

First transgender bishop in ELCA resigns

by [Alejandra Molina](#) in the [July 13, 2022](#) issue



Megan Rohrer, the first openly transgender bishop of the ELCA, who resigned in June. (AP Photo/John Hefti)

The first transgender bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has resigned amid criticism over the decision to remove the pastor of a Latino congregation on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in December.

“The constant misinformation, bullying and harassment has taken too hard a toll on the Synod I love, my family and myself,” said Megan Rohrer, who presided over the Sierra Pacific Synod of the ELCA, in a resignation letter posted June 6 on Twitter.

However, questions remain about the timing of the resignation.

Rohrer's post came an hour after ELCA presiding bishop Elizabeth Eaton announced on Twitter that she would be "initiating the discipline process immediately, including suspension of Bishop Rohrer, based on additional information that has come to light."

Rohrer's posted resignation letter was dated two days prior to Eaton's announcement.

"The ELCA has decided to move forward with a discipline process, even after I resigned, without providing any specifics about what I allegedly did, and that appears to be in conflict with their own procedures," Rohrer said in a tweet thread accompanying the resignation letter.

Eaton did not elaborate on the additional information.

Rohrer had been criticized by the Asociación de Ministerios Latinos de la ELCA as showing a "lack of empathy and understanding toward their Latinx siblings" for removing Nelson Rabell-González on one of the most sacred and culturally significant days for Latinos.

Rohrer apologized in a written statement in late December, saying they "did not understand the impact on the greater church." Rohrer said the Sierra Pacific Synod—which covers Central and Northern California as well as northern Nevada—provided pastoral care for those affected and had "private pastoral conversations" with individuals from Misión Latina Luterana, the congregation in Stockton, California, from which Rabell-González was removed.

Eaton appointed a listening team to review the December 12 disruption. The team issued a report that found Rohrer chose to remove Rabell-González even after being made aware that doing so on the sacred day would be "potentially devastating."

The decision in December to vacate Rabell-González's call simultaneously ceased funding for the congregation, according to the report. The congregation changed its name to Iglesia Luterana Santa María Peregrina, or Holy Mary Pilgrim Lutheran Church, "as a way to describe their experience of feeling assaulted and forced to become pilgrims," the report noted. The congregation now worships in a parking lot.

The listening team recommended Eaton bring disciplinary charges against Rohrer.

It isn't completely clear what led to Rabell-González's removal, but in a previous statement, the council of the Sierra Pacific Synod said it unanimously decided to vacate the pastor's call after "continual communications of verbal harassment and retaliatory actions from more than a dozen victims from 2019 to the present."

Rabell-González, who was considered for bishop in the election that ultimately chose Rohrer, has denied those accusations.

During the 2021 synod assembly, at which he was nominated for bishop, Rabell-González acknowledged allegations against him, saying he was accused of "verbally mistreating a pastoral intern and members of the church staff" in a previous position at a different church.

The pastor, who is Afro-Caribbean, said he had been asked to resign from that church and sign a nondisclosure agreement, which he declined, after members complained about his support for Black Lives Matter and immigrant rights.

In their resignation, Rohrer said that while they remain strong enough to continue serving as bishop, "I believe I would be a poor role model for my black trans children if I continued in this position."

Rohrer said they remain proud of what the synod has accomplished, especially a \$1 million donation to the Sierra Pacific Outdoors project.

"I hope you will continue to support and work on this important project to provide wellness and spiritual support for youth, young adults, families and diverse individuals," the statement read. —Religion News Service. Emily McFarlan Miller contributed to this report.