

Global Mission Team Report Synod Assembly 2025

El Salvador

Bishop Medardo Gómez retired in January 2025 and died on March 27, 2025. He was preceded in death by his wife, Pastor Abelina Centeno de Gómez, who died after preaching at the assembly to elect a new bishop in October. This has caused a mournful transition period for the Salvadoran Lutheran Church (Iglesia Luterana Salvadoreña or ILS).

Dec. 5, 2024, Rev. Guadalupe Cortés was elected the second bishop since the church's founding, and the first woman to hold the position. Bishop Leila Ortiz traveled to El Salvador in January 2025 and had the honor of preaching at Bishop Cortés' installation.

Bishop Ortiz returned to El Salvador in April 2025 to facilitate the first retreat for the rostered ministers under the leadership of the new bishop and church council. The theme of the retreat was, "Reencuentro y Reforma." It was the beginning of an intentional healing process as they seek to address the critical needs of the church and the country as a healthy church body.

A Sister Church Gathering will be held in El Salvador November 10-14, 2025.

Namibia

In February, a delegation of approximately twelve representatives from companion synods in Iowa, Washington State, New Jersey, and the Metro DC Synod—including Bishop Leila Ortiz and The Rev. Dr. Elijah Mwitanti—traveled to Namibia to strengthen partnerships with Lutheran churches in the region. The visit featured consultative meetings with three Namibian Lutheran Synods: the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Namibia (DELK), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). Discussions centered on deepening collaboration between these Namibian synods and their four U.S. counterparts, with a focus on shared mission goals, leadership development, and resource-sharing.

Key Engagements

1. Synod Collaboration: Strategic meetings emphasized resource-sharing, leadership development, and joint mission priorities.
2. Bishop Installations: The delegation attended the installation ceremonies of bishops from Namibia and Angola, including the historic installation of The Rev. Hilja Ndatala-Eenyofi Nghaangulwa, Angola's first woman bishop, a milestone for gender equity in church leadership. The Rev. Gideon Niitenge was elected to serve the Western Diocese as well as taking the office of the Presiding Bishop. Bishop Leila Ortiz's participation in the ceremony was reported in the Living Lutheran article, [“A new season in Namibia Lutherans rejoice with the first female bishop”](#).
3. Paulinum Seminary: A visit to Namibia's primary theological training center led to commitments to supply academic resources, including books and scholarship funds, to nurture future church leaders.
4. Ministry Site Visits: The group observed US-supported initiatives, such as HIV/AIDS outreach programs and primary/secondary education projects, reaffirming their commitment to these ministries.
5. Historical Reflection: In northern Namibia, the delegation honored the legacy of Finnish missionaries who established the Lutheran Church in the region, many of whom are buried there as a testament to their lifelong dedication.

Outcomes and Next Steps

- Namibian bishops accepted an invitation to attend the installation of the newly elected ELCA Presiding Bishop this fall.
- Cross-Cultural Exchange: Plans were finalized to host Namibian camp counselors at US Lutheran summer camps in 2025, fostering youth collaboration and shared learning.
- Long-term goals include expanding scholarship programs for Paulinum Seminary and amplifying support for leadership initiatives that will strengthen the national church.

Acknowledgments

The synod extends gratitude to the Namibia Network of the Metro DC Synod— Kathryn Tobias, Mark Victorson, and Rev. Dr. Elijah Mwitanti—for their indispensable efforts in coordinating logistics, fostering connections, and ensuring the companion relationship successes.

Middle East Peace Team (MEPT)

Bishop Ortiz and the Synod's Middle East Peace Team hosted Palestinian pastor and author The Rev. Munther Isaac for lunch and conversation on Tuesday, April 1, 2025, at Saint Luke Lutheran Church. The Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac serves both Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Beit Sahour. Pr. Munther was in the US in late March/early April on a speaking tour in relation to his new book, Christ in the Rubble: Faith, the Bible, and the Genocide in Gaza. The event was well attended.

The MEPT also drafted and submitted a memorial for this year's Synod Assembly regarding Palestine and Israel. In preparation for the discussion of the memorial at the Assembly, the MEPT scheduled a zoom meeting on May 7th to introduce the memorial and answer questions.

In February 2025, the MEPT hosted an evening dinner and discussion with Dr. Fadi Atrash (CEO of Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem) and Sieglinde Weinbrenner (LWF Representative in Jerusalem).

The MEPT meets monthly by zoom. Please contact one of the co-conveners if you would like to participate in the work of the MEPT.

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