

29th Annual Synod Assembly
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA
June 17-18, 2016
PPL Center, Allentown, Pennsylvania

2016 Synod Assembly Minutes

PLENARY SESSION ONE

Friday, June 17, 2016, 9:30 a.m.

The Rev. Dr. Samuel R. Zeiser, Bishop, opened the Synod Assembly of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod at 9:30 a.m., declaring a quorum present. He expressed appreciation to all of the persons involved in making arrangements for the assembly: Pastor Christopher deForest, the individuals who planned and staffed “God’s Playground,” the worship team, “Tangled Blue,” Mark Mummert, the volunteers from the three host mission districts, the synod support staff, and Pastor Kurt E. Garbe. He welcomed Mr. Andrew Hirsh, Assistant General Manager at the PPL Center, who greeted the assembly. Bishop Zeiser introduced the three deans of the host mission districts, who invited the assembly attendees to “Taste and See God in the City,” i.e., opportunities to explore parts of Allentown and area institutions.

Making reference to the June 12 attack at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, Bishop Zeiser offered prayer while the names of those persons killed were shown on the screen.

Following opening worship, Secretary Carl D. Shankweiler introduced the following resolution on behalf of the Synod Council of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod: ***Resolved, that the 2016 Synod Assembly Program be adopted.*** The motion was adopted.

Secretary Shankweiler reported that copies of the 2015 Assembly Minutes, as prepared by former Secretary Barbara Belón, have been corrected, certified by the bishop and secretary, and prepared for deposit in the archives, with additional copies available at the registration desk.

Bishop Zeiser presented his report and commented on the “unleashed” emphasis, with 2016 being the second of three years with this theme. He gave a dozen examples of ministries and persons he met or experienced during the previous year: meeting four members of a congregation who came to visit the Lutheran Center and shared their joy about their congregation; seeing call committees and councils from congregations where there was conflict now showing enthusiasm and new life; witnessing a congregation’s summer meal program; attending a congregation’s anniversary celebration and hearing the president say that they need to raise more money for world hunger; witnessing two congregations come together in a collegial relationship through a unanimous vote; watching the synod receive extraordinary first call seminary graduates; seeing the Philadelphia and Gettysburg seminaries begin to form a new way of educating amid uncertainty; recognizing that the ELCA is creating a new vision through “Called Forward Together in Christ”; noting that the persons gathered in assembly are going beyond the confines of their congregations to do something synodically; recognizing that the assembly is challenged to raise up to \$15,000 as a match for a major gift for World Hunger; noting that a generous donor is making available to congregations one new prayer book each for members of the armed forces; and talking with a woman of Russian descent who is proud to be a Lutheran for twenty-one years.

Vice President Donald F. Smith Jr., Esq., spoke about the nomination process for nominations coming from the floor; Edward Cool, chairperson of the elections committee, spoke about the positions needing to be filled. Bishop Zeiser opened the floor to nominations, but none were made and so the bishop declared the nominations closed. Mr. Cool moved that the secretary approve the elections of all persons running

unopposed; the motion was seconded and adopted. The first ballot was then taken for the three contested synod council elections.

Vice President Smith presented the Report of the Synod Council, beginning on page 9 of the Bulletin of Reports, and his own written report on page 4. He spoke about the need for humility in church work. He also spoke about the discussions within the synod council concerning the synod's constitutional responsibilities concerning congregations that can no longer protect their assets, including endowments, from waste and deterioration. He asserted that action is needed because, quoting Martin Luther in a similar situation, "it is God who asks and requires the action of you." He reported that the synod council recognized that taking action will likely result in resistance from congregational members and that any action to close a congregation should come only when all other options have been tried and even then with pastoral care being supplied. He spoke about the desirability of having a neutral person work with the congregation, entering into the process of providing guidance at an early stage before closing is inevitable, and noting the demands that all of this work would place on an already stressed synod staff. He indicated that the council will take up this issue again at its July 2016 meeting.

Secretary Shankweiler presented the Report of the Secretary, found on pages 4 to 7 of the Bulletin of Reports.

Treasurer David Hinrichs presented the Treasurer's Report found on page 8 of the Bulletin of Reports. He noted that the ELCA's theme is not "God's work; our money." Money is a helpful tool. He explained that the synod draws from two "wells": (a) the mission support dollars provided by congregations, which makes up two-thirds of the synod's spending; (b) the endowment funds of the synod. He explained that the last fiscal year ended with a \$44,000 deficit, which was covered by the synod's reserves.

Pastor Lori A. Kochanski of the Spirituality Ministry Team was called upon to lead the assembly in a spiritual exercise.

Pastor Carolyn Hetrick, Chairperson of the Committee on Reference and Counsel, explained the work of the committee and the rules of procedure that relate thereto. She announced that anyone wishing to submit a resolution for consideration by the assembly needed to do so by 5:00 p.m. on this day (later adjusted to 4:00 p.m.). The initial report consisted of six items, only one of which could be presented at this time.

RESOLUTION 1: FUNDING ELCA MINISTRIES AMONG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING ECONOMIC POVERTY

Pastor Hetrick reported that the following resolution was received from Pastor Mary E. Wolfe, Pastor D. Michael Bennethum, Pastor Richard Summy, Pastor Julie Recher, Pastor Wayne Heintzleman, Pastor Rebecca Knox, and Pastor Fred Crawford and that the Committee on Reference and Counsel recommended the adoption of the resolution, recognizing that it is consistent with the practices of the ELCA's 1999 Ministries Among Persons in Poverty (MAPP) initiative that commits this church, both globally and domestically, to support ministries among people experiencing economic poverty.

"Whereas, the scriptures repeatedly call upon God's people to open their hands to their poor and needy neighbors, stating that sharing with the "hungry" and "homeless poor" constitutes an expression of piety that pleases God (Deuteronomy 15:11; Isaiah 58:6-7; Matthew 19:21; Galatians 2:10); and

"Whereas, the first century churches in Macedonia and Achaia, following the example of Jesus who brought "good news to the poor," were "pleased to share" their financial resources with the economically challenged church in Jerusalem (Luke 4:18; Romans 15:26); and

“Whereas, the strategic directions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America encourage all expressions of this church to reach out to every segment of society, including “building capacity for evangelical witness and service in the world to alleviate poverty and to work for justice and peace”; and

“Whereas, ELCA ministries with and among the homeless and those experiencing economic poverty are rich in many ways – rich in spiritual growth; rich in worship life; rich in the building of supportive relationships; rich in listening to, learning from and showing compassion to the neighbor – but often struggle to be financially sustainable;

“Therefore, be it ***Resolved***, That the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, gathered in Assembly, memorialize the 2016 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to instruct the Budget and Finance Committee of the ELCA Church Council to develop a plan for designating twenty percent of all funds in all programmatic units, global and domestic, to support ministries among people experiencing economic poverty; and

“Be it further ***Resolved***, That the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod memorialize the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to direct institutions of this church, in particular educational institutions, to develop processes for raising up and equipping leaders to serve in ministries among people experiencing economic poverty; and

“Be it further ***Resolved***, That the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod memorialize the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to instruct the Domestic Mission program unit of this church to develop faith formation and worship resources that will support those engaged in initiating and leading ministries among people experiencing economic poverty.”

Pastor Mary Wolf spoke in favor of the resolution. Pastor Fred Opalinski asked if the “twenty percent” would be a reduction compared to current practice; Pastor D. Michael Bennethum replied that twenty percent is a target. The resolution was adopted.

Bishop Zeiser then welcomed the Rev. Dr. Andrea Walker, ELCA Global Mission Area Director for Madagascar, West and Central Africa, as this year’s ELCA representative. She gave her first address, which included a video presentation featuring Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Dr. Walker spoke about her own faith journey, which took her from religious indifference to ordained ministry. She explained her own work for the ELCA as well as the ELCA’s ministries in general. She stated that the ELCA has 9,300 places of worship with 3.7 million members. Together, all giving to the ELCA is \$1.8 billion a year, with \$47 million going to churchwide ministries and \$51 million to synods; the rest remains in congregations. She thanked the synod for its support of the ELCA and of the ELCA World Hunger Appeal and Lutheran Disaster Response, mentioning grants made to ministries in Pennsylvania. She also explained the ELCA’s five-year campaign to strengthen churchwide ministries, “Always Being Made New,” pointing out that two students from the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod received grants from the Fund for Leaders in 2015. She explained several ways in which persons from our synod can be involved in the ELCA, including participation in the 2016 “Grace Gathering” being held in New Orleans at the time of the ELCA Assembly.

In accordance with a 1994 continuing resolution, Bishop Zeiser announced that a special offering for world hunger would be received at the festival worship service on Saturday morning. He noted that thanks to a generous donor, the offerings will be matched up to \$15,000.

Pastor Inge M. Williams was invited to explain the “water walk,” which was intended to make participants aware of the struggle some people have to obtain water, that is, by personally carrying water a significant distance.

Bishop Zeiser introduced Mr. Dan Scharnhorst, Executive Director, Eastern Pennsylvania Camp Corporation, who addressed the assembly and joined Bishop Zeiser in a rite of installation for the 2016 Bear Creek Camp staff. Mr. Scharnhorst explained that attendance at Bear Creek Camp is up 44 percent, which means that this summer almost one thousand kids will have the opportunity to grow in faith and then go back to their congregations and share that faith. He asserted that Bear Creek Camp is alive and well and that youth without funds can attend for free if necessary. The theme for 2016 is “No Greater Love.”

Secretary Shankweiler was called upon to make the morning’s announcements, after which Plenary One was officially closed at 12:15 p.m.

PLENARY SESSION TWO

Friday, June 17, 2:00 p.m.

Bishop Zeiser called the assembly to order at 2:00 p.m. and invited Pastor Carolyn Hetrick to come forward in her capacity as pastor of Christ Lutheran Church, Conyngham. She explained that her congregation, with nearly two hundred years of ministry, wants to praise God for their upcoming anniversary by presenting a \$50,000 check for World Hunger. Accepting the check on behalf of the synod were Pastors Wayne Kaufmann and Lisa Burrell.

The members of the Lutheran Youth Fellowship (LYF) attending their annual gathering at Muhlenberg College were called forward by Bishop Zeiser; they were accompanied by Ms. Karen Matthias-Long. The president, Billy Garrison, spoke to the assembly.

Mr. Cool presented the Report of the Elections Committee, first ballot. There were three competitive elections for positions on synod council.

Synod Council: Clergy (3-year term)

Total Votes	426
Valid Votes	426
Jessica Kingsborough	274
Kenneth Melber Sr.	152

Synod Council: Lay Female (3-year term)

Total Votes	424
Valid Votes	424
Louise McCloughan	203
Ruth Major	221

Synod Council: Lay Female (2-year term)

Total Votes	425
Valid Votes	425
Madeline Deegan	233
Julia Keim	192

Bishop Zeiser declared the following persons elected: Jessica Kingsborough, Ruth Major, and Madeline Deegan. With these positions filled, there was no need for any additional ballots.

Bishop Zeiser also declared elected the persons elected by acclamation in Plenary Session One: James J. F. Jennings and Robert J. Cimerol (nominees for the ELCA Church Council), Elizabeth Leibenguth (Synod Council, two-year term, youth lay female), Thomas Engle (Synod Council, three-year term, lay male), and M. Jeannette Richardson (Synod Council, one-year term, person of color or language other than English).

Bishop Zeiser welcomed the Rev. Dr. Cheryl Peterson of Trinity Lutheran Theological Seminary, Columbus, Ohio, to present her first keynote address. She said that the Reformation was about unleashing the Gospel, which we are free to preach and which is out in the world, needed, and welcome. However, the church is in captivity to a cultural Christendom and to a way to be the church which developed when the church was the center of society. With the ELCA having declined in membership by 25 percent since it was formed in 1988, a common question is, "What can we do to grow the church?" Usually "attractional evangelism" has been tried whereby the church offers something to attract people to come to it. Given the changing context, this approach does not work as the "mainline" denominations have been "sidelined" in a more pluralistic society. However, post-Christian does not mean post-belief as about 85 percent of Americans believe in some kind of god/force. The fastest growing group in America are the "Nones," people who are not affiliated with any organized religion and who exceed in number all of the non-Christian religions in America. A majority of the Nones do have some kind of belief. Nones include a great variety of people.

Dr. Peterson recommended the book *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious* by Linda Mercadante, which explains that many people hold back from church for reasons of integrity. They want to participate but not affiliate. Most Nones have little or no experience with the church, and those people who left the church often felt that their issues were not given answers or dialogue. Many are looking for a God of love and acceptance but are trusting places other than the church for answers.

Another book, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* by Reggie McNeal, claims that churches are more secular than the world around them. Are we spiritual enough? When people come to church, they often find a religious club where God is conspicuously absent; and they do not find that the members' "walk" matches their "talk." We invite people to *church* but not to *Jesus Christ*.

The church exists for the sake of the Gospel. If we think of the church as just another voluntary association, we are in captivity and need to be unleashed for the mission of God today. We usually think of the church as the "body of Christ," but shifting our thinking to the Holy Spirit might open new possibilities. The Spirit is not a "free agent" but brings us to Christ in community, working through the Word.

The Reformation took the church back to the Holy Spirit as the dynamic presence of God in Jesus Christ. We need to affirm the Pentecostal idea that God will show up. Christ is present to forgive us and renew us. As we are justified, the Holy Spirit is poured into our hearts. The gifts and fruits of the Spirit are unleashed in us, unleashing us into the world. The Spirit has appointed the church as God's hands and feet to go out into the world. *Missional* is not a program; it is a way of being. God is a missional God. We are called to accompany our neighbors as God accompanies us. The church does not have a mission; God's mission has a church. We are meant to be in the hurting and broken world, and the world needs to hear the love and hope of God. What does an unleashed church look like? See Luther's *Small Catechism*, especially the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed.

After a twenty-minute break, four persons representing various agencies addressed the assembly.

The Rev. Sandra L. Strauss, Director of Advocacy and Ecumenical Outreach for the Pennsylvania Council of Churches, brought greetings from the council and explained some of their ministries and emphases including mass incarceration, bullying, minimum wage advocacy, public education, criminal justice, climate, ecumenical and inter-faith dialogues, peacemaking, and farmworkers' ministry.

Ms. Rachel Dexter, Director of Customer Care of Portico Benefit Services, introduced a video presentation about help provided by Portico and referred to "the wellness reformation" in the ELCA to promote healthier lifestyles for pastors and other church leaders.

The Rev. Dr. David J. Lose, President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, thanked the assembly for the support offered by the synod to the seminary, for sending students, for receiving the seminary's graduates as pastors, for helping to shape seminary interns, for engaging in faithful ministry, and for providing persons from the synod to serve on the seminary's board of directors. He showed a video presentation concerning "A New Venture in Theological Education," which is bringing together the Philadelphia and Gettysburg seminaries. Explaining why this new approach is needed, Dr. Lose pointed to the shortage of leaders (600 full-time pastors are currently needed with the projection of 1,000 in four years) and the financial unsustainability of the current model of theological education. He spoke of the attempts to train leaders who are more responsive to the changing culture, to cut expenses, and to carry out theological education in a way that is less expensive for the students. He said that the synod's support is crucial because of new initiatives such as the offer of free tuition to full-time ELCA students and asked to be included in congregations' operating budgets. He also asked for prayer and offered to talk about the seminary.

President John J. Williams Jr. of Muhlenberg College welcomed the assembly to Allentown and thanked the synod for Muhlenberg's existence. He spoke about programs to offer education to the college's neighbors. He affirmed that the college welcomes students of any or no religious beliefs but that Protestant worship and interfaith dialogue are available.

Pastors Carl W. Filer and Oliver E. Brown, both certified chaplains, spoke about the availability of prayer books for members of the armed forces and encouraged pastors to consider being chaplains in the military or prisons.

Following announcements by Secretary Shankweiler, at 4:05 p.m. the assembly gathered outside the building for a sending prayer by Bishop Zeiser. The members of the assembly were then invited to explore the city, for which arrangements for visits had been made at various places and institutions.

PLENARY SESSION THREE

Friday, June 17, 7:30 p.m.

Vice President Smith called the assembly to order at 7:30 p.m. and introduced Pastor Jerel Gade, dean of the Lehigh Mission District, who offered comments regarding the evening event, "Taste and See God in the City."

Vice President Smith invited those rostered leaders who retired since the 2015 assembly to stand and be recognized (all being pastors except as noted): Charles H. Oldland III, Paul Barlett, David L. Roper, Eugene Sharkey, Gerald Arndt, Diane LaFauci, Sister Millicent Drake (deaconess), Jimmy Lee Werley, Lester Stephenson Jr., David Hess, Bruce McLaughlin, and Christian Matthy,

Mr. Smith then introduced the rostered leaders received from other synods or church bodies by ordination, consecration, or transfer since the 2015 assembly: Lauren M. Applegate, Jennifer C. Bramble, Wayne E. Dreyman, Christina Johnsten, Gary F. Koch, Eric R. Moser, David A. Newman, Julie G. Osterhout, Scott J. Paradise, Brian R. Rajcok, Alan J. Wolkenhauer, and Phyllis M. Wolkenhauer.

Vice President Smith introduced a video about the May 24, 2016, worship service and luncheon at the Lutheran Center for rostered leaders celebrating major anniversaries.

Bishop Zeiser called upon Pastor Carolyn Hetrick for the second report of the Committee on Reference and Council.

RESOLUTION 2: DIVESTMENT OF FOSSIL FUELS.

On behalf of the committee she presented the second resolution submitted to the committee and, on behalf of the committee, recommended its adoption. The resolution had been presented by the Creation Care Task Force members of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod: Scott Alderfer; Mindy Heppe, Wayne Heintzelman; Rebecca Knox; Paul Metzloff; Anja Nicole Stuckenberger; Inge Williams.

“Whereas, Jesus call us as his disciples to both love God and our neighbor, and climate change is a direct threat to both God’s creation and God’s people, the church should be a leader in all efforts to preserve and protect creation;

“Whereas, the scientific consensus that human use of fossil fuels is a primary contributor to climate change is clear and overwhelming;

“Whereas, the current movement to divest from fossil fuels and reinvest in sustainable forms of energy are an important part of the overall campaign to combat climate change and protect people and the planet;

“Whereas, numerous church bodies, foundations, municipalities, and institutions of higher learning have already divested from fossil fuels, and several of our fellow synods in the ELCA have approved or are voting on similar divestment resolutions;

“Therefore, be it ***Resolved***, **That this synod memorialize the 2016 Churchwide Assembly to request that, by December 31, 2016, the ELCA begin divestment of all fossil fuel investments held in the ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust Fund A, by taking the following actions:**

- a) **Publish a list of the values of all fossil fuel investments currently held; and**
- b) **Cease any new investments in fossil fuel companies; and**
- c) **Ensure that all fossil fuel holdings are removed within five years; and**
- d) **Publish quarterly updates detailing progress towards this divestment; and**
- e) **Seek to reinvest any resulting monies in clean and sustainable energy investments.**

“Be it further ***Resolved***, **That this synod memorialize the 2016 Churchwide Assembly to direct the ELCA to consider and recommend that Portico add a fossil-free investment fund that excludes the 200 largest fossil fuel companies as an option for ELCA retirement plan participants.**

“Be it further ***Resolved***, **That this synod encourage its congregations and individual members to prayerfully consider their own divestment from fossil fuels, and consider re-investment in sustainable and clean energy.”**

Considerable discussion ensued. David Hinrichs observed that the resolution would not pressure fossil fuel companies to change their behavior but would accomplish our not profiting from that industry.

Phyllis Pelletier questioned the meaning of “clean energy” and spoke against including nuclear energy in that category. Philip Smith considered the resolution too heavy handed and detrimental to thousands of miners. Paul Metzloff said that the resolution would make a statement and would not support nuclear energy or cause as something new the loss of mining jobs. Tucker Irwin referred to the actions in the 1980s to divorce ourselves from the racist policies of South Africa and Namibia as a way of showing that we did not want to support those policies. David Brown referred to fossil fuels as a gift from God that need to be used responsibly and that not using them would be a disaster to the economy. Edward Cool asserted that the basic issue is our huge consumer demand for energy and not the companies that respond to that demand. Brian Rajcok strongly favored divesting as some universities have done as a way of caring for our planet and for those most vulnerable to the effects of global warming. Donald Wenner Jr. spoke in favor of lowering reliance on fossil fuels while remaining shareholders of companies producing them so as to maintain control. Anja Stuckenberger pointed to her experiences in the Arctic as an anthropologist in support of her wanting action that will deal with climate change, which will cause the poor to suffer most.

Although approximately three persons remained in line to speak, the order of the day required the cessation of this discussion until the next report of the Committee on Reference and Counsel.

Bishop Zeiser called upon Mr. David Derr, chairperson of the synod’s finance committee, to present the 2017 Program Proposal. On behalf of the synod council Mr. Derr moved the following:

“Resolved, That the 2017 program proposal (February 1, 2017 to January 31, 2018) be adopted. The synod council is hereby authorized to establish the 2017 budget no later than its January 2017 meeting, making any necessary adjustments to the budget proposal in light of both realistic anticipation of receipts and synod priorities (in consultation with the ELCA Treasurer with respect to the ELCA portion thereof).”

Mr. Derr then spoke about the projected deficit in the original budget plan for 2017 and the special synod council meeting in May 2016 to deal with this matter, He spoke about the assumptions behind the proposed budget, the intention by the synod council to consider the synod’s structure before preparing the next budget, and the intention by the council to consider at its July 2016 meeting how to increase support for the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.

There being no discussion of the proposed budget, Bishop Zeiser called upon Harold Gooch to offer prayer before the assembly voted on the budget. Following that prayer for wisdom, strength, and the ministries of the church, the vote to adopt the budget was taken and the resolution was adopted.

Vice President Smith announced the synod’s seven ministry teams: Worship Ministry Team; Spirituality Ministry Team; Leadership Development Ministry Team; Faith Formation Ministry Team; Youth, Young Adult and Family Ministry Team; Connection Building Ministry Team; and Witness and Service Ministry Team. A video presentation followed highlighting some of the activities of the teams. Following the video presentation, Bishop Zeiser gave a period of time for the assembly participants to discuss the work of the teams, indicating that ideas originating from the discussion should be conveyed to the teams. He also thanked Tony Cimerol for the production of the video.

Bishop Zeiser called on Pastor Rachael Dietz, on behalf of the Leadership Development Ministry Team, to present the 2017 compensation guidelines for both clergy and lay rostered leaders. There being no questions about the guidelines, Bishop Zeiser called for a vote to approve the Compensation Guidelines for Clergy; the guidelines were adopted. The subsequent vote to approve the Compensation Guidelines for Lay Rostered Leaders was likewise adopted.

Bishop Zeiser called on Mr. Guy Ehler, synod chairperson for “Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA,” to give a campaign update. Mr. Ehler reminded the assembly that our resolution to support the campaign did not include a dollar amount but did call upon 100 per cent of our congregations to take part. So far 75.9% (205) have supported the campaign, generating \$333,830. He explained that every year has had a focus, with the 2016 emphasis being World Hunger. In all, the campaign throughout the ELCA has generated 40 percent of the \$198,000,000 being sought. He thanked the assembly for their support of the campaign; gave specific examples of projects that have been supported, expanded, or begun because of the campaign; and indicated that the synod still has time to achieve its goal. He also spoke with gratitude for the support that he and his wife received when they were injured in a major car accident earlier in 2016.

Pastors Ruth Doty and Michelle Kaufmann reported about the 2016 exchange visit to Saxony, including the involvement of Bishop Zeiser and the planting of a tree on behalf of the synod in the Luther’s Garden project in Wittenberg, a certificate for which they presented to the bishop.

After Secretary Shankweiler made the evening’s announcements, the assembly went into recess at 9:00 p.m. until the following morning.

PLENARY SESSION FOUR

Saturday, June 18, 9:30 a.m.

Vice President Smith called the assembly to order at 9:30 a.m. He then called upon the Secretary Shankweiler, who offered the following resolution, which was adopted:

“Resolved, That the agenda of Plenary Session Four be amended so that the conclusion of the session is extended by thirty minutes to 11:30 a.m., the Festival Worship Service begins at 12:00 noon, and the additional thirty minutes is added to the third report of the Committee of Reference and Counsel.”

Bishop Zeiser invited the mission district deans and members of the synod council to come forward for the rite of installation, drawing specific attention to those persons newly elected.

He next asked the Rev. Dr. D. Michael Bennethum, Director for Evangelical Mission, to recognize several guests attending the assembly: (a) Manfredo Martinez, a United Methodist lay minister who is leading a joint synod-Methodist ministry in Easton, Iglesia la Hermosa; and (b) leaders of the Hmong Community Evangelical Lutheran Church, which meets at Allegheny Lutheran Church, Knauers. The Hmong congregation is in the process of affiliating with the synod.

Bishop Zeiser called on Pastor Carolyn Hetrick to present the third report of the Committee on Reference and Counsel. She began by asking the assembly to vote on the second resolution, the discussion on which was ongoing at the end of the committee’s second report. A motion was made and seconded to move the Previous Question, and it was adopted. She read the motion. Pastor Wayne Kaufman raised a point of order: Is it appropriate to vote now when at the end of the previous session several persons were already in line to speak and told that they would be allowed to speak when consideration resumed on this resolution? Bishop Zeiser deferred to the house, which chose by vote to end the debate. Voting on the main resolution took place by a count of the yeas and nays, with the result that the committee’s recommendation that the resolution be approved was adopted 181 to 142.

RESOLUTION 3: SUPPORT FOR PEACEMAKING WITH JUSTICE IN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

Pastor Hetrick presented the third resolution given to the committee, this one coming from Pastors Bruce D. Mac Laughlin, Peter Pettit, Jimmy Lee Werley, Richard Stough, Harold Weiss, Jeffrey Butz, and Kathleen Ash-Flashner. The committee recommended its adoption. Pastor Hetrick read the resolution, there was no debate, and the resolution was adopted.

“Whereas, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is led by the promise of Jesus Christ who said, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God’; and

“Whereas, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has committed itself to non-violent responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the Peace Not Walls campaign’s efforts toward strengthening accompaniment, awareness-building, and advocacy; and

“Whereas, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America affirms its role as an agent of justice, peace, and reconciliation, and recognizes that fulfilling this role in areas of international conflict will require both political action and locally driven grassroots efforts;

“Therefore be it ***Resolved***, That the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod memorialize the 2016 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to affirm the commitment of this church to:

1. **Continue its awareness-building, accompaniment, and advocacy on behalf of a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine;**
2. **Embrace the principles of restorative justice¹ as part of the ELCA’s advocacy and engagement for the just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and actively seek ways to support Palestinians and Israelis engaging in restorative justice dialogue and other projects involving mutual cooperation;**
3. **Consider continued commitment to making positive economic investments in those Palestinian projects and businesses which peacefully strengthen the economic and social fabric of Palestinian society; and**
4. **Recognize that Palestinians and Israelis are all born free and equal in dignity and rights; and**
5. **Support efforts for protecting the human rights of both Palestinians and Israelis and condemning and opposing all violence and actions of either party which discriminate or deny any people their basic freedom, dignity, or economic, social, legal, educational or cultural rights; and**
6. **Continue to support and pray for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land; and**
7. **Support a just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a negotiated settlement, even in the midst of the current violence and deteriorating political relations between the parties, rather than relying on past failed methods of simple calls to return to the negotiating table;**

- (a) challenge the United States government to offer a new, comprehensive, and time-bound agreement (based on dialogue with both parties) to the Governments of Israel and the Palestinian Authority for the resolution of all final-status issues including borders, the status of Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, and security arrangements; and**
- (b) urge the United States government to offer strong, built-in incentives – including economic, commercial, diplomatic, and travel-related incentives – to encourage both parties to adopt this as the framework for a final status agreement.”**

¹ The goal of Restorative Justice is to transform conflict into a pact of mutual cooperation. Restorative Justice focuses on addressing and finding ways to meet the needs of those who have been harmed by conflict, while encouraging those who have caused the harm to take responsibility. Through a process of facilitated dialogue, victims and aggressors/offenders name what happened, identify its impact, and try to come to some common understanding of the root causes and the effects of the conflict, how the harm caused will be repaired, and how the aggressors/offenders will be held accountable. Restorative Justice dialogue may be especially effective in a situation like the Israeli/Palestinian conflict where both parties see themselves as the victim (who has been harmed) and the other as the aggressor/offender (who has caused the harm).

RESOLUTION 4: A RESOLUTION CONCERNING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Pastor Hetrick presented the fourth resolution, which was received from the Northern Lehigh Valley Mission District: Pastor Lori Kochanski, Melanie Werley, Pastor Barry Mitchell, Pastor Elizabeth Mitchell, Pastor Russell Haab, Pastor Gary Walbert, Pastor Ray Hand, Pastor Paulette Obrecht, and Jackie Wolf. The committee recommended adoption of the resolution but with the second item in the resolution--which, as presented, read “Resolved, That the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod establish a Social Justice Task Force to inform, educate, and mobilize its congregations and communities in ways to stop human trafficking and other systems that serve to oppress people”--amended so that it would read as follows: “Resolved, That the Program and Review Committee of the Synod Council establish a Social Justice Task Force to inform, educate, and mobilize its congregations and communities in ways to stop human trafficking and other systems that serve to oppress people; reporting on its activities to the 2017 synod assembly.”

The assembly adopted the committee’s recommendation, that is, the original resolution with the amendment proposed by the committee. The resolution as adopted is as follows:

“Whereas, an estimated 21 million victims are trapped in modern-day slavery. Of these, 14.2 million (68%) were exploited for labor, 4.5 million (22%) were sexually exploited, and 2.2 million (10%) were exploited in state-imposed forced labor; and

“Whereas, human trafficking earns profits of roughly \$150 billion a year for traffickers, according to the International Labor Organization; and

“Whereas, according to the 2015 State Department Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, there were only 10,051 prosecutions and 4,443 convictions for trafficking globally in 2014; and

“Whereas, according to Pennsylvania law enforcement, prosecutors and numerous advocacy organizations at the national, state, and local levels, there is both sex trafficking and labor trafficking in Pennsylvania and victims include children and adults, United States citizens and foreign nationals; and

“Whereas, one particularly notorious area where women are being forced into prostitution is along a short stretch of Route 11 south of Carlisle in Middlesex Township, which connects Interstate 81 to the Pennsylvania Turnpike; and

“Whereas, we are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), a church body that has made a public commitment through the 2001 Church Council of the ELCA adoption of the social message on ‘Commercial Sexual Exploitation,’ which reminds us that ‘love born of faith in Jesus Christ calls us to attend to, discuss, resist, and change the system of commercial exploitation’; be it

“Resolved, That all congregations of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod become aware of the domestic and global efforts to end human trafficking, in particular those of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, and Lutheran World Relief, and ELCA Faith and Society resources in order to find ways we might participate in ongoing efforts to stop human trafficking; and be it further

“Resolved, That the Program and Review Committee of the Synod Council establish a Social Justice Task Force to inform, educate, and mobilize its congregations and communities in ways to stop human trafficking and other systems that serve to oppress people; reporting on its activities to the 2017 synod assembly; and be it further

“Resolved, That each congregation of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod be encouraged to empower its members to become aware of the reality of human trafficking and take action in our own neighborhoods and communities; and be it further

“Resolved, That all children of God be encouraged to raise their own awareness of human trafficking, and be encouraged to share this information with their family and circle of friends and learn how to report suspected incidents of Human Trafficking.”

RESOLUTION 5: AFRICAN DESCENT LUTHERAN LIVES MATTER

Pastor Hetrick presented the fifth resolution, which had been received from Sister Ramona Dailey, stating that the committee recommended its adoption and acknowledged that this is a timely issue that impacts the lives of many people in our congregations and communities. After Sister Dailey spoke to the resolution, it was adopted.

“Rationale: The United Nations declared 2015-2024 the ‘International Decade for People of African Descent.’ African American, African Caribbean, and African national communities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) are gifted and culturally diverse, represented by more than 200 million people living in the Americas. Whether as descendants of the transatlantic slave trade or as more recent migrants, people of African Descent constitute some of the poorest and most marginalized groups with limited access to quality education, health services, housing, and Social Services.

“People of African Descent represent 13% of the total population of the United States of America. Within the ELCA there are more than 46,100 members that identify as people of African Descent, or 1.9% of the ELCA’s total population.

“As the ELCA prepares to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, the political, social and economic injustices affecting African Descent communities still remain largely invisible to a society indifferent to black life. The legacy of slavery, post-Reconstruction ‘Jim Crow’ laws, and racial

subordination in the United States remains a ‘serious challenge’ as there has been no real commitment to recognition and reparations for people of African Descent.

“Despite many advances by people of African Descent within the ELCA and society, racism and racial discrimination, both direct and indirect, de facto and de jure, continue to manifest themselves in inequality and disadvantage.

“The 1993 ELCA CWA adopted the social statement, ‘Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity & Culture’ as a confession of the sin of racism. However, Black Liberation Theology is often rejected and avoided within not all but many Lutheran academic institutions. African Descent rostered leaders acquire higher education debt, wait longer to receive calls, are less likely to receive full-time calls, and are less likely to reach synod compensation guidelines.

“The majority of African Descent ELCA congregations were birthed out of ‘white flight,’ a divestment from urban areas, taking socio-economic resources and abandoning a connection, call, and witness. What is left are deteriorating, debt-filled buildings with shrinking memberships, in part due to the systemic and structural issues of discrimination and lack of full inclusion of our gifts of leadership and worship styles.

“The African Descent community is within a denomination that affirms ‘there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; for all of you are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28).’ We are called to be a church that embraces each person and confronts racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, age, gender, familial, sexual orientation, physical, personal, and class barriers that often manifest themselves in unjust treatment, inequalities, exclusion, and violence. The ELCA constitution (7.31.12 Section A Number 7), states ‘Consistent with the faith and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, every ordained minister shall: speak publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, calling for justice and proclaiming God’s love for the world.’ Justification by faith is a principle of scripture and Lutheran identity for all races, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, sexual orientation, class, cultures or nationalities.

“Resolved, That the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly memorialize the 2016 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to include as part of its observance of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation and the commemoration of the United Nation’s International Decade of People of African Descent the following:

- 1. Direct the Church Council to create a ‘Declaration of the ELCA to the African Descent Community’ similar to the ‘Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community (04/18/1994)’ acknowledging the Lutheran Church’s complicity in the 400+ years of slavery and the oppression of other marginalized groups; that people of African Descent were victims of slavery, the slave trade, and colonialism through attitudes, actions, policies, and practices these communities still endure. The Council will bring this ‘Declaration’ to the 2019 Churchwide Assembly for its consideration and action with a recommendation to include this Declaration in the governing documents of the ELCA;**
- 2. Direct the Church Council to require the Theological Education Advisory Council (TEAC) in partnership with the Conference of International Black Lutherans (CIBL) to recognize and dismantle white hegemony by lifting up, encouraging and incorporating academic exploration of Black Liberation theology across ELCA educational expressions, to allocate**

funds for the development of resources, and to accomplish this by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly; and,

- 3. Direct the Church Council to require the Congregational and Synodical Missions Unit of the ELCA to work in partnership with the African Descent Lutheran Association to increase by 10% the number of African Descent leaders, congregations, and communities served, thereby renewing its commitment (see African Descent Strategy, CWA, 2005) to create, sustain, reinvest in, and support this plan of action by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly and to encourage Synods and congregations to do likewise.”**

RESOLUTION 6: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MINISTRY IN CONGREGATIONS

Pastor Hetrick presented the sixth resolution, which had been received from the Domestic Violence Ministry of Christ Lutheran Church, Allentown, by Pastor Peggy Wuertele. The committee recommended its adoption but with a substitute for the original resolution, which read, “Therefore, we encourage congregations to establish ministry teams that will address all areas of Domestic Violence that threaten the life of women, men, and children, and that we provide educational and referral services to members within our congregations and our communities.” The committee’s substitute read, “Therefore, be it resolved, That each congregation of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod be encouraged to address all areas of domestic violence that threaten the lives of women, men and children; and that a Social Justice Task Force created by the Program and Review Committee of the Synod Council collate educational and referral resource information to support our congregations and communities in this ministry.” The assembly adopted the resolution as amended by the committee so that the entire resolution as adopted reads as follows:

“Whereas, in 2014, in one day 2,498 victims/survivors were served by Pennsylvania domestic violence programs, and 252 cases were not served, and;

“Whereas, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men in the United States have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner, and;

“Whereas, intimate partner violence accounts for 15% of all violent crimes, and;

“Whereas, 72% of all murder/suicides involve an intimate partner; 94% of victims of these crimes are female, and;

“Whereas, the presence of a gun in the home during a domestic violence incident increases the risk of homicide by at least 500%;

“Therefore be it ***Resolved***, **That each congregation of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod be encouraged to address all areas of domestic violence that threaten the lives of women, men and children; and that a Social Justice Task Force created by the Program and Review Committee of the Synod Council collate educational and referral resource information to support our congregations and communities in this ministry.”**

RESOLUTION 7: NEPA SYNOD CLOSING A LUTHERAN CHURCH.

Pastor Hetrick moved next to the document titled “Second Report of the Committee of Reference and Counsel,” the first item of which was a resolution received from Maurice L. Connor: “Resolved, That NEPA Synod will close a church only after the church council notifies NEPA Synod they have exhausted all efforts to remain open.” The committee recommended that this resolution not be adopted because “the resolution is inconsistent with the synod’s constitution (S13.24).” However, because the resolution had not been presented to the committee within the announced time for resolutions, the first issue to consider was whether the assembly would agree to consider this resolution. The vote to consider the resolution failed, and so no further action was called for.

RESOLUTION 8: CHURCH GROWTH—WE KNOW ENOUGH TO DO ENOUGH.

Pastor Hetrick reported that a resolution was received from Stephen George Bettun:

“Whereas, that the church should grow and we should share the gifts that God has given us and be active for justice as Jesus has given us his example; therefore be it

“Resolved, That the ELCA be known that it knows enough to do enough; and

“Be it further resolved, That our pastors know enough about justice issues to lead their congregations to do enough; and

“Be it further resolved, That we know enough about justice issues to do enough to make a difference; and

“Be it further resolved, That the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly memorialize the Church Council to refer these ideas to the group studying the future of the Church.”

The committee recommended that the resolution not be adopted and invited the writer and all members of the assembly to take advantage of the invitation to give feedback directly to the Called Forward Together in Christ process at www.elca.org/future. However, because this resolution was also presented to the committee after the cut-off date, the assembly first needed to vote on whether or not to consider the resolution. The vote to consider failed, and so no further action was called for.

There being no further resolutions, the report of the Committee on Reference and Counsel came to an end.

Bishop Zeiser introduced a video about Mike Solliday of Weisenberg Church, who is passionate about encouraging people to explore a call to rostered ministry.

He next invited the synod’s two candidates for rostered status to be introduced: (a) Ms. Lauren Blatt from Advent, West Lawn; and (b) the Rev. Thomas Daniel Clayborne, being received into the ELCA from the Covenant Church.

The Rev. Dr. Cheryl Peterson was then invited to present her second keynote address. She pointed to the church in Acts as a community that was in the Spirit and not fearing for its future survival. She said that we, the church, have the Spirit already; but we do not always listen to the Spirit. We need to allow the Spirit to dwell in us as the church. This is not a step-by-step plan, and it will not happen overnight; but it will take place if we get out of the way. She suggested shifts that are needed for the church today:

1. From survival to revival.

2. From fear to bold proclamation.
3. From planning to preparation.
4. From attractional to incarnational evangelism.
5. From belonging to an organization to belonging to Christ.
6. From thinking of mission from a congregational viewpoint to a wider network of relationships.
7. From “volunteers” to Spirit-unleashed disciples.
8. From “isms” and cultural identity to the Holy Spirit as the bond of unity.
9. From familiar fellowship to a more expansive, inclusive fellowship.
10. From avoiding conflict to living into the “full forgiveness of sins.”
11. From “parish” to mission area” in terms of where and how we are sent out in mission.

Bishop Zeiser introduced Pastor Mark Wimmer, Vice President of Church Relations and Ministry Partnerships at Diakon Lutheran Social Services, who brought greetings to the assembly from Diakon, spoke about the scope of Lutheran social ministry organizations throughout the nation, and spoke about some of the specific changes, challenges, and accomplishments of Diakon. He thanked the assembly for the support given to Diakon and its ministries.

Bishop Zeiser indicated that the reports of all of the synod’s ministry teams, committees, and task forces were before the assembly for questions. No questions were asked. He asked if there was any unfinished business; nothing was brought forward.

Vice President Smith called on Pastor Kathleen Ash-Flashner to present the report of the committee on minutes; she indicated that the committee examined drafts of the minutes for the first three sessions and will continue its work following the assembly.

Indicating that the assembly had concluded its business, Bishop Zeiser introduced a video presentation of the Kalahari Resort, which will be the setting for the 2017 assembly (June 2-3). Pastor Shankweiler made the final announcements. A motion to adjourn was made and adopted at 11:20 a.m.

FESTIVAL WORSHIP

The assembly’s festival worship followed the conclusion of the assembly. As part of this service Bishop Zeiser preached the following sermon.

“It was his first day on the job, but Doris fell for him—like instantly. They boarded the elevator with other workers; she found herself standing behind him. Going up, the opportunity presented itself. She stole the yellow Number 2 pencil from his backpack. The rest of the movie, *Hello, My Name is Doris*, traces Doris’ bold endeavor to land him. Never mind that he’s at least 30 years younger.

“That’s the fun part of the movie. From there it goes pretty deep emotionally, however, as Doris Miller’s life unfolds: never married; apart from her bookkeeping job at a rather trendy company, Doris devoted her life to her mother, living in the same house; nephew tells her she dresses like a clown (and that’s pretty kind). And . . . she’s a hoarder. A hoarder is someone who throws away nothing, and cannot stop accumulating things. Now Doris is an educated woman, financially secure; but there’s no getting through to her about the way she’s cluttered up her life.

“She’s a lot like the people in the Galatian churches: financially secure. The Galatian churches had given the Apostle Paul reason for encouragement. And they did not disappoint. Jesus Christ publicly exhibited as ‘crucified!’ (Galatians 3:1) Whatever that meant, after hearing Paul preach it, they abolished their former religious ways. Superstitions? Drop kicked into the Black Sea! Demons? Evicted to the Oasis of Ammon! All those pagan gods? Replaced by ‘the one God.’ And get this: as a result of Paul’s emphasis on Jesus Christ publicly exhibited as crucified, the Galatian churches extended freedom to slaves and equality to women. So, rostered leaders: imagine Paul filling out his Parochial Report for the year AD 48, reporting that kind of activity in those rectangular boxes. Paul preached, they believed and received the Holy Spirit, and miracles among them began to occur.

“This is what Paul was after: believers in the God who, in the death and resurrection of Jesus, saved the world—the God who set the relationship right with God’s people and with all creation. The gospel preached, faith created, miracles occurring in their midst: these were the faith dynamics washing over the Galatian churches. Jesus Christ publicly exhibited as ‘crucified.’ It was Paul’s early draft of ‘saved by grace through faith.’

“Confident that the Galatian churches were secure, Paul then moved on to other locations in Asia Minor. When he reached either Ephesus or Corinth two to three years later, word reached him that the Galatian churches were slipping away. It was the work of Paul’s opponents—opponents who insisted that it takes religious laws (Torah) and upholding ritual practices (circumcision) in order to maintain a right relationship with God. Paul was furious: ‘You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?’ Paul’s focus on Jesus Christ publicly exhibited as crucified went by the wayside. The hoarding had started in their faith practices . . . and made its way into their relationship with God.

“Not one to walk away from a fight, the Apostle Paul penned a letter. You’ve just heard part of the salvo levelled at the Galatian churches. He added: The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?

“‘Doing the works of the law . . . ending with the flesh:’ I’m guessing there must have been some real appeal in the message of Paul’s opponents, drawing the Galatian churches away. Give them a break! How are these Galatian churches supposed to get their arms around ‘saved by grace through faith?’ A check list, enumerating laws and rituals, is better. These are the things you do, and those are the ones you avoid. Want proof I am right with God? I can show you! All of this makes the relationship to God just a little easier to grasp. For Paul, however, this law and ritual stuff was clutter in the believer’s relationship to God.

“Clutter! You know, like Doris Miller clutter: the piles and piles of stuff, the boxes filled with stuff, the mountains of stuff, and junk and worthless clutter slowly gave definition to her life. That’s what the yellow Number 2 pencil was about. It was something to hold onto, something you can measure. That’s Paul’s message to the foolish, bewitched Galatian churches. They had fallen under the influence of those who would clutter their healthy relationship to Jesus Christ publicly exhibited as crucified. Foolish, bewitched Galatians!

“What about the churches of the Northeastern PA Synod? Is there clutter that needs our attention? On the threshold of 500 years of Reformation heritage, are synod congregations

- communities of faith bewitched by the hoarding of numbers: numbers of people (especially young people), and financial numbers (especially those that devour any confidence that God has a future for the congregation);
- communities of faith bewitched by the clutter that leaves room only for the insistence that God's call today can only be lived out by hearkening back to bygone days?

“Are we holding on to ‘stuff’ for all the wrong reasons, creating a clutter we do not see but that seems so odd to those on the outside? Are we fooling ourselves about the value of this clutter because we are addicted to a congregational nostalgia that obscures reality? Are we doing the same things repeatedly, leashed to a life-draining mission statement—a statement composed not of words but of routine actions so numbing that they mask the inevitable coming of a crippling pain that has loomed larger and larger for decades? I’m guessing there must be some real appeal in all the clutter.

“Paul’s appeal to the Galatian churches sounded an alarm, warning about the clutter accumulating in their relationship to Jesus Christ. The effect of the clutter diminished the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus and lifted up their efforts to reconcile with God. Paul would not abide the First-Century clutter in the Galatian churches just getting underway. We ought not abide any Twenty-first-Century clutter in our churches.

“From today’s Gospel reading (Luke 5:17-26): ‘Immediately [the paralyzed man] stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. Amazement seized all of them . . . they were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen strange things today.”’ Strange things; miracles!

“When was the last time you departed a worship service, or a committee meeting, or a council meeting and thought: we have seen strange things today? Imagine the strange things, miracles, that God has in store for churches uncluttered in their faith, uncluttered in their focus on serving their neighbor in need through ministries that have the words “Jesus Christ publicly exhibited as crucified” written all over them.”

The Rev. Carl D. Shankweiler, Secretary

Bishop Samuel R. Zeiser, Ph.D.