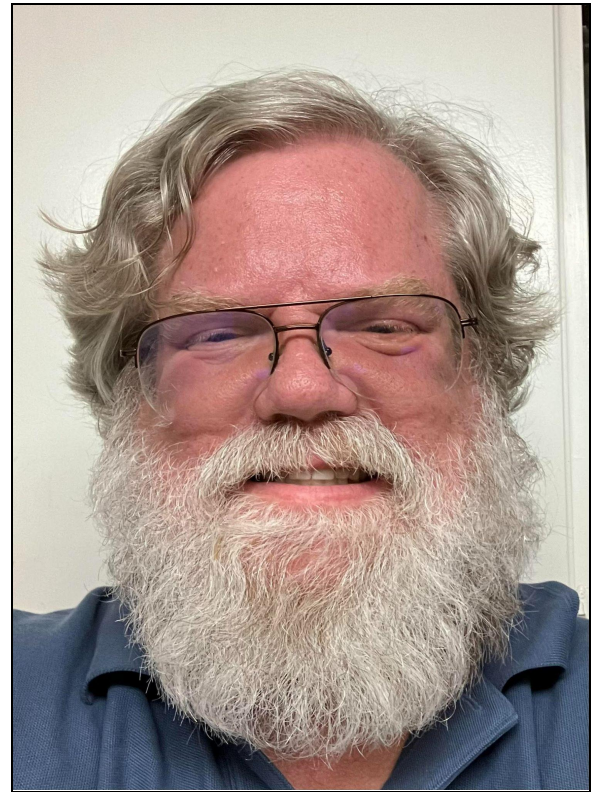
I visited an elderly member of our congregation every week during the pandemic. I am on the Policy Council of the Lutheran Office of Public Policy. I volunteered on a friend's successful campaign for the Los Angeles Community College Board of Trustees. I am a judge in a competition for sustainable/socially responsible business plans.

**Synod involvement, currently and within the past three years:**

I am on the Synod Council, secretary of the Synod Justice Team, and I am chair of the Metropolitan Conference.

**Sense of calling to serve in this specific capacity or capacities:**

I have a very wide range of experience, personally, professionally, and in terms of social justice activism. I've worked for some of the largest organizations in the world, and some of the smallest. The church is facing substantial challenges at every level - from individual congregations, to the conferences, to the Synod, to the ELCA, to Christianity itself. Earning a degree in philosophy taught me to think deeply, and to see the big picture. Working in environments like restaurants, film sets, and numerous offices taught me the importance of paying attention to fine details. In this time of challenge I see great opportunity. Martin Luther took advantage of the new technology of the printing press to spread his interpretation of the gospel. But he also changed how the church was organized. Our new technologies provide us with similar opportunities, but those same technologies challenge us to change how we think about organizing the church and sharing our message. I have a number of ideas about how we can collectively rise to these challenges, and I believe that serving as vice president of the Southwest California Synod would provide me with an ideal platform to share those ideas and develop plans of action appropriate to meet those challenges.



**Name:** Nicole R. Kippen

**Southwest California Synod Congregation (Name and City):**  
Shepherd of the Valley - Simi Valley

**Congregational service, currently and within the last three years:**

I am currently serving on the call committee. I just finished a two year term on our church's council, one of which I served as the secretary.

**Community service, currently and within the past three years:**

**Synod involvement, currently and within the past three years:**

I was the youth delegate to Synod Assembly in 2021 and a delegate in 2022.

**Sense of calling to serve in this specific capacity or capacities:**

I feel called to a greater level of service, specifically in our synod. Our synod is doing such amazing work and I am excited for the possibility of being a part of it all. I firmly believe that the acceptance and radical inclusion of queer folks will make our church thrive. The more we do to change our practices, policies, and language to include the LGBTQIA+ community, the better the Church will be. I also believe that getting young people involved will not only strengthen their faith, but change our communities for the better. While that is not a radical idea, how we include the youth might need to change to engage the youth of today. Having people of all ages grow together in faith might be the way forward.





## -----Conference Representatives-----

*Conference Representatives are Synod Council members who are elected at a meeting of their conference, usually a Spring Assembly. They serve a 3 year term. The voting membership of the Synod Assembly does not nominate or elect them individually, but votes to affirm them (usually en bloc). Names of and information about Conference Representatives are included in the Report of the Nominating Committee. Nominations for this position can't be brought from the assembly floor - only the conference can elect or appoint this position.*

### **Tehachapi Conference Rep**

Term: 3 years

(Vacant, No conference election)

### **Twin Valleys Conference Rep**

Term: 3 years

**Name:** Karen Tomlinson

### **Southwest California Synod Congregation (Name and City):**

St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Van Nuys

### **Congregational service, currently and within the last three years:**

I have had many years of experience as a lay leader at St. Andrew's in several capacities. Most recently I have been serving as the secretary of the Twin Valleys Lutheran Parish Board.

### **Community service, currently and within the past three years:**

### **Synod involvement, currently and within the past three years:**

### **Sense of calling to serve in this specific capacity or capacities:**

## South Bay Conference Rep

Term: 3 years

**Name:** Margarita C. Gonzalez

### **Southwest California Synod Congregation (Name and City):**

First Lutheran Church, Torrance

### **Congregational service, currently and within the last three years:**

As South Bay Conference representative, I have assisted the Dean in his commitment to maintain an active involvement with the congregations to better serve or listen to the needs of each one. For instance, all the pastors of the South Bay Conference (including me) are invited to the virtual weekly text study; this moment provides an opportunity to share and to communicate the needs and projects of their communities.

### **Community service, currently and within the past three years:**

As a board member of the FirstServe Community Services of the South Bay, Inc., a non-profit organization that offers programs of caring for people of all age groups, I have had the opportunity to engage in some of the programs focusing more directly on programs for elders such as “Hope Circle” Support Group, a monthly online support group. This group includes presentations of life issues that many of us face. For instance, I have benefited from this group in sharing my feelings of grieving for the recent loss of my husband. I also have contributed and supported the El Salvador Scholarship program sponsored by members of First Lutheran Church in Torrance and other congregations in the South Bay area. Also, as a member of the Rotary e-Club of Puerto Rico & Las Americas I have helped in supporting community services to the people in need in the island and working with the recent scholarship program named “Everardo y Margarita Gonzalez” for high school students.

### **Synod involvement, currently and within the past three years:**

As a current Synod Council member-at-large, I have been involved in the following committees: Executive Committee, Budget and Finance Committee, and the Discipline Committee.

### **Sense of calling to serve in this specific capacity or capacities:**

I have had the opportunity to currently serve as the Synod Council Member-at-large, and I feel the call to continue to serve and support the Synod and congregations in my conference. I am bilingual (Spanish, English proficient) and feel that I can serve and support the Latino communities in communicating their needs.



## -----Council Members At-Large-----

*Members-at-Large are expected to be present at council meetings, to attend Synod Assembly, and to volunteer on Mission Teams, Task Forces and Committees. The term of office is 3 years with one reelection*

### **Synod Council Member At Large #1**

Term: 3 years

Layperson - Female/Non-Binary

**Name:** Lisa Curtis

**Southwest California Synod Congregation (Name and City):**

St. Luke Lutheran Church, Woodland Hills

**Congregational service, currently and within the last three years:**

I am the volunteer choir director at St. Luke, Woodland Hills, and I lead the women's weekly bible study

**Community service, currently and within the past three years:**

I help lead the women's non-denominational bible study in Malibu.

**Synod involvement, currently and within the past three years:**

I was elected to a two year Synod Council term in 2020, which has flown by! It has been a meaningful and amazing learning experience. I am currently heading up the mutual ministry committee which supports and encourages the synod staff, and having served on EOMT, the evangelical outreach mission team, I am now co-chair of this group that supports the D.E.M, and helps define strategic ministries for our synod, and determine synod funding for these ministries.



**Sense of calling to serve in this specific capacity or capacities:**

Having served for just two years, I feel like I am now deeply involved and have a much better understanding of the role the synod council plays in the life of the church. I enjoy the process of listening and asking questions that help us think critically and deeply about the issues being faced and needs that need meeting . I get to witness so many people working so hard with limited resources and it is a joy to better understand, support and celebrate what we are doing together as our Synod community to serve God's people. Having taken on a leadership role with the EOMT and with the Mutual Ministry team, I feel like I am just getting started! I would be honored to continue serving on the Synod Council.

## Synod Council Member At Large #2

Term: 3 years

Layperson - Female/Non-Binary

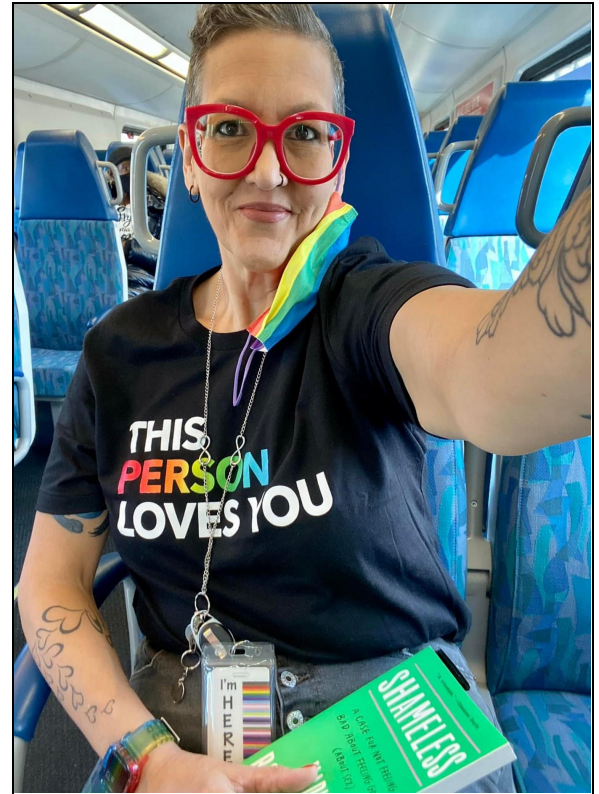
**Name:** Vivian Vega

### **Southwest California Synod Congregation (Name and City):**

American Lutheran Church, Burbank

### **Congregational service, currently and within the last three years:**

I joined ALC Burbank in October of 2021, shortly after moving to the area. I was welcomed into the community in a way that I had not experienced in my spiritual journey before. Shortly after joining, I was invited to read poems, and prayer, and scripture from the pulpit during Sunday Services. I felt seen! From the first time up at the pulpit, I felt driven to share my passion for gender equality, racial and social justice --guided by the Divine Light that is Christ Jesus. In January of 2022 I was elected as Council Secretary. I also became a pretty constant figure in ALC-B's midweek "midrash" meetings and book club, where the topics near and dear to me are discussed. I felt encouraged to share my personal stories and struggles as a refugee to this country, and as a queer female person of color. It has been a journey, and there is so much more to do, but I am excited to be a part of my congregation's future and the future of ELCA.



### **Community service, currently and within the past three years:**

I have worked closely with Students Deserve Justice, the National Education Association's LGBTQIA+ committee, and the LA Teachers Equity and Racial Justice Committees since working for United Teachers Los Angeles for the last 11 years --since moving to California.

### **Synod involvement, currently and within the past three years:**

I attended my first Synod Assembly last year, so I do not have much experience. I am eager to learn more!

### **Sense of calling to serve in this specific capacity or capacities:**

Since joining the Lutheran community, I have felt a passion for discipleship. A passion to share God's message of grace and compassion, of acceptance, empathy, and peace... but most importantly, love. I feel called to do more.



### **Synod Council Member At Large #3**

Term: 3 years

Layperson - Male/Non-Binary

**Name:** Robert E. Siemer

**Southwest California Synod Congregation (Name and City):**

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Long Beach

**Congregational service, currently and within the last three years:**

Church Council, Secretary, 2021 to Present; Website/Tech Admin, 2021 to present; Constitution/Bylaws, 2021 to present; Property, 2023 to present

**Community service, currently and within the past three years:**

Homeowners Association, Vice-President, 2020 to present; Long Beach Yacht Club, RVers, Chair, 2020 to 2022; Community Legal Aid of Southern California, Volunteer Attorney, 2020 to present

**Synod involvement, currently and within the past three years:**

Consultation Committee, Member, 2021 to present; Churchwide, Representative, 2022



**Sense of calling to serve in this specific capacity or capacities:**

The body needs the gifts of many even to merely function. My limited and self-perceived gift is the ability to assist organizations function ethically, efficiently and effectively, honed on years of observation, successes and mistakes. After 18 years of service in my Congregation, my participation on the Consultation Committee and participation in Churchwide Assembly, leads me to seek a position on Synod Council.

## Synod Council Member At Large #4

Term: 3 years

Rostered Leader

**Name:** Deacon Nancy J. Ackerman

**Southwest California Synod Congregation (Name and City):**

Emmanuel, North Hollywood

**Congregational service, currently and within the last three years:**

Within my congregation I've served on the Foundation board, Finance Committee, and as organist.

**Community service, currently and within the past three years:**

I am currently a member of FirstServe Community Services and President of the Greater San Fernando Valley Chapter, Association of Fundraising Professionals. I have also served with the North Central Pennsylvania Dialysis Center; HillSides; the Lutheran Credit Union of America; and the Lutheran Planned Giving Partnership of Southern California and Hawaii.. She was Volunteer of the Year in the Families with Children Category for Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.

**Synod involvement, currently and within the past three years:**

I currently serve the Synod as a member of the Budget & Finance and Endowment Committees. I've served previously on the Synod Council, Executive Committee and as an Assistant to the Bishop.

**Sense of calling to serve in this specific capacity or capacities:**

As a deacon, I'm called to further the mission of organizations that serve God's people. In 2021, I was named CEO of California Lutheran Homes , a NPO that provides funding and other assistance to those in need of housing and human services through partnerships with church congregations, community organizations, and local agencies. My experience in corporate operations, including fiduciary stewardship, ethical practice, financial management, fund development, governance, board development, policy administration, personnel management, strategic planning and execution, and property management position me to be effective in the boardroom in meeting the needs of individuals, congregations and organizations.



**Synod Council Member At Large #5**

Term: 3 years

Rostered Leader

**Name:** Rev. Megan Hunt-Fryling (incumbent)

**Southwest California Synod Congregation (Name and City):**

Bethlehem Lutheran Church & School, Granada Hills

**Congregational service, currently and within the last three years:**

I'm the pastor of Bethlehem in Granada Hills where I've been serving for almost 9 years. During that time, the congregation has faced a number of challenges and changes along with joys and excitement.

**Community service, currently and within the past three years:**

I currently volunteer my time on the PTA board at my children's school in LAUSD and I am involved in a Boy Scout troop. I've also a foster parent.

**Synod involvement, currently and within the past three years:**

For the past few years I've been on Synod Council.

**Sense of calling to serve in this specific capacity or capacities:**

I have been honored to have the opportunity to serve on the synod council for the last few years and I feel called to continue serving in this role.



**Synod Council Member At Large #6**

Term: 3 years  
Rostered Leader

**Name:** Rev. Amie Barsch Odahl

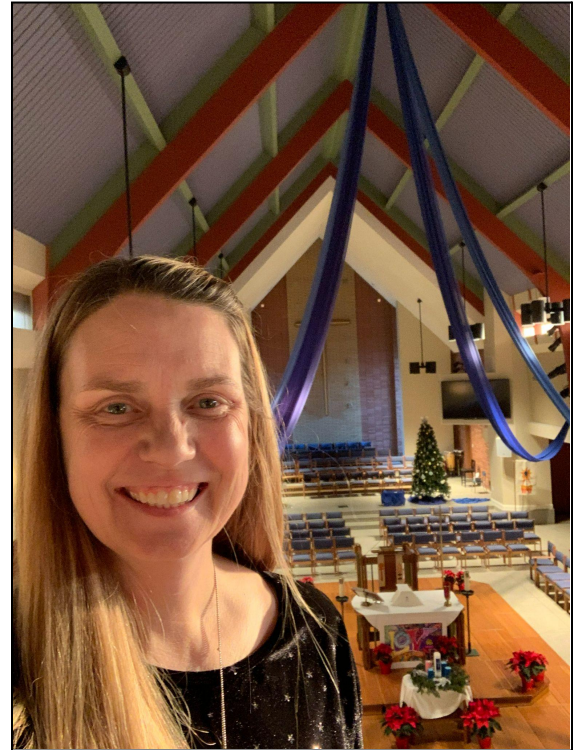
**Southwest California Synod Congregation (Name and City):**  
Salem Lutheran Church, Glendale

**Congregational service, currently and within the last three years:**  
I am the Lead Pastor and Head of School at Salem Lutheran Church.

**Community service, currently and within the past three years:**  
For 5 years, I have been active in the National Charity League - volunteering with my daughter at dozens of Glendale and Burbank charities. I am a current puppy raiser for Guide Dogs of America and Tender Loving Canines.

**Synod involvement, currently and within the past three years:**  
I am an active participant in our monthly Foothill Conference meetings. I am an active supporter and advocate for LRCC.

**Sense of calling to serve in this specific capacity or capacities:**  
It is my time to start serving not only my church but the synod as well. Because my children are grown, I have more time to be involved in the work of the synod.



-----Youth Representative-----

**Synod Council Youth Representative**

Term: 2 years  
10th or 11th Grade

(No Nominations)



-----Committee Positions-----

**Consultation Committee (1)**

Term: 6 years

Lay Person

*The primary responsibility will be to hear the issues of all parties involved in cases related to ordained ministers, officers, congregations, and members of congregations and recommend whether or not disciplinary action should be taken. It will consist of at least six persons and not more than twelve persons, of whom half shall be ordained ministers and half shall be lay persons, who shall be elected by the Synod Assembly. This position is a voluntary one and will meet on an "as needed" basis. Each person must be a voting member of an ELCA congregation. Persons serving on the Consultation Committee must have an ability to listen to the opinions of many persons and process them into a recommendation, which will be fair to all parties involved. They must be able to share openly in discussions of very sensitive matters and must know the policy and mission of the church and be willing to uphold the integrity of the church and individuals to which the church ministers.*

**Name:** Leila Mahmoudi Mader

**Southwest California Synod Congregation (Name and City):**

New Hope Lutheran Church, Agoura Hills

**Congregational service, currently and within the last three years:**

I had been attending at New Hope Lutheran church in Agoura Hills for the last 9 years.

**Community service, currently and within the past three years:**

I had been the chair of the fellowship committee for about the last 6 years at New Hope Lutheran church in Agoura hills.

**Synod involvement, currently and within the past three years:**

I think I've never been involved with the Synod.

**Sense of calling to serve in this specific capacity or capacities:**

It sounds exciting for the new experience and being involved with the Synod.



**Discipline Committee (1)**

Term: 6 years

Lay Person

*The responsibility of the Discipline Committee is to act on the recommendations of the Consultation Committee. It will consist of twelve persons, of whom half shall be ordained ministers and half shall be lay persons, who shall be elected by the Synod Assembly. This position is a voluntary one and will meet on an "as needed" basis. Each person must be a voting member of an ELCA congregation. Persons serving on the Discipline Committee must have an ability to process input from many persons in reaching a consensus of opinion. Persons must be able to share openly in discussions of very sensitive matters. Persons serving on the Discipline Committee must know the policy and mission of the church. They must be compassionate with a commitment to fairness and justice.*

(No Nominations)