

**SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING**  
**Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
**Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Emanuelsville, Pennsylvania**  
**March 31, 2016**

**ATTENDANCE.** Synod Council Members Present: Pr. June Bair, Dr. Donald Boyer, Stacie Bray, Pr. Oliver Brown, Jim Carey, Madeline Deegan, David Derr, Marlane Druckenmiller, Linda Eroh, 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: Marilyn Mazsa, who is not a member of the council but the assigned representative for the synodical unit of the Women of the ELCA.

Synod Council Members Absent: Martin Milne.

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

Guests: Paul Theiss, seminary intern working with the Susquehanna County Initiative.

**CALL TO ORDER.** Vice President Donald F. Smith Jr. called the meeting of the Synod Council of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod to order at 3:01 p.m.

**HOSTS' GREETINGS.** Pastors Barry and Elizabeth Mitchell, co-pastors at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Emanuelsville, welcomed the council and spoke about the new building (May 2015) in which the council was meeting and which is used for contemporary worship. The congregation itself dates to 1723.

**DWELLING IN THE WORD.** Bishop Samuel Zeiser read a psalm of rejoicing, Psalm 146, and offered the opening prayer.

**2017 ASSEMBLY LOCATION.** Deborah Frey was present in order to report about the information gathered concerning possible venues for the 2017 synod assembly. She distributed a comparison of seven possible locations titled "Assembly Venue Costs." After discussing the options, including the favorable pricing offered by Kalahari Resort, a resolution was moved by Dr. Donald Boyer, seconded by Pastor Oliver Brown, and adopted:

**(2016.03.01)** Resolved, that the 2017 synod assembly be held at Kalahari Resort, June 2-3, with the objective for using this location being to lower the cost of the assembly.

**CASE STUDY: IMPLEMENTING S13.24.** Mr. Smith led the council in a discussion of the portion of the synod's constitution that grants the synod council the power to "take charge and control" of the property of a congregation when that congregation can no longer protect its

property “from waste and deterioration.” The case study involved English and Zion Lutheran Churches, Minersville, and the handouts “Tale of Two Congregations in Minersville, Pa.” and “Section S13.24 of Synod Constitution.” The council was divided into four groups, which were asked to consider whether S13.24 should be implemented. They then reported their conclusions to the council.

Group 1. The process of implementing S13.24 is fraught with landmines and emotions. There needs to be very deliberate pastoral care provided to the congregation. Implementation may be necessary, but it needs an interim step concerning the non-termination possibilities.

Group 2. Celebrate the memories. Is it time to die or to do something new? A neutral person needs to come in to help the congregations acknowledge what they are. It would be hospice care for congregations. There are additional issues if there is a parsonage and/or cemetery.

Group 3. The synod council should step in, but it is a no-win situation either way. Ask the congregation to provide an action plan of how it will thrive. Perhaps the dean or synod staff liaison should inform the synod council about the congregation’s condition. “Property” includes endowment, and using an endowment to maintain a building for very few people is a waste of resources.

Group 4. These congregations cannot fulfill the missions they are there to perform, so how do we assist them in finding a vision given our limited staff time? If people do not want our help, and we invest effort there, it will take away resources from congregations that do want to advance. It is fruitless to try to force people to do the right thing. Warning: a congregation under consideration for being taken over could obtain an attorney, which would cost them and the synod money in a court fight. Implementing S13.24 would be forcing people to do what they do not want to do, and that will require resources that we need in other places.

Mr. Smith asked if a plan should be drafted. Pastor June Bair said that she would hate to create a wave of fear. Another suggestion was to share stories of congregations in an aggressive way so that it is clear that closing or consolidation are only two of the possible options. Another observation was that persons involved in hospice care are helped to make decisions so that they have a quality of life, so the synod should intervene earlier to help congregations make those kinds of decisions. Dr. Donald Boyer observed that when a person enters hospice care the end result is inevitable, so we should go back and try to identify the point at which congregations need to make decisions before the results are an inevitable death. Pastor Michael Bennethum pointed to stories about congregational success in “Faith in Action,” such as two congregations that thought that they had slipped below viability and so decided to go “whole hog” in self-giving ministry before they died and by so doing turned themselves around and flourished. Mr. Smith said that these thoughts should be put down on paper and dealt with at the July synod council meeting or perhaps in a workshop at the synod assembly in June.

At the conclusion of the case study Mr. Smith distributed the Metropolitan New York Synod 2012 resolution concerning congregational viability.

**MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING.** The minutes of the January 20, 2016, meeting were distributed and approved with the correction that Brian Riedy's last name was misspelled as "Reed"; he is the intern who assisted in leading the council through the renovated facilities at Christ, Allentown.

**BISHOP'S REPORT.** Bishop Zeiser reported that on April 6 there will be a webinar concerning the 2016 assembly in order to give a sense of the variety of people involved.

There will be a representative from the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America at our assembly; Bishop Zeiser wants the synod council to meet him/her, and so there will be a dinner at 6:00 p.m. on Friday, June 17, at 6:00 p.m.

The conference of bishops met recently and heard about "Called Forward Together in Christ," a broadly based process that will deal with what is distinctive about the ELCA, what are the needs, what is the vision for the future, and so forth. One issue will be the question of whether the existing structures are right for the future.

The bishop reported that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod will receive two first call candidates this year.

He spoke about Lutheran Congregational Services (LCS), which began in 1973 and it now part of Liberty Lutheran. The executive director, the Rev. Dr. Jennifer Phelps Ollikainen, is about to announce severe cutbacks in programming; a public letter will explain which ministries will remain and in what form. Refugee resettlement is one of the ministries that will close in terms of LCS's involvement. This transition, as well as what is happening with the seminaries at Philadelphia and Gettysburg, shows that changes are taking place in a very visible way.

"Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA" is on track with 40% of the desired funds already received. At our 2016 assembly there will be a special matching funds appeal to raise \$15,000 for world hunger, about which Bishop Zeiser sent out information. So far 75% of the synod's congregations have taken part. Our synod's campaign coordinator, Guy Ehler, is now home from the hospital having been injured in a major traffic accident, but he needs to assist his wife in her recuperation from the same accident.

The synod staff is exploring making the 2017 assembly be as paperless as possible.

**VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT.** Mr. Smith reported that he attended the rescheduled 2016 Learning Ministries Day, which went well. He was especially interested in hearing the keynote speaker, the Rev. Dr. Karl Krueger, who will be retiring. As part of his presentation Dr. Krueger mentioned being grateful that the church now offers options to L.G.B.T. persons.

**SECRETARY'S REPORT.** Pastor Shankweiler reported that all official letters related to actions taken at the January 20 meeting of the council have been sent. He reported that an affirmative

email vote by the executive committee authorized him to sign documents to sell the property of the former St. Mark Lutheran Church, Lackawaxen, for \$100,100 but that the buyer then backed out of the agreement. Pastor Shankweiler indicated that minutes of the March 2, 2016, executive committee had been distributed to the council by email. He reported 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 spoke about the ongoing transition to having the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Mission Investment Fund (MIF) as our financial services organization. This transition has had a rocky start, but no one missed receiving a paycheck. There has been more anxiety than was hoped for. The bishops of the synods involved in this pilot project have addressed the problems with MIF.

Mr. Hinrichs reported an \$84,000 deficit in the fiscal year that ended in January 2016. There was \$2.3 million in income, including the ELCA's share, compared to \$2.4 million in expenses (\$1.3 million of which was the synod's share). With income down, less support was sent to the ELCA than hoped for.

**DIRECTOR FOR EVANGELICAL MISSION REPORT.** Pastor Bennethum spoke about the registration by council members for the 2016 assembly. He also said that the synod council contact list has been updated and indicated the information still needed.

He said that he works with the synod's active Mission Support Table, which does need participants from the Northern Lehigh, Scranton Wilkes-Barre, Hazleton-Lehigh, and East Berks mission districts. Concerning mission support responses for 2016, the synod has heard from 74% of the congregations (compared to 62% by the same point in 2015). He said that the ELCA wants every synod to adopt a mission support strategy, and so we will be preparing one. The synod is involved in the magazine "Giving." He observed that we as a church have more than enough resources but that we spend them on ourselves. He spoke about a "train the trainer" event in Leola to train people who will come back and work in the synod to train others.

The Congregational Vitality Project is now being used in our synod. Seven congregations have completed the survey on the website and received their reports. He encouraged the use of this resource.

Pastor Bennethum explained that he deals with new ministry development including Iglesia Christiana La Hermosa (Easton), a Hmong ministry in Berks County, Common Ground, and Hope's Table (Reading). The newest ministry was approved by the ELCA last month, namely a ministry exploration in Susquehanna County.

Pastor Bennethum then introduced Paul Theiss, a seminarian working for his intern year in Towanda and in Susquehanna County. Mr. Theiss then spoke about his work and personal experiences in that work, including the birth of their daughter and the need to balance the

work in Susquehanna County, which could be full time, with his work at Trinity. Towanda. He observed that his training in mission development does not apply to this setting and stressed the need to deal with the local culture. Needing an “in” to get in, he attended drumming groups and in that way started to be introduced to other people. He made contact through an adult school in Montrose and dealt with people who were interested in improving their health, but he also met many people who were “burned” by various Christian churches in the past. He also met poor people with no place to go for spiritual care.

So what should take place in Susquehanna County? Mr. Theiss recommended having someone from there, who also lives there, to carry on the work. He spoke about the need to help that person find an “in,” which could be, for example, the use of an empty building to provide free programs. We could partner with what is already taking place. There are issues to deal with, such as some local people who are losing one-fourth of their wages.

Mr. Theiss explained that he had started weekly discussions at a local restaurant, but the numbers dwindled as Christmas came, so other avenues should be tried. Through getting to know people he came to have a Christmas Eve service in a dairy barn. He even butchered pigs with local persons. On June 26 at St. Paul, Dallas, there will be a motor cycle mass that will support the Special Olympics; Mr. Theiss is involved in that effort.

Working with Mr. Theiss in the Susquehanna County Initiative is a local committee that includes council member Martin Everhart.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE.** David Derr distributed “NEPS 2017 Spending Proposal” and pointed out that the proposed budget for 2017 includes a \$111,301 deficit. The committee raised this issue for synod council discussion, asking whether there were realistic prospects to increase mission support, or if spending should be cut, or if the matter should be passed on to the synod assembly. Mr. Smith encouraged the council not to cut the synod staff. It was observed that reducing the payments to the ELCA to cover the synod’s needs would require a truly major cut, not only a percent or two. As a result of this discussion, and in view of the limited time remaining on the day’s agenda, a motion was introduced to hold a special council meeting to deal with this matter only. The motion was made by Carl Shankweiler, seconded by David Hinrichs, and was adopted.

**(2016.03.02)** Resolved, that a special meeting of the synod council be held on May 10, 2016, at 3:00 p.m. at the Lutheran Center, Schoenersville, to deal with the issue of the 2017 program proposal (February 1, 2017, to January 31, 2018) and bring it into balance.

**PROGRAM COMMITTEE.** There was no further business in that the earlier discussion about the location of the 2017 assembly and the bishop’s report covered the matters that needed attention.

**NOMINATING COMMITTEE.** Marlane Druckenmiller reported that there are two nominees for many of the positions to be filled by the 2016 assembly. She explained what offices still required nominees.

**ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE.** Stacie Bray distributed a sheet of proposed changes to the synod's personnel policies. These changes relate to the complete set of policies distributed to the synod council in 2014. The following resolution was adopted:

**(2016.03.03)** Resolved, that the additions to the personnel policies of the synod as recommended by the administration committee as new items 2.5 ("Family Violence"), 6.3 ("Performance Issues Related to Family Violence"), 11.11 ("Leave Due to Family Violence"), and 5.8 ("Background Checks") be adopted and appended to the protocol copy of these minutes.

Mrs. Bray reported that Pastor Mary Gade has suggested that support staff members who have major anniversaries in synodical service might be recognized at synod assemblies. The matter will be dealt with by the executive committee.

**EN BLOCK RESOLUTIONS.** Three resolutions were approved unanimously.

**(2016.03.04)** Resolved, that the 2016 Assembly program (as printed in the Bulletin of Reports) be adopted.

**(2016.03.05)** 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. Rebecca Middeke-Conlin (12/31/2015)
Clergy (first year):	Sister Janet Stump (1/15/2016)
Clergy (second year):	The Rev. Frank Stinner (11/28/2015)
Clergy (second year):	The Rev. James Hammond (2/1/2016)

**(2016.03.06)** Resolved, that in accordance with ELCA bylaw 7.41.17. and upon endorsement by the bishop, the following rostered leaders be granted the roster status of "retired":

Associate in Ministry Marlane Druckenmiller (7/1/2016)  
The Rev. Paulette Obrecht (7/1/2016)  
The Rev. Dennis Moore (7/31/2016)

**NEW BUSINESS.**

**(2016.03.07)** Resolved, that Attorney Robert Ritter be appointed to serve as a voting member at the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, replacing Charles Moon, who is unable to fulfill the responsibility to which he was elected. The motion was made by Mt. Everhart, seconded by Ms. Druckenmiller, and was adopted. Bishop Zeiser explained that there are no alternate voting members available and that it is more desirable to have the synod council elect a replacement rather than having the bishop appoint someone when there is time for a council election.

**(2016.03.08)** Resolved, that the Executive Committee be authorized by majority vote to sell at prices that the committee considers acceptable the properties that came to the synod from St. Mark Lutheran, Lackawaxen, and Christ Lutheran, Quakake. The motion was made by Pastor Shankweiler, seconded by Mr. Hinrichs, and was adopted.

**WOMEN OF THE ELCA.** There was no report in that Marilyn Mazsa was absent.

**ADJOURNMENT.** Mr. Smith declared the meeting adjourned at 6:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carl D. Shankweiler, Secretary