

SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Christ Lutheran Church, Allentown, Pennsylvania
January 20, 2016

ATTENDANCE. Synod Council Members Present: Dr. Donald Boyer, Stacie Bray, Pr. Oliver Brown, Jim Carey, Madeline Deegan, David Derr, Marlane Druckenmiller, Martin Everhart, Pr. Charles Grube, David Hinrichs, Ruth Major, Ethan Melber, Pr. Deborah Scheffey, Pr. Carl Shankweiler, Donald F. Smith Jr., Pr. Suzanne Trump, Victor Unks, Pr. Gary Walbert, Bishop Samuel Zeiser.

Synod Council Members Excused: Pr. June Bair; Linda Eroh; Taylor Seymour, who submitted both her excuse for this meeting and her resignation from the council.

Synod Council Members Absent: Martin Milne.

Synod Staff Members Present: Pr. D. Michael Bennethum, Executive Associate of the Bishop and Director of Evangelical Mission.

Guests: Marilyn Mazsa (representing Women of the ELCA).

HOSTS' GREETINGS. Pastor William Maxon, Senior Pastor, and Pastor Maritza Dolich, Outreach Pastor, of the host congregation, Christ Lutheran Church, Allentown, welcomed the council and spoke about the current ministries at both Christ Lutheran and the St. Stephen Outreach Center, Allentown. The review of present ministries included a tour of the newly renovated Schantz House/Ruhe Annex, a former parsonage now used as a community center for a variety of programs. Also present was Seminarian Brian Reed, an intern shared with other congregations in the area, and Jonah Adamcik, a student at Muhlenberg College.

CALL TO ORDER AND PRAYER. Vice President Donald F. Smith Jr. called the meeting of the Synod Council of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod to order at 3:27 p.m. Bishop Samuel Zeiser offered the meeting's opening prayer.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING. The minutes of the October 21, 2015, meeting were distributed and approved.

BISHOP'S REPORT. Bishop Zeiser spoke about efforts to bring together the synod's deans, persons working in transition ministry, and the synod staff in order to enhance the synod's efforts concerning pastoral transitions, an issue that will become more difficult as more retirements by pastors take place.

He spoke about the progress of Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA.

He reported about the process of assigning the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's seminary graduates for 2016 to regions and about the smaller number of graduates this particular year. The creation of a new school of theology out of the Philadelphia and Gettysburg seminaries was presented as a way to insure the continuation of theological education in this area. He explained that the new co-op program of the seminaries will allow students with the capacity and interest in doing so to complete their studies and field work in three years instead of four, with one or two congregations in the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod being considered as placement sites.

He spoke about the desirability of area strategies as a way to provide pastoral care and leadership for smaller membership congregations and to keep available retired pastors for supply work.

Bishop Zeiser asked Pastor Michael Bennethum to explain the Congregational Vitality Project whereby fifteen key factors have been identified to ascertain where congregations are in their life cycles (new start, formation, learning, mature, declining, struggling, closure) through dealing with eight categories of vitality. With the help of a video presentation, Pr. Bennethum explained the tools available to congregations through this project and how they can be used, offering to assist those congregations needing additional direction. The goal is to help congregations become aware of how change is occurring and can be dealt with in ways that move congregations out of a cycle of frustration and anxiety and, where necessary, to redevelop their ministries.

Bishop Zeiser spoke about the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the Lehigh Valley and the synod's involvement in those efforts.

He also discussed the 2016 synod assembly, June 17-18, asking that all synod council members be present on Friday evening when the vice president gives his report. The Rev. Dr. Cheryl M. Peterson will be the keynote speaker.

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT. Mr. Smith spoke about the visit that he and Pastor Carl Shankweiler made to the two church buildings for sale by the synod: Ascension, Quakake, and St. Mark, Lackawaxen. He pointed out the revised documents from the Closing Congregations Task Force: (1) a proposed letter to go to all synod congregations; (2) a related questionnaire on congregational vitality. Also available to the council were a resolution concerning congregational viability adopted by the Assembly of the Metropolitan New York Synod in 2012 and, for possible action by the council, a proposed resolution for implementing the task force's recommendations.

After a lengthy discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the specific documents, in which many council members spoke and during which reference was made to the newly announced Congregational Vitality Project, Mr. Smith withdrew the task force's recommendations and documents from consideration. He also indicated that although he had intended to lead the council in a case study of the synod's role in dealing with some actual

synodical congregations in danger of closing, because of time constraints he would postpone that case study until the March 31 meeting of the council. Before the conclusion of the meeting Bishop Zeiser spoke about the importance of dealing with this issue in that the synod can be burdened by the need to dispose of the buildings of closed congregations.

SECRETARY’S REPORT. Pastor Shankweiler reported that all official letters related to actions taken at the October 21 meeting of the council have been sent. He read a letter from Reformation Lutheran Church, Reiffton, concerning their 2016 mission support commitment. He also read part of an email from the Most Reverend Bernadette Meck, Schuylkill Haven, in which she thanked the synod for the lectern from Ascension, Quakake, which will now be used by her congregation. Pastor Shankweiler indicated that minutes of the January 6, 2016, Executive Committee had been distributed. He spoke about the continuing work of the constitution committee in revising and codifying the synod’s continuing resolutions and other resolutions of ongoing significance.

TREASURER’S REPORT. David Hinrichs reported that mission support receipts for the first eleven months in fiscal year 2015 have exceeded the previous year by \$18,000 but that it is still unlikely that the budget’s goal will be achieved. He said that the process whereby the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s Mission Investment Fund (MIF) will begin providing the synod with bookkeeping services starting February 1, 2015, is on track and that all congregations of the synod will receive a mailing from MIF this week concerning how to submit mission support and other payments to MIF.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT. The executive committee presented a resolution concerning executive staff compensation for fiscal year 2016; this resolution was adopted.

(2016.1.01) Resolved, that 2016 executive staff compensation be set in accordance with the following schedule, reflecting (1) total compensation, and (2) for ordained staff members the amount of base salary, social security allowance, and housing allowance. The amounts designated as housing allowance were acted upon at the October 21, 2015 meeting and shall apply to calendar year 2016 and all future years unless otherwise provided by this synod council. (Numbers are rounded to the nearest dollar.) This represents a 2% increase over 2015.

NAME***	BASE SALARY	HOUSING	SS	TOTAL
Samuel Zeiser	\$65,298	\$20,000	\$7,066	\$92,364
Kurt Garbe	\$52,503	\$16,000	\$5,675	\$74,128
Mary Gade	\$50,614	\$24,000	\$6,181	\$80,795
K. Matthias-Long			*\$4,724	\$61,756
Carl Shankweiler	\$ 5,327		\$ 441	\$ 5,768
M. Bennethum				\$21,012
Jean Huber				\$15,759
John Richter				\$17,860
Fred Crawford				\$15,300
Peter Kuritz				\$15,300

- * Employer's required portion of Social Security
- ** Pastor Bennethum's salary as DEM and all of his benefits are paid by the ELCA. This amount represents additional compensation for working as the synod's Executive Associate of the Bishop.
- *** Compensation for the associates serving the Northern Lehigh Valley and Pocono Mission Districts is paid to their congregations under a purchase of services arrangement

[Note: the 2% increase in staff compensation means that the 2016 cost for support staff will be \$227,603; the 2016 cost for contract staff will be \$50,723.]

FINANCE COMMITTEE. David Derr reported that the Finance Committee recommends affirmative action by the council on two requests for grants.

(2016.1.02) Resolved, that \$12,000 be granted from the Prosser, Pahse, Mission Fund to the Common Ground Recovery Ministry, Wyomissing. The resolution was adopted.

(2016.1.03) Resolved, that \$12,000 be granted from the Prosser, Pahse, Mission Fund to Hope's Table, Reading. The resolution was adopted.

A report titled "Spending Policy Looking Back" was distributed and included the Finance Committee's proposed spending policy for 2016, which was presented as a resolution:

(2016.1.04) Resolved, that the spending policy for the fiscal year 2016 for the synod's funds be set as follows:

Prosser, Pahse, Mission Fund:	10% of assets,	\$76,280
Student Education Fund:	10% of assets,	\$13,823
Kelchner Fund:	10% of assets,	\$138,394
Leadership Development Fund:	7% of assets,	\$4,316
Social Ministry Fund:	10% of assets,	\$52,156

The resolution was adopted.

PROGRAM COMMITTEE. No report.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE. Pastor Gary Walbert distributed a list of 32 property-related projects completed in 2015 at the Lutheran Center and spoke about the repainting of the sanctuary. He also presented a list of 13 possible projects for 2016, a majority of which could be completed by volunteers. He spoke about attempts to stop unauthorized parties taking place on Lutheran Center property.

Stacie Bray asked if the council wants the staff or the synod to pay for required state and federal security clearances. By consensus it was agreed that the synod should cover the cost of these clearances. Marlane Druckenmiller raised the issue of who retains the clearances if an

employee leaves. It was also decided by consensus that whoever pays for the clearances—normally the synod—retains them.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE. Ms. Druckenmiller reported that the form for making nominations for synod positions has been updated and that the job description of synod council members has also been revised. She added that she did contact the deans to alert them about the forms and the need for nominees.

EN BLOCK RESOLUTIONS. Three resolutions were approved unanimously.

(2016.1.05) Resolved, that in accordance with sections 7.31.16. and 7.52.22. of the ELCA Constitution, “on leave from call” status be approved as follows:

Clergy (first year):	The Rev. Mary Owens
Clergy (first year):	The Rev. Brett Jenkins
Clergy (second year):	The Rev. Rashion Santiago
Clergy (second year):	The Rev. Timothy Garman
Clergy (second year):	The Rev. Franklin Stinner

(2016.1.06) Resolved, that in accordance with ELCA bylaw 7.41.17. and upon endorsement by the bishop, the following rostered leader be granted the roster status of “retired”:

Sister Millicent Drake, effective October 1, 2015

(2016.1.07) Resolved, that the 2016 budget of the West Berks Mission District be approved

OLD BUSINESS.

(2016.1.08) Resolved, that the Common Ground Recovery Ministry, housed at Atonement Lutheran Church, 5 Wyomissing Blvd, Wyomissing, PA 19610, be reauthorized as a Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod. The motion was made by Ms. Druckenmiller, seconded by Pastor Oliver Brown, and was adopted.

(2016.1.09) Resolved, that in accordance with section S13.21 of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Constitution, the dissolution of the parish relationship between St. Luke’s, Reading, and Christ, Reading, be approved, effective December 31, 2015. The motion was made by Pastor Brown, seconded by Victor Unks, and was adopted.

NEW BUSINESS. Ms. Druckenmiller reported about the work of the Task Force on Bullying and presented a handout giving a detailed history. The next event will be a workshop on April 16 featuring Scott Heydt of RefinED Character. She indicated that the task force, which began with seven members, is now down to three members and that they recommend the termination of this task force and the possible creation of a new task force to deal with the issues of reconciliation and peace.

(2016.1.10) Resolved, that the synod council carried out the call of the 2011 synod assembly to “appoint some group or person . . . to address bullying, harassment, and other related violence” by establishing a task force for that purpose, with the council now recognizing the conclusion of the work of this task force and thanking its members for their successful efforts to deal with this serious issue. The motion was made by Mr. Hinrichs, seconded by Pastor Deborah Scheffey, and was adopted.

WOMEN OF THE ELCA. Marilyn Mazsa, president of the synodical Women of the ELCA, reported that their spring retreat will take place on April 9 at Breinigsville.

ADJOURNMENT. Mr. Smith declared the meeting adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carl D. Shankweiler, Secretary