

SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Christ Lutheran Church, Conyngham, Pennsylvania
October 12, 2016

ATTENDANCE. Synod Council Members Present: Barbara Belón, Dr. Donald Boyer, Pr. Oliver Brown, Madeline Deegan, Marlane Druckenmiller, Thomas Engle, Linda Eroh, Pr. Charles Grube, Jessica Kingsborough, Elizabeth Leibenguth, M. Jeannette Richardson, 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, David Derr, David Hinrichs, Ruth Major, Marilyn Mazsa (not a member of the Synod Council but the representative of the Women of the ELCA), Ethan Melber.

Synod Council Members Absent: Martin Milne.

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

Guests: Dan Scharnhorst, Executive Director of Bear Creek Camp.

CALL TO ORDER. Vice President Donald F. Smith Jr. called the meeting of the Synod Council of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod to order at 3:05 p.m.

HOST PASTOR GREETINGS. Mr. Smith introduced Pastor Carolyn Hetrick of Christ Lutheran Church, Conyngham, who welcomed the council to Christ's Church and explained the ministries taking place in Christ's facilities, including an outdoor worship space to be dedicated on October 23. The congregation is preparing for its 200th anniversary in 2018. Every year \$70,000 is normally given by the congregation for a variety of projects beyond itself. While carrying out some renovations to the building in connection with the anniversary, the congregation made a commitment to give \$100,000 in special gifts concerning world hunger and disaster relief. "It is in the congregation's DNA to give," she said.

DWELLING IN THE WORD. Bishop Samuel Zeiser affirmed that "God does not abandon us to difficult circumstances" and invited the council members to share what creates uncertainty and fear. He then led the council in prayer.

COUNCIL DEVELOPMENT. Barbara Belón, speaking for the Program Committee, led the council in an exercise, "Two Truths and a Lie," to help council members get to know one another better.

MINISTRY UPDATE: BEAR CREEK CAMP. Dan Scharnhorst, Executive Director of Bear Creek Camp, gave a handout showing the 2016 staff, comments from campers and parents, and attendance statistics. He explained various aspects of the camp's work, such as the increase in attendance by Roman Catholic youth as well as youth from other Protestant denominations. "Lives are being impacted and changed." Financially, the camp is doing better and wants to build 22 cabins and upgrade other buildings as well. Seeking funding for these improvements, the camp has \$215,000 so far and should achieve \$300,000. He expressed appreciation for the support received from the synod. Bishop Zeiser asked that the comments from parents be included in the synod's news and invited the council to find

donors for the camp. Mr. Scharnhorst said that the camp has not made a wide push for funds because of donor fatigue but that the request for funds will be widened as the camp comes closer to its goal.

MINUTES OF THE JULY 9 MEETING. The minutes of the July 9, 2016 meeting were distributed and approved.

BISHOP'S REPORT. Bishop Zeiser said that attending the 2016 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA was a blessing and uplifting, giving participants a sense of pride and encouragement. "We have great ministries in this church; we need to get behind them and encourage others." He reported that the assembly members from our synod came home with a commitment to gather funds and raised \$6,271.37, which included a donation to be matched of \$2,500.00. The assembly adopted Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry and Eucharist, a joint statement with the Roman Catholic Church on finding a way towards unity in anticipation of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. A member from one of the synod's Pocono Mission District congregations, James Jennings, was elected to the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The assembly voted to change the lay roster by combining the three previous rosters into one, "Word and Service," with the title now being "Deacon." He distributed a sheet about AMMPARO, the ELCA's strategy of Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO).

Bishop Zeiser reported about the most recent meeting of the ELCA Conference of Bishops, which included a banquet related to the ELCA Fund for Leaders; the banquet included students who are receiving funding. He said that by supporting Bear Creek Camp and the ELCA Fund for Leaders, congregations are engaged in ministries with youth and young adults. Hence, "every congregation can do youth ministry."

He stated that Elizabeth Leibenguth of Orefield was involved in the TEY (Theological Education with Youth) program this summer at the Gettysburg seminary. Participants had courses in global warming, climate change, and leadership. She found it to be a comfortable place to share thoughts about God.

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton is encouraging everyone to read the Small Catechism in relation to the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. The Campaign for the ELCA is going very well: churchwide, 75% of all congregations have participated; the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod is at about 78%.

Bishop Zeiser said that he and Pastor D. Michael Bennethum have been talking about downward synodical trends and how to turn them around with Beth Lewis, President and CEO of 1517 Media. She will be in the synod from January 25 to 30, 2017, in connection with Learning Ministries Days and to continue those synodical discussions.

Planning for the 2017 Synod Assembly has begun and has included people who had volunteered to help in 2016. There will possibly be a banquet in connection with the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation.

Pastors Niels Nielsen and Mary Gade have been considering ways to provide new leadership for congregations in the Pocono Mission District. At issue is the increasing number of smaller congregations that still have energy for ministry.

Holy Trinity, Kingston, experienced the embezzlement of up to \$175,000 and perhaps even more. "It matters that you have an outside audit."

Bishop Zeiser spoke about his medical issues, which include an operation on October 31 and his inability to work in November. In December he will be able to return to work on a limited basis, beginning with one workday the first week and then adding an additional day each week. He reported that he gave his associates full responsibility to make decisions in his absence and that staff meetings will continue. The Executive Committee may also need to make decisions without him. His administrative assistant, Brenda Stauffer, and Pastor Bennethum will keep him informed. No objections were expressed by any council members to these plans.

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT. Mr. Smith did not have a report.

SECRETARY'S REPORT. Pastor Carl Shankweiler presented a written report. Seconded by Linda Eroh, he moved the following resolution, which was adopted: Resolved, that the minutes of the March 31, 2016, meeting of the Synod Council be amended to correct 2016.03.08 so that it reads "Ascension Lutheran, Quakake" and not "Christ Lutheran, Quakake."

Pastor Shankweiler reported that the Synod Council's Executive Committee conducted a vote by email on September 21, 2016, on whether to accept an offer of \$50,000 for the former property of St. Mark's, Lackawaxen. The vote was unanimous to sell and in keeping with the authority given to the Executive Committee in resolution 2016.03.08. Voting in the affirmative were Barbara Belón, Stacie Bray, David Derr, Marlane Druckenmiller, David Hinrichs, Pr. Carl Shankweiler, Donald Smith, and Bishop Samuel Zeiser.

In keeping with the wishes of the final council at St. Mark's, Pastor Shankweiler reported the request that grants be given from the proceeds of the sale to St. Mark's sister congregations, namely, St. Luke, Greeley, and St. Jacobi, Shohola. Not yet certain about the amount of money that will be available after the payment of the closing costs and the covering of other expenses incurred since the synod received the property, he asked that the Finance Committee consider the following or a similar resolution for future action:

Resolved, that upon the successful completion of the sale of the property formerly owned by St. Mark's, Lackawaxen, for a price that exceeds the synod's costs and expenses related to managing the property, the closing of the congregation, and the making of these grants, that grants of \$3,000 each be given to St. Mark's sister congregations, namely, St. Luke, Greeley, and St. Jacobi, Shohola, in recognition of the request by St. Mark's council that such gifts be made.

Pastor Shankweiler moved, seconded by Dr. Donald Boyer, the following resolution:

Resolved, that the document "Continuing Resolutions and Other Resolutions of Ongoing Impact, Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA" be adopted and appended to the Synod Constitution in replacement of the current "Standing and Continuing Resolutions, Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA" with all current continuing resolutions and other resolutions of ongoing impact, whether included in the present document or not, being hereby rescinded.

There was discussion concerning the various opinions on whether the synod council itself could take this action, would simply need to inform the assembly, or would need to ask the assembly to affirm this action. Pastor Shankweiler explained that the Constitution Committee, which prepared this document, did not attempt to change the meaning of the existing resolutions but was simply editing them to update them with current terms, to eliminate material that is now irrelevant, and to sort the

resolutions by topic. Mr. Smith expressed concern about the desirability of some resolutions, wanting to challenge their content and not just their wording. With the issue of dealing with the substance of several resolutions now before the council, Pastor Shankweiler, seconded by Pastor Deborah Scheffey, moved that action on the resolution concerning standing and continuing resolutions be tabled. The motion was adopted.

TREASURER'S REPORT. Dr. Boyer reported that the audit of the synod's 2015-16 finances has been completed. It was found that the revenue was reduced and that the projected deficit of \$84,000 was really \$87,000. There were no major findings needing action.

DIRECTOR FOR EVANGELICAL MISSION REPORT. Pastor Bennethum reported that as of the end of August, 80 percent of the synod's congregations had made mission support payments and that they total 53 percent of what is expected; that is, the synod's income is on target.

He distributed current copies of "Stories of Faith in Action."

Pastor Bennethum reported that starting in the fall of 2016 every synod is asked to develop a stewardship plan, and so he distributed the draft of a plan for the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, "Blessed To Be a Blessing: Faith-based Stewardship in the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod."

Visits concerning mission support will be made to all congregation councils by 2020; these visits will begin this fall with about 33 to 44 congregations involved. He thanked those synod council members who agreed to make visits.

Concerning the Congregational Vitality Project, 185 of the synod's 270 congregations did turn in Form A of the parochial report for 2015 in time to be included in a combined synodical report. The returns indicate that the congregations are strong in helping people in need but weak in advocacy and very weak in equipping people to share their faith. Reports of individual congregations are kept confidential; the synodical compilation is not confidential. For congregations, their individual results are useful in assisting informed discussion; they are not considered to be a report card.

The one-year Susquehanna County Initiative was an exploration that showed that it is not effective to have an intern working in Susquehanna County who is also in a congregation in another location. One important issue is finding partners in that county. New directions are being sought.

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa) is planning to reorganize. There will now be seven action teams, which may be joined by persons having those interests: racial justice, immigration, creation justice, hunger, mental health-addiction, poverty-housing-employment, and education. Most meetings will be by conference call. Anyone interested in serving should contact Pastor Bennethum or the LAMPa director, Tracey DePasquale. The synod's two representatives are Pastors Dennis Ritter and Bruce Osterhout.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE. Pastor Bennethum reported for the committee, presenting a resolution on housing allowances for the synod staff for 2017 that was adopted.

(2016.10.01) Resolved, that the portion of the 2017 Executive Staff salary to be designated as housing be as follows:

Samuel Zeiser	\$20,000
Mary Gade	\$24,000

Kurt Garbe \$17,000

FINANCE COMMITTEE. Dr. Boyer reported for the committee, distributing the minutes of the September 10, 2016, Finance Committee conference call and presenting a resolution concerning the spending policy for 2017.

(2016.10.02) Resolved, that spending policies for synod funds for 2017 be established as follows:

Prosser, Pahse, Mission Fund :	8% of assets,	\$59,810
Student Education Fund:	8% of assets,	\$10,741
Kelchner Fund:	10% of assets,	\$131,119
Leadership Fund:	6% of assets,	\$3,937
Social Ministry Fund:	8% of assets,	\$40,980

PROGRAM COMMITTEE. Barbara Belón reported for the Program Committee. She said that Bishop Zeiser would like the committee to facilitate discussing and planning for synod assemblies so that the planning is not so fractured. She also distributed the draft of a letter concerning the establishment of a task force on social justice that Bishop Zeiser still needs to edit; the letter will be issued over their signatures and that of Vice President Smith.

She reported that the synod has been approved as a recipient of funds under the Thrivent Choice program and distributed sample publicity materials related to Thrivent Choice. Now the synod needs to market this possibility. Because this is an unanticipated revenue stream, we will face the issue of needing to decide how to use this money; and she asked that suggestions be given to the committee.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE. Marlane Druckenmiller reported that the committee met prior to the synod council meeting to consider the needs for 2017. Three mission districts have synod council members who can be reelected. A new vice president and a new treasurer will be needed. The committee has begun brainstorming names for those positions and would like to have two nominees for each.

EN BLOC ITEMS. Four en bloc items were presented for action; all were adopted.

1. **(2016.10.03)** Resolved, that Hope's Table, housed at Hope Lutheran Church, 601 N. Front Street, Reading 19601, be reauthorized as a Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community (SWAC) of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

2. **(2016.10.04)** Resolved, that the Rev. Jeffrey S. Carstens be appointed as the convener of the Worship Ministry Team.

3. **(2016.10.05)** 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. Kenneth Buckwalter (9/1/2016)
Clergy (second year):	The Rev. Mark Swanson (7/18/2016)
Clergy (second year):	The Rev. George Grubb (8/30/2016)
Associate in Ministry (first year):	Christine Summy (9/1/2016)

4. **(2016.10.06)** 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”:

The Rev. Thomas Richards (1/1/2017)

The Rev. Wayne Kaufman (1/1/2017)

NEW BUSINESS. Pastor Bennethum explained the Common Ground ministry of Reading, which has an average attendance of 60 with about 40 new people coming each week. A second campus is needed, for which a grant has actually been approved even though the synod council has not yet authorized the ministry. He distributed a set of papers giving detailed information about the ministry to be housed at this second campus, Trinity, Reading. Jessica Kingsborough moved, seconded by Elizabeth Leibenguth, that the following resolution be adopted, which it was:

(2016.10.07) Resolved, that Common Ground Recovery Community—Downtown Reading Campus, meeting at Trinity Lutheran Church, 527 Washington Street, Reading 19601, be authorized as a Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community (SAWC) of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

OTHER REPORTS. Marilyn Mazsa, liaison for the Women of the ELCA, was not able to attend and did not supply a written report.

DEBRIEFING. Bishop Zeiser stated that he considered the meeting to have had much of substance. Barbara Belón expressed her gratitude to the synod for supporting the coaching workshop that she attended; Pastor Bennethum replied that eight individuals from the synod took part in that training at some level.

The council meeting scheduled for January 18, 2017, will take place at Prince of Peace, Johnsonville. The correct date for the March meeting is March 23, 2017.

ADJOURNMENT. Mr. Smith asked for a motion to adjourn, which was made, seconded, and adopted. He thereby declared the meeting adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carl D. Shankweiler, Secretary