



# EN CONJUNTO

Iniciativas del Ministerio Latinx del Sínodo del Sureste  
Latinx Ministry Initiatives of the Southeastern Synod

**\*\*THE FOLLOWING IS A WORKING DOCUMENT INTENDED TO BE A SPRINGBOARD FOR INITIAL CONVERSATIONS WITH THE NEW LATINX MINISTRIES INITIATIVES TASK FORCE IN JANUARY 2021. \*\***

*“From [Christ], the whole body,  
fitted and held together by what every connection supplies,  
as each part is working properly,  
causes the body’s growth for building itself up in love.”  
- Ephesians 4:16*

## **En Conjunto**

*En conjunto*, in Spanish, means altogether, as a group, together with and is used to describe how something is done communally. *En Conjunto* is the name for the Southeastern Synod Latinx Ministry Initiatives because we do this work that God has given us *altogether* and with one another. The initiatives that grow out of this ministry are always carried out **with** our Latinx siblings in Christ and neighbors. Through the various parts of this ministry we strive to worship and pray *en conjunto*, learn and teach *en conjunto*, serve and advocate *en conjunto*, engage, equip, and empower *en conjunto*, and accompany *en conjunto*.

## **Logo**

The logo for En Conjunto is based on and includes the Southeastern Synod logo, with the love of Christ that holds us together as diverse members, congregations, and partners. The circle of connected people leaves a space of inclusion for others to join and recognizes the times that Latinx individuals, families, leaders, immigrants, asylum seekers are absent or excluded from tables of decision-making that impact the Latinx community. From the description of our Southeastern Synod logo: *As disciples of Jesus, we seek to equip, empower, and engage all to love and serve. The circle is not closed, but remains open. For we have been called to draw the circle so wide that no lines of exclusion exist; so that all may know God’s grace, love, and mercy.* This is why there is space for you too in God’s work that we do together!

## **Mission**

The Latinx Ministry Initiatives will engage, equip, and empower individuals, families, and congregations to proclaim God’s love in Jesus Christ through word and deed, foster intercultural faith communities and explore the many possibilities that emerge from our glocal (local and global) church reality.

## Vision

Engaging communities, equipping leaders, empowering relationships for the development of Latinx Ministries in the Southeastern Synod.

## Terminology: *Latinx*

When you search across the ELCA, there is not one consistent term used to describe the rich diversity of peoples, communities, languages, cultures, histories of Latin American ancestry. Two of the most common terms are “Hispanic” and “Latino.” Acknowledging that ethnic descriptors are often generalizing at best and oppressive at worst, En Conjunto is mindful of the words that will be used to be intentionally inclusive to Latina women, gender non-conforming and non-binary Latinxs, and all who strive for inclusion, equity, and justice within the Latino community, En Conjunto will use the term “Latinx.”<sup>1</sup>

## History of Latinx Ministries in Southeastern Synod

The faith and dedication of committed Latinx lay leaders in the Synod is a living example of the deep roots, relationships, shared struggles, solidarity, and seed-planting done over the years, of which we still see fruits. Their strong leadership and service have led to congregational vitality and continuity that we witness in the ministries listed below. For all that the leaders of these faith communities have done, do, and will do to lead emerging Latinx ministries, we give thanks.

### *Iglesia Luterana Sagrada Familia, Doraville, GA*

2000	Advent Lutheran Church on Buford Highway in Doraville, GA closed, ceding its locale for a new Latinx Lutheran ministry to the community due to Buford Highway being one of the most diverse corridors in the U.S. The new Latinx Lutheran ministry was named Iglesia Luterana Sagrada Familia
2000-2001	Rev. Ricardo Sinisterra served as Pastor of Sagrada Familia
2001-2004	Barbara Capers maintained the unity of Sagrada Familia in the interim
2004-2013	Rev. Lydia Villanueva served as Pastor of Sagrada Familia and was a key Latinx leader
2013-2018	Rev. Alberto Sifontes served as Supply SAM at Sagrada Familia
2018-2019	Rev. Julie Crosby served as Supply Pastor at Sagrada Familia
2019	Sagrada Familia sold their property and merged with Amazing Grace, Lawrenceville, GA

### *Christ Lutheran Church / Iglesia Luterana de Cristo, Oakwood, GA*

2001-2006	Rev. Andy Siebert began Latinx outreach ministry and gathering a Spanish-speaking worshipping community
2006-2016	Rev. Alberto Sifontes served as Synodically Authorized Minister (SAM) at Christ Lutheran and began Iglesia Luterana de Cristo as a mission congregation “under development” (the church status remains the same in 2020)
2016-present	Lay leaders continue to gather for worship in Spanish

### *St. James Lutheran Church, Norcross, GA*

2006-2014	Rev. Julie Crosby served as Pastor of St. James with a Latinx service on Saturday evenings, for several years, but service was then suspended due to few participants
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<sup>1</sup> Ramos, Paola (2020). *Finding Latinx: In Search of the Voices Redefining Latino Identity*. Vintage Books, 5. “Latinx stands for all people in the Latino community who have ever felt left out. That ‘x’ is simply an invitation for every one of those people that can’t fit into one identity, for people who want to challenge norms, or for those that simply want to reimagine themselves.”

2013-2014 Seminarian Betty Rendon worked for a year at St. James with the Latinx community as part of her internship with Rock of Ages Lutheran Church, Stone Mountain, GA

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church, Lawrenceville, GA

2013 A Latinx outreach ministry began with an Iglesia Familiar, which became a weekly “Homework Help” ministry for children and youth from Latinx families, and liturgical pieces in Spanish began to be incorporated into English worship services

2019 Sagrada Familia members became part of Amazing Grace where Rev. Mike Millum serves as Pastor, including a third worship service in Spanish. Pastor Julie Crosby served as supply preacher for Spanish services

2020 Rev. Justin Eller called as half-time Associate Pastor at Amazing Grace

Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church, Birmingham, AL

2020 Rev. Edelmiro “Ed” Cortes began monthly Spanish language prayer services online

Southeastern Synod

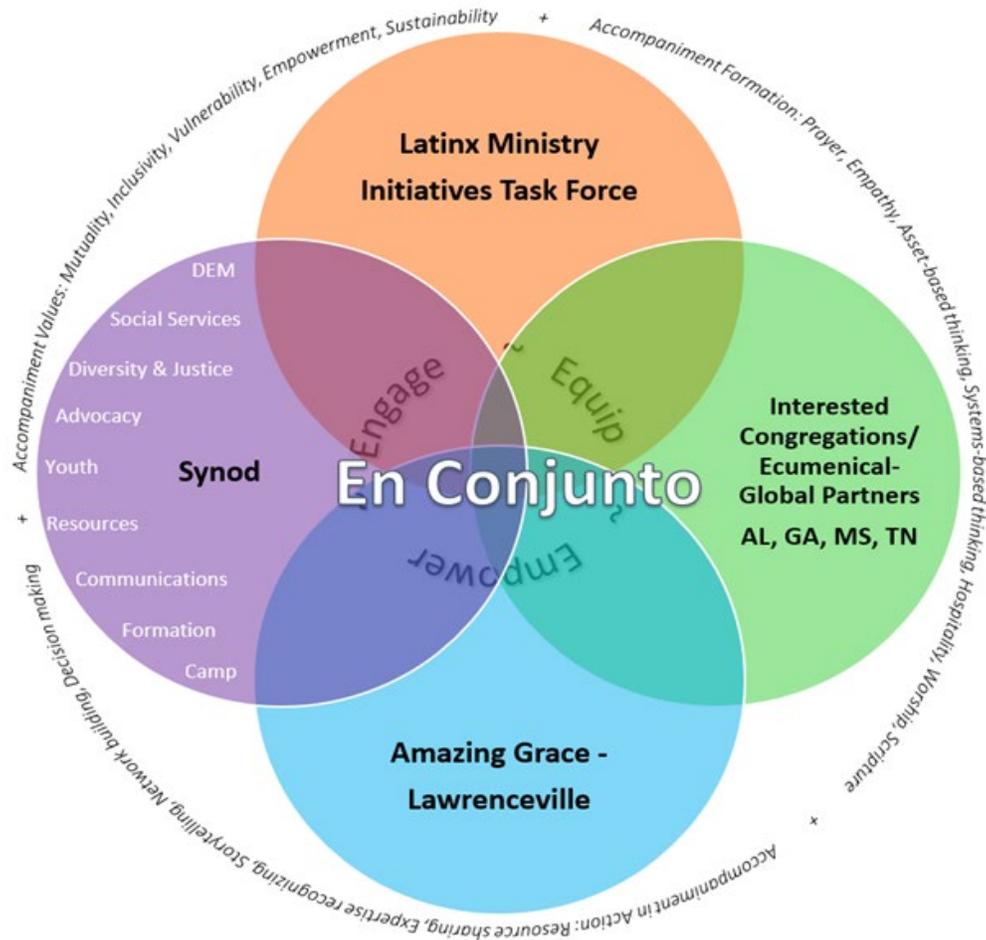
2020 Rev. Justin Eller called as half-time Assistant to the Bishop for Latinx Ministry Initiatives

Pastors Crosby, Villanueva, and Sifontes participated in weekly pericope discussions in each other’s homes for years, sharing meals, ideas, and support. They hosted two two-year lay schools, once a month for six hours. Pr. Sifontes was President of the Hispanic Association of the ELCA until 2015.

The Latinx Lutherans of the Southeastern Synod have participated in annual Synod assemblies, Southeastern Synod’s annual Martin Luther King services, a Día de la Raza Celebration, Lay Ministry Schools, Summer Family Camps at Lutheridge, Family Retreats at Lutheridge, and many other synodical and church-wide activities.

The En Conjunto as the Southeastern Synod Latinx Ministry Initiatives are the next iteration, manifestation, and revelation of what God is doing in and through Latinx communities and ministries in the Synod.

## SPHERES OF INTERCONNECTING RELATIONSHIPS



### A. Latinx Ministry Initiatives Task Force (Task Force)

A team of 8-10 people will work together to facilitate the Southeastern Synod's multifaceted efforts to develop new Latinx ministry initiatives. The primary goals of this task force include:

1. to develop a Synod vision for Latinx ministry,
2. raise up and strengthen Latinx Ministry initiatives: *engaging communities, equipping leaders, and empowering relationships* across the Southeastern Synod.

### B. Interested Congregations/Ecumenical-Global Partners (Partners)

Interested congregations in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee will be explored to identify congregations and leaders who are open to serving as host sites or sponsors for developing and emerging Latinx ministries. These potential sights may be identified by the En Conjunto Task Force as well as self-identify themselves to the Task Force. These congregations and leaders may desire to reach out and be in ministry with the Latinx community around them or nearby.

Ecumenical-Community-Global Partners will be leaders from other denominations, community agencies and organizations, and global companion church (e.g. Iglesia Luterana Agustina de Guatemala) with whom we can build partnership and networks to support emerging Latinx ministry initiatives.

**C. Amazing Grace Lutheran Church, Lawrenceville, GA** (Amazing Grace)

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church in Lawrenceville is a model of ministry where a predominantly Spanish-speaking congregation (formally known as *Iglesia Luterana Sagrada Familia* in Doraville, GA) has been welcomed into a predominantly English-speaking congregation (still known as Amazing Grace) to join together in ministry. Both worshipping communities have a shared history of educational outreach together with the Latinx community and both have expressed their desire to become one faith community. This is also where Pastor Justin Eller serves as half-time Associate Pastor. This congregation has the potential to be a home base for pilot programs, new initiatives, and hybrid ministry models.

**D. Southeastern Synod & “Serving Arms”** (Synod)

*En Conjunto* strives to partner with other ministry areas throughout the Southeastern Synod, inviting them to collaborative conversations related to emerging Latinx ministry initiatives. The partnerships will be unique from one another and reflect the strengths of the Synodical partners. Synod ministries include, but are not limited to: Directors for Evangelical Mission, Diversity and Justice Task Force, Advocacy, Youth and Young Adults, Human, Financial, and Formation Resources, Communications, and Formation-Candidacy. Synodical “Serving Arms” are ministry partners and organizations essential to helping the Synod carry out its work, and include, but not limited to: Inspiritus, Lutheranch by NovusWay Ministries, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Campus Ministry, and Lutheran Theological Center in Atlanta.

## FOCI

Based on the three action areas of the Southeastern Synod’s Strategic Vision, *En Conjunto* aims to work within the same foci or areas:

1. **Engage** (communities): community building, initial contacts, start conversations
2. **Equip** (leaders & congregations): sustainable formation of leaders identified in Latinx communities
3. **Empower** (relationships): between parishioners, congregations, organizations, surrounding Latinx community

		<b>1. Engage:</b> Community building, initial contacts, start conversations		<b>2. Equip:</b> Sustainable formation of leaders identified in the Latinx communities		<b>3. Empower:</b> Relationships (parishioners + congregations + organizations)
<b>A. Latinx Ministry Initiatives Team</b>	Accompaniment Values: Mutuality, Inclusivity, Vulnerability, Empowerment, Sustainability	A.1. Form Task Force to facilitate Synod efforts in new initiatives for congregations, conferences, Synod	Acc. Formation: Prayer, Empathy, Asset-based & Systems-based thinking, Hospitality, Scripture	A.2. Create sustainable plans focused on the development of human, formation & financial resources	Acc. In Action: Resource sharing, Expertise recognizing, Storytelling, Network building, Decision making	A.3. Work to recognize/address asymmetries of power as SES identifies/lifts up gifted Latinx leaders
<b>B. Interested Congregations/Ecumenical-Global Partners (GA, TN, AL, MS)</b>		B.1. Strengthen & build relationships with other SES congregations, ecumenical partners, Latinx community leaders		B.2. Interested congregations learn about Accompaniment Model, Interculturality, advocacy, anti-racism work or participate in Latinx Ministry Competency course		B.3. Accompany congregations as they explore interests/passions/resources for engaging Latino community; support their plans
<b>C. Amazing Grace Lutheran Church Lawrenceville, GA</b>		C.1. Foster deeper intercultural and inclusive relationships between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking members		C.2. Pastoral accompaniment, identify gifted lay leadership		C.3. May become a teaching parish for congregational interculturality
<b>D. Southeastern Synod &amp; "Serving Arms" (camps, social services, youth, advocacy, DEM, Candidacy, communications, resources)</b>		D.1. Connect with various Synod ministries about past/present/future with Latinx community		D.2. Equip Spanish/English-speakers to become accompaniment practitioners through Mission Formation across various Synod ministries		D.3. Provide on-going support to accompaniment practitioners as living curriculum

## ENGAGING COMMUNITIES *en conjunto*

Ministry approach focused on across all relationships in this focus area: *Accompaniment Values of Mutuality, Inclusivity, Vulnerability, Empowerment, Sustainability*<sup>2</sup>

**A.1. TASK FORCE ENGAGES.** Form and convene the Latinx Ministry Initiatives (*En Conjunto*) Task Force to facilitate Synod's efforts in new Latinx ministry initiatives with congregations, conferences, Synod. Responsibilities of this team will include:

- Participate in bilingual monthly meetings by Zoom (first meeting in January) and participate in other regular communication (email, text, etc.) as needed
- Be a co-teacher/co-learner able to use various methodologies, pedagogies, and approaches that acknowledge and dismantle systems of oppression/supremacy as we accompany individuals, families, congregations, and organizations in the development of intercultural relationship and networks
- Co-create materials and resources and facilitate workshops with Spanish-speakers and/or English-speakers on a variety of topics (i.e., Accompaniment Model, interculturality, immigrant rights, etc.)
- Actively participate in the collaborative development of a Synod vision for Latinx ministry and in the planning, monitoring, and evaluating process of new Latinx Ministry initiatives and share in team leadership responsibilities

<sup>2</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (2013). *Accompaniment*. Glocal Mission Gathering. [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Accompaniment\\_\(full\).pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Accompaniment_(full).pdf)

- The initial term commitment will be for one year (12 months); members will serve in a rotational manner to ensure that ministerial and ecclesial memory is maintained
- Prepare regular progress reports for all Synod Council meetings, and other synod gatherings during the Task Force's existence

### **B.1. PARTNERS ENGAGE.**

- Strengthen/build relationships with other interested congregations in the Southeastern Synod, ecumenical and global partners, Latinx community leaders and organizations
- Have mutual conversations around the future of Latinx ministries and how, together, networks and resource sharing or connecting might be possible
- En Conjunto will be a resource for questions, guidance, or suggestions on how to engage with and learn about the Latinx community around them

### **C.1. AMAZING GRACE ENGAGES.**

- Foster deeper intercultural and inclusive relationships between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking members.
- Begin by listening to stories, building relationships despite language barriers
- Convene a small working group of Spanish and English-speaking leaders

### **D.1. SYNOD ENGAGES.**

- Connect Synod ministries with Latinx community and congregational possibilities.
- Assess congregations open to being served by a Latinx candidate or rostered minister
- Actively participate and provide counsel when decisions are made regarding new Latinx mission starts and local leaders

## **EQUIPPING LEADERS *en conjunto***

*Ministry approach focused on across all relationships in this focus area: Accompaniment Formation of Prayer, Empathy, Asset-based & Systems-based thinking, Hospitality, Worship, Scripture*

### **A.2. TASK FORCE EQUIPS.**

- Work together to create and curate sustainable roadmaps focused on the development of human resources (candidacy), formation resources (materials for leaders/congregations) & financial resources (endowment and Strategic Initiatives Fund)
- Explore preexisting successful and innovative models across the Synod and ELCA for equipping emerging Latinx leaders and predominantly English-speaking congregations to be welcoming and interculturally competent communities
- Explore ways to promote continuing education that embodies popular education methodology<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> According to Paolo Freire's Popular Education Methodology, *we are all co-teachers and co-learners; no one is an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge, rather we all have something to teach and something to learn; we construct knowledge in community.*

**B.2. PARTNERS EQUIP.** For many, accompaniment is a new ministry approach. So we will not assume accompaniment, but constantly keep the values, formation, and accompaniment in action at the forefront of our thoughts and actions.

- Predominantly Spanish-speaking faith communities will identify, raise up, equip lay ministers, empowering some to continue on to rostered ministry
- Predominantly English-speaking faith community will work on intercultural and Latinx cultural competencies so that they can reach out to their Latinx neighbors
- Collaborate with the Iglesia Luterana Agustina de Guatemala (ILAG) and ELCA on trainings using technology where and when possible

### **C.2. AMAZING GRACE EQUIPS.**

- Relationships between Amazing Grace and former Sagrada Familia members will be nurtured and strengthened through shared learning and teaching opportunities
- The congregation will identify, equip, and empower gifted Spanish-speaking lay leadership in the congregation
- The congregation will resume workshops, trainings, and community engagements with Latinx families

### **D.2. SYNOD EQUIPS.**

- Equip Spanish/English-speakers to become accompaniment practitioners through workshops, videos, etc. across various Synod ministries
- Partner with Assistants to the Bishop for Congregational Transitions to identify leaders who can counsel congregations considering calling/contracting new Latinx leaders
- Develop (or partner with another institution) and offer basic and ministry-related Spanish language courses for English-speaking leaders like the Spanish Language and Hispanic Ministry Intensive through the Lutheran Seminary of the Southwest that would prepare them for ministry with the Latinx community

## **EMPOWERING RELATIONSHIPS en conjunto**

*Ministry approach focused on across all relationships in this focus area: Accompaniment in Action: Resource sharing, Expertise recognizing, Storytelling, Network building, Decision making*

**A.3. TASK FORCE EMPOWERS.** The En Conjunto Task Force will work to recognize and address asymmetries of power within the Synod. Using, for example, the description of the five legs of a starfish organization,<sup>4</sup> the Task Force will function as:

- Leg 1: Facilitators to help individuals and congregations join En Conjunto **circles** (initiatives, groups) of Latinx ministry
- Leg 2: **Catalysts** help initiate circles, inspire others to action, transfer and empower responsibility, and then may fade into the background
- Leg 3: Promoters of the ideas (**ideology**), dreams, hopes, visions of Latinx Ministry Initiatives in the Synod

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<sup>4</sup> Brafman, O. & Beckstrom, R (2006). *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*. Penguin Books.

- Leg 4: Networkers connecting itself and others into **preexisting networks**, platforms, resources, networks
- Leg 5: **Champions** to continually promote, support, and curate new ideas, helping take ideas to the next level and being salespersons for En Conjunto across the Synod

**B.3. PARTNERS EMPOWER.** Partners will accompany one another as they explore interests/passions/resources for engaging Latinx community, support plans for congregations to become internship sites for bilingual seminarians with Latinx outreach ministries.

- Interested Spanish-speaking leaders/congregations will be encouraged to participate in lay leadership trainings through the following or similar institutions:
  - Parish Lay Ministry Academy (Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod)
  - Academia de Liderazgo (ELCA)
  - Instituto Pastoral Contextual (Argentina)
  - Seminario Luterano Augsburg (Mexico)
  - Escuela Internacional de EPES (Chile)
- Interested English-speaking leaders/congregations will be encouraged to learn more about the ELCA's Accompaniment Model, interculturality, advocacy basics, anti-racism, diversity, and justice training, and participate in educational opportunities like the Episcopal Church's week-long Virtual Episcopal Latino Ministry Competency course

### **C.3. AMAZING GRACE EMPOWERS.**

- One future goal might be that Amazing Grace, as a bilingual worshiping community, could become a teaching parish or an internship site for future leaders in the ELCA
- Empower other leaders and congregations to become intentionally bilingual and intercultural congregations
- Be one of the congregations that makes up a non-geographical Latinx Conference of the Southeastern Synod and empowers new, emerging communities to join

### **D.3. SYNOD EMPOWERS.**

- Work in partnership with the Bishop's Assistants for Candidacy to explore the possibilities of including 2-3 members of Latinx or Latin American ancestry on the Candidacy Committee
- Explore possibility of intentionally having 1 or 2 representatives from the Latinx community serve on Synod Council with voice and vote
- Provide on-going support to leaders, congregations, and accompaniment practitioners to be living curriculum of developing contextual Latinx Lutheran ministries.

## **POINT OF CONTACT**

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