

SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
The Lutheran Center in Northeastern Pennsylvania, Schoenersville, Pennsylvania
May 10, 2016

ATTENDANCE. Synod Council Members Present: Dr. Donald Boyer, Pr. Oliver Brown, Jim Carey, Madeline Deegan, David Derr, Marlane Druckenmiller, Linda Eroh, Martin Everhart, Pr. Charles Grube, David Hinrichs, Ruth Major, Pr. Martin Milne, 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, Stacie Bray.

Synod Council Members Absent: Ethan Melber.

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

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.

DWELLING IN THE WORD. Bishop Samuel Zeiser read Psalm 146 and offered the opening prayer, all on the theme of gratitude.

SYNOD COUNCIL EMAIL VOTE: ASSEMBLY AGENDA. Mr. Smith reported that the email vote requested on April 21 concerning a revised 2016 Synod Assembly agenda was successful in that it was unanimously approved by all persons voting. Nineteen persons responded affirmatively: Pr. June Bair, Dr. Donald Boyer, Pr. Oliver Brown, Jim Carey, Madeline Deegan, David Derr, Marlane Druckenmiller, Linda Eroh, Martin Everhart, Pr. Charles Grube, David Hinrichs, Ruth Major, Pr. Martin Milne, Pr. Deborah Scheffey, Pr. Carl Shankweiler, Donald F. Smith Jr., Pr. Suzanne Trump, Victor Unks, and Pr. Gary Walbert. Pastor Carl Shankweiler asked if anyone not listed actually did vote because there were two cases in which individuals voted but he did not receive the vote directly, probably because the vote was sent to Pastor Michael Bennethum only. The resolution that was adopted is as follows:

(2016.05.01) Resolved, that the 2016 Synod Assembly Program as approved on March 31, 2016, be amended in accordance with the April 21 proposal from Bishop Zeiser which reflects the work of the synod assembly planning team and which shortens the Friday afternoon session and adds a session on Friday evening.

NOMINEES FOR THE ELCA CHURCH COUNCIL. Bishop Zeiser spoke about the process whereby this year the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod is guaranteed a position on the Church Council of the ELCA. The synod is required to present two nominees, one of whom will be elected at the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. The synod obtains the nominees in the following way: (a) two nominees are proposed by the bishop, (b) they are voted upon by the Synod Council, and

(c) they are voted upon by the Synod Assembly. The following resolution was moved by Bishop Zeiser, seconded by Pr. Martin Milne, and adopted:

(2016.05.02) Resolved, that James Jennings and Robert Cimerol be presented as nominees for a six-year term on the Church Council of the ELCA, one of whom is to be elected at the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

FINANCE COMMITTEE: 2017 PROGRAM PROPOSAL. The primary reason for this special council meeting was to deal with the program proposal for 2017. The finance committee presented its original proposal (\$1,330,301, synod portion) with a \$111,301 deficit, a new “Base Proposal” (\$1,219,101 synod portion) with a \$101 deficit, a new “Force Reductions Proposal” (\$1,219,022) with a \$22 deficit, and a new “ELCA Cut Proposal” (\$1,330,301 synod portion) with a \$3,699 budget surplus. Mr. Smith offered another option: the Base Proposal with the \$29,000 in proposed staff salary cuts restored, resulting in a deficit of \$29,101.

Dr. Donald Boyer, seconded by Marlane Druckenmiller, moved that the “Base Proposal” with the staff salary cuts restored be adopted. Within the ensuing discussion the recommendation was advanced that an effort be made to replace the proposed cut in funding for the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia by means of a special effort to raise at least \$33,600 (i.e., the proposed cut to the seminary when moving from the \$144,000 included in the 2016 budget to the \$110,400 in the 2017 “Base Proposal”). The original motion was thereby adjusted as follows and adopted:

(2016.05.03) Resolved, that the synod council accept the finance committee’s option for a 2017 program proposal of \$2,300,000 which requires a budget deficit of \$29,101, it being understood that there should be no reductions in staff salaries and that the \$33,600 lost to the Philadelphia Seminary (as compared to the 2016 budget) should be covered by special funding of at least that same amount so as to show support for the bold moves in ministry adjustment being taken by the Philadelphia and Gettysburg seminaries.

With the program proposal defined by that resolution, a second resolution was then adopted relative to action sought by the 2016 Synod Assembly:

(2016.05.04) 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 spending program no later than its January 2017 meeting, making any necessary adjustment 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.)

The discussion leading up to the vote on those two resolutions was lengthy and thoughtful. The following points were made:

+ Some years ago a special assembly was needed because there was lack of agreement on the budget.

+ Besides cutting, we should also look for income, including looking beyond the congregations. For example, we could seek recognition from Thrivent in order to be a recipient in their Choice Dollars program. Could we put a donation “button” on the synod’s website. (Marlane Druckenmiller reported that her congregation receives donations from people they do not even know.) We could use opportunities for special fundraising, such as for the seminary.

+ Remind the attendees at the 2016 Synod Assembly that setting a budget and supporting it financially are exercises in faith.

+ We could approach the synod for one hundred special \$500 donations.

+ The synod staff recently brainstormed ideas to deal with the budget and funding issues; explore those ideas.

+ The proposed budget reduces the budget line for youth ministry, which is not a good area to cut. A response was given that the proposal is based on the previous year’s actual spending and that there are other sources for financing youth ministry if money is now needed.

+ If we do lose \$29,000 in one year as the projected deficit suggests, how long can we function? A response pointed out that the synod has a surplus on hand of \$599,486, which came about in recent years because spending was below income.

+ If we do lose \$29,000 in 2017 and continue spending according to recent patterns, in future years the deficit will grow.

+ Is it realistic for the Philadelphia and Gettysburg Seminaries to charge no tuition? A response: we need to find a way to make this new policy work or we will not have seminaries. Also, the students will still have living expenses that they need to pay.

+ One person noted that in her congregation general giving is down but that for outreach there is increased financial support. Therefore, the synod needs to explain what we do when we pass a budget so that people are inspired and we do not have this issue every year. A response: we do tell the story of the synod’s ministries, but that news does not always reach the members of our congregations. Bishop Zeiser asserted that he would be happy to talk about the synod’s ministries with congregations.

+ Concerning the seminaries, Bishop Zeiser spoke in favor of being supportive of their efforts during this time of transition. We should not give the impression that we are cutting our support for theological education, which is one of our most essential tasks as a church. The changes at the seminaries in Philadelphia and Gettysburg could allow “pods” in other areas closer to students’ homes as a way to overcome the barrier of geography. The Philadelphia Seminary has historically been the strongest in the Northeast; we need to do something as a

synod that says “thank you; we are supportive of your bold moves” and that does not take away strength from the seminaries because their circumstances require special consideration.

+ We need to have a serious conversation about what our synod should be in the future. We need to support congregations and rostered leaders.

+ We need to seek funding for other affiliated agencies as well because they are important, too.

+ Can we make a power point presentation, such as during the treasurer’s report at the assembly, so that we do not simply approach the assembly with a resolution? What is important to say?

+ Remember the theme of gratitude. In our synod members give on average 1.27% of their income to their congregations; the congregations give 3.67% of their expenditures to the synod. Therefore, congregations do contribute to the synod at a higher rate than members give to congregations.

NOMINATIONS. The question was raised about the possibility of making additional nominations for positions being filled at the assembly. They can be made, even from the floor; but the information concerning the nominees can no longer be sent out in advance to the assembly registrants.

ADJOURNMENT. Mr. Smith asked for a motion to adjourn, which was made, seconded, and adopted. He thereby declared the meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carl D. Shankweiler, Secretary