

SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Bangor, Pennsylvania
January 18, 2017
(as corrected by the March 23, 2017, council meeting)

ATTENDANCE. Synod Council Members Present: Pr. June Bair, Barbara Belón, Dr. Donald Boyer, Stacie Bray, Pr. Oliver Brown, Madeline Deegan, David Derr, Marlane Druckenmiller, Thomas Engle, Pr. Charles Grube, David Hinrichs, Pr. Jessica Kingsborough, Elizabeth Leibenguth, Ruth Major, Ethan Melber, M. Jeannette Richardson, Larry Rissmiller, Pr. Deborah Scheffey, Pr. Carl Shankweiler, Donald F. Smith Jr., Pr. Suzanne Trump, Victor Unks, Bishop Samuel Zeiser.

Synod Council Members Excused: Linda Eroh.

Synod Council Members Absent: Pr. Martin Milne, Pr. Gary Walbert.

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

Guests: James Jennings, member of the host congregation and of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Pr. Jeffrey Carstens, convener of the synod's Worship Ministry Team.

DWELLING IN THE WORD. Bishop Samuel Zeiser led the council's opening devotions in the church nave; his theme for the lessons and hymns was Peter, on whose day the council was meeting.

CALL TO ORDER. Vice President Donald F. Smith Jr. called the meeting of the Synod Council of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod to order at 3:20 p.m.

GREETINGS. Mr. Smith introduced James Jennings, a member of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and a member of Prince of Peace. Mr. Jennings, a life-long member of the host congregation, extended the congregation's greetings and explained how the current congregation and its facilities are the result of a mid-1970s successful merger of three older congregations. He suggested that this merger might be a model for other congregations to follow. He also explained the congregation's worship services and pointed out that the congregation has a full slate of activities in its busy building. He greeted the council on behalf of the ELCA's church council, to which he was elected by the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. He explained that the first church council meeting he attended was in November, at which the council approved "Called Forward Together in Christ," noted the halfway point in the 5-year Campaign for the ELCA, recognized that synodical Mission Support is a challenging issue, and learned about ethnic-specific ELCA ministries.

Larry Rismiller, also a member of Prince of Peace, was welcomed to the synod council as its newest member. He explained his diverse religious background and how he became an active member of Price of Peace because of the "love shown" and God's leading him as a lay minister to "fill in as needed."

COUNCIL DEVELOPMENT. The Program Committee, through Thomas Engle, led the council in an exercise to demonstrate the need to listen deeply and still be able to come to different conclusions.

MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 12 MEETING. The minutes of the October 12, 2016, meeting were distributed and approved with one correction: David Derr, who was listed as being both present and absent, was not at the meeting.

BISHOP'S REPORT. Bishop Zeiser made six specific points and then read a statement about synodical ministries and finances.

1. On January 1, 2017, he returned full time from his leave for surgery, which was successful to the point that no follow-up radiation is needed. He expressed his thanks for the council's support in what was his own first major medical experience.
2. On December 13, 2016, the synod's support staff held a luncheon for church office secretaries, more than 60 of whom attended. Important steps were made in building relationships, and the group would like to gather again next year.
3. Beginning January 1, 2017, the ELCA has a two-roster system ordained ministers: (1) Ministers of Word and Sacrament and (2) Ministers of Word and Service, which brings together all of the former lay rosters. There are many implications related to this change, including the wording change from "Rostered Leader Profile" (RLP) to "Rostered Minister Profile" (RMP).
4. The ELCA has eliminated the position of regional coordinator. Our coordinator for Region 7 has been Pastor Peggy M. Wuertele, who has done in a very fine job.
5. The first call process for 2017 is about to begin. Bishop Zeiser will represent Region 7 in Chicago from February 21 to 22 for the first step whereby the 2017 seminary graduates are assigned to the various regions. Those assigned to our region will then be divided among the synods of Region 7.
6. The planning team for the 2017 synod assembly has been at work, and a keynote speaker has been identified: the Rev. Dr. Kathryn Kleinhans of Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa. She will speak on the doctrinal understanding of being unleashed for the sake of reformation. The ELCA representative will be Pr. Daniel O. Rift, Director, ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Appeals. Bishop Zeiser introduced to the council Pr. Jeffrey Carstens, convener of the synod's Worship Ministry Team, which will play an important role in the assembly.

Bishop Zeiser then read his prepared text concerning the financial challenges facing the synod. The entire text is included here.

"As declining mission support threatens to erode this synod's end-of-year financial position, it is important that a review of the ministry of this synod takes place in order to insure that essential responsibilities are upheld, that significant ministries are carried out, and that support of churchwide ministries is sustained.

"While financial prudence has always been a hallmark of this synod, added diligence has had to be exercised since the nation's 2008 economic downturn and the ministry policy decisions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Both of these large issues have had long-term negative impact on the level of Mission Support offered by synod congregations. Among the many adaptations that were made in order to keep the synod's ministries strong in the face of those developments, two decisions changed the way in which this synod functions. One decision prompted a move from a synod staff composed of predominantly full-time members to a staff composed largely of part-time members. The second decision effected a decrease in the percentage of Mission Support forwarded from

congregations to churchwide ministries. These moves have afforded the synod the ability to operate in a way that maintains ministry to Rostered Ministers and congregations and continues to fund many ministries across the synod territory (and foster some new ministries), as well as providing significant financial support to churchwide ministries.

“The continued decline in Mission Support, however, is beginning to stifle availability of financial resources to continue funding the current operational demands of the synod. Conversations about this dilemma and in anticipation of its looming influence have occurred in the Synod Council, the Finance Committee, and the Bishop’s Staff. In preparing the 2017 Spending Plan to be proposed to the 2016 Synod Assembly, it became clear that the time has come for additional steps that will insure the financial health of the synod.

“As I have pondered the circumstance we face and imagined how to address the need for operational adjustments that keep costs in line with resources, I am struck by the sweeping changes that would be required. Because of the large number of staff who are part time, it would require the dismissal of a large number of staff to add up the cost savings necessary to bring spending in line with income. Because of the number of Rostered Ministers and congregations in this synod, the ramifications of such changes have the potential to severely impact ministry to those ministers and congregations. I believe that such sweeping changes will need to be imposed in a way that does not further harm the ministry and mission of this synod by eroding confidence, spirit, and commitment.

“Announcement of final decisions should follow efforts to prepare for the healthy operation of synod ministries once those changes are in effect. To prepare for that transition, I have asked the Bishop’s Staff to join me for three days of consultation during which time we will critically assess the ministries we do, with the intent to “start with a blank slate” and devise a new synod leadership model. I have called upon Beth Lewis, President and CEO of 1517 Media (AugsburgFortress), to lead the workshop, and Mr. John Smith, President and CEO of the Reading Museum, to provide added insight and challenge. The consultation will take place on January 25, 26, and 30, 2017, at Christ Lutheran Church, Allentown.”

VICE PRESIDENT’S REPORT. Mr. Smith spoke about a talk he gave in his home congregation, Reformation Lutheran Church, Reiffton, concerning the 500th anniversary of the Reformation; he explained Martin Luther’s importance and the changes he brought to the church. Following his remarks, a long-time member of that congregation spoke to Mr. Smith about how much he learned from that talk. “We can’t assume that our members know” the Luther story, Mr. Smith asserted. He offered to visit other congregations in order to make the same presentation, which can be found on the website of Reformation Church. He added that he enjoys visiting congregations.

He spoke about his visit to St. John, Sayre, for the January 8 election of their new pastor. He noted three “wrinkles” associated with this call: (1) the candidate was an Episcopal priest (2) in a same-sex marriage and (3) in another call process at the same time. Mr. Smith found that there was some unhappiness with the synod on the part of the congregation’s president, who asserted that they “might be better off in the New York Synod.” However, after the candidate performed the liturgy “flawlessly,” gave a “great” sermon, and answered questions in a Q & A session, she received a 90 percent approval vote. At the end, the president said, “Don, you did good.” Mr. Smith observed that many people think that the synod only expects money and gives little in return. Instead, the synod should be seen as all of us “walking together.” Council members should keep that in mind as they conduct elections.

Finally, he reported about a meeting that he had with President David J. Lose and others regarding the Philadelphia Seminary. The new merged seminary will have a balanced, \$9.5 million budget in contrast to the \$12.5 million previously needed to operate the two separate seminaries at Philadelphia and Gettysburg. The curriculum is being changed to show “competency” and not simply academic achievement. Scholarships will be provided to more incoming students. While the synod can assist theological education through its budget, it would be good if more congregations could also provide support.

Mr. Smith concluded that the Lutheran church is far from being “boring” as we look at these three topics: Martin Luther (past), the election at Sayre (present), and the changes at the seminaries (future).

SECRETARY’S REPORT. Pastor Carl Shankweiler reported that an email vote to approve the appointment of Pastor Cheryl Meinschein to the board of the United Lutheran Seminary was unanimously approved by those voting (24 yes votes from 26 possible voters with two council members not voting, with the following persons all voting in the affirmative: Pr. June Bair, Barbara Belón, Dr. Donald Boyer, Stacie Bray, Pr. Oliver Brown, Madeline Deegan, David Derr, Marlane Druckenmiller, Thomas Engle, Linda Eroh, Pr. Charles Grube, David Hinrichs, Elizabeth Leibenguth, Ruth Major, Pr. Martin Milne, M. Jeannette Richardson, Larry Rismiller, Pr. Deborah Scheffey, Pr. Carl Shankweiler, Donald F. Smith Jr., Pr. Suzanne Trump, Victor Unks, Pr. Gary Walbert, Bishop Samuel Zeiser.)

(2017.01.01) Resolved, that the Rev. Cheryl F. Meinschein be appointed by this synod to the board of the United Lutheran Seminary.

Pastor Shankweiler reported that Pastor Wm. Chris Boerger, Secretary of the ELCA, sent us three documents related to the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly and the November 2016 meeting of the Church Council of the ELCA: (1) “Amendments to the Constitution for Synods as Approved by the 2016 Churchwide Assembly: Official Notice of Required Provisions,” (2) “Report of Church Council Responses to Synod Resolutions and Churchwide Assembly Actions (Nov. 10-13, 2016)” and (3) “Report of Actions of the Church Council (November 10-13, 2016) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.” He passed around copies of all three documents, with Pastor Bennethum indicating that he had copies for every council member of the pages related to three of the four memorials sent by the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod to the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Concerning the recommended amendments to the synodical constitution, Pastor Shankweiler explained that some items approved by the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly will automatically become part of our synodical constitution (i.e., those marked with a dagger) while other proposals are optional; consequently, our constitution committee plans to meet before the March 23 synod council meeting to formulate a recommendation for action concerning these optional items.

TREASURER’S REPORT. David Hinrichs asserted that we should not be afraid of reformation and that, for example, attendance at the Philadelphia Seminary is up. Even if the synod’s budget is shrinking, there can still be opportunities. Because the year-end surge in Mission Support has not yet been accounted for, it is difficult to know what the full fiscal year’s outcome will be, but Mr. Hinrichs projected a deficit of less than \$50,000 once the \$90,000 end-of-December deficit is modified by year-end receipts in January.

DIRECTOR FOR EVANGELICAL MISSION REPORT. Pastor Michael Bennethum made five points.

1. The average size of congregations is decreasing; congregations having fewer than 50 persons in worship is the fastest growing type. Nevertheless, many congregations are still vibrant even though they can no longer afford a solo pastor.
2. The Congregational Vitality Project has gained traction. We have had more congregations use it than any other synod.
3. Concerning Mission Support intentions for 2017, some congregations had fact-to-face visits, with some of those visits having been made by synod council members. Thus far 122 congregations have made their intentions known; last year 222 intentions were received.
4. New ministries include Hope's Table and two additional campuses for the Common Ground Recovery Community.
5. This synod sent four memorials to the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Responses have been received concerning three of them. The fourth one, concerning poverty, has not yet been acted upon by the ELCA Church Council, to which it was referred.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. Mr. Smith explained that the Executive Committee decided to offer two possible salary plans for 2017: one with no increases and the other with a 2 percent increase. Mr. Derr expressed his conviction that although the synod is running a deficit, we can fund a 2 percent raise in the short term. Mr. Hinrichs also offered support for a 2 percent increase, while Mr. Smith said that 2016's inflation rate was about 2 percent. Consequently, Mr. Hinrichs, seconded by Jeannette Richardson, offered the following resolution to give the bishop and his staff 2 percent salary increases in 2017. The resolution was adopted.

(2017.01.02) Resolved, that 2017 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 12, 2016, meeting and shall apply to calendar year 2017 and all future years unless otherwise provided by this Synod Council. (Numbers are rounded to the nearest dollar.) This represents a 2% increase over 2016.

Name***	Base Salary	Housing	SS	Total
Samuel Zeiser	\$67,004	\$20,000	\$7,207	\$94,211
Kurt Garbe	\$52,874	\$17,000	\$5,788	\$75,662
Mary Gade	\$52,107	\$24,000	\$6,304	\$82,411
Karen Matthias-Long			\$4,819*	\$62,911
Carl Shankweiler	\$5,327		\$441	\$5,768
M. Bennethum**				\$21,432
Jean Huber				\$16,074
John Richter				\$18,217
Fred Crawford				\$15,606
Lori Kochanski				\$15,606
Peter Kuritz				\$15,606

*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 associate serving the Pocono Mission District is paid to his congregation under a purchase of services arrangement

[Note: the 2% increase in staff compensation means that the 2017 cost for support staff will be \$230,414; the 2017 cost for contract staff will be \$35,594.]

FINANCE COMMITTEE. Mr. Derr reported that the Finance Committee sees no need to adjust the synod's budget for 2017 at this time. He presented the following resolution on behalf of the committee, and it was adopted.

(2017.01.03) Resolved, that grants for the 2017 fiscal year be made from the Prosser, Pahse, Mission Fund to the following ministries under development:

Common Ground Recovery Community, Wyomissing: \$12,000

Hope's Table, Reading: \$12,000

Common Ground Recovery Community, Reading: \$5,000

Common Ground Recovery Community, Douglasville: \$1,200

He said that the committee will prepare a description of the purposes of the synod's various endowment funds.

Pastor Shankweiler gave an update on the synod's attempts to sell the property of the closed congregation in Lackawaxen, on which graves are located and for which it cannot be proved that the congregation owned the land between its main property and the Delaware River.

PROGRAM COMMITTEE. Barbara Belón spoke about the opportunity for the synod to gain contributions through the Thrivent Choice program. Ideas for promoting this possibility include putting out "news flashes," asking Thrivent for a list of the donor opportunities that exist in our synod, and mentioning the possibility of designating the synod as a recipient for Choice Dollars in the Mission Support thank-you letters. Mrs. Belón will write a blurb about this matter for synodical publicity.

She also reported that the committee has taken on responsibility for God's Playground at the 2017 Synod Assembly. Marlane Druckenmiller suggested putting the date and location on the synod's website.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE. Stacie Bray presented the document "Continuing Resolutions and Other Resolutions of Ongoing Impact" for consideration. After considerable discussion of the section asking that institutions receiving sizeable grants from the synod include in their annual reports the salaries of their most highly compensated individuals, Mr. Hinrichs, seconded by Ms. Druckenmiller, moved the following resolution, which was adopted with Pastor Shankweiler voting in the negative:

(2017.01.04) Resolved, that Chapter 2, Item 10, of the document "Continuing Resolutions and Other Resolutions of Ongoing Impact" dealing with the reporting of salaries by institutions receiving synodical grants in excess of \$10,000 a year be retracted and deleted from that document.

Chapter 5, Item 8, dealing with the issue of the evaluation and compensation of rostered leaders was discussed. Bishop Zeiser, seconded by Pr. Suzanne Trump, moved the following resolution, which was adopted:

(2017.01.05) Resolved, that Chapter 5, Item 8, be amended by replacing "The Mutual Ministry/Staff Support Committee will have, among its duties, the responsibility to review and evaluate the implementation of the covenant and to recommend appropriate compensation for rostered leaders" with a new sentence: "Appropriate processes will be developed to review and evaluate the implementation of the covenant."

Discussion took place concerning the tenth item on page 9: “The Synod Council, through the appropriate synod committee, shall enter annually into consultations between the synod and its congregations to determine congregational mission support commitment goals for support of the synod's spending plan in the coming fiscal year.” Madeline Deegan questioned whether that provision is realistic. Pastor Bennethum said that the Stewardship and Mission Support Table is doing this work.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE. Ms. Druckenmiller reported that she has been given a list of the positions that require nominees for the 2017 assembly and that the committee plans to have a slate of candidates by the March meeting of the synod council.

EN BLOC ITEMS. The following resolutions were adopted en bloc:

(2017.01.05) 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. Thomas F. Irwin (2/1/2017)
Deaconess (second year):	Sister Janet Stump
Clergy (third year):	The Rev. Rashion Santiago
Clergy (third year):	The Rev. Timothy R. Garman

(2017.01.06) 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”:

The Rev. Harry M. Laubach Jr. (3/1/2017)

(2017.01.07) Resolved, that a call to special service be extended to the Rev. Paul Xander to serve as Chaplain of the Good Shepherd Rehabilitation network.

(2017.01.08) 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. Lisa K. Borrell (2/26/2017)
Clergy (first year)	The Rev. Peggy M. Wuertele (3/1/2017)

(2017.01.09) Resolved, that a call to special service be extended to the Rev. Stephen J. Weisser to serve as Director of Chaplaincy Services for the Reading Health System.

(2017.01.10) Resolved, that the synod council extend an invitation to the Rev. William Culton, an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to serve as the interim pastor of St. Paul, Tannersville, effective January 15, 2017.

NEW BUSINESS. Mr. Hinrichs, seconded by Pr. Deborah Sheffey, moved the following resolution, which was adopted:

(2017.01.11) Resolved, that the Common Ground Recovery Community, housed at Atonement Lutheran Church, 5 Wyomissing Blvd, Wyomissing, PA 19610, be reauthorized as a Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

DEBRIEFING. Comments included: (1) the meeting was intense with depth and attention to detail; (2) it is important to attend the March meeting, at which there will be significant matters to consider; (3) the meeting was good with no “bumps on the log.”

ANNOUNCEMENTS. The synod council retreat for 2017 will be held on July 22, beginning at 9:00 a.m., at St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Smithfield, 139 Craigs Meadow Road, East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania 18031.

ADJOURNMENT. Mr. Smith asked for a motion to adjourn, which was made, seconded, and adopted. He thereby declared the meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carl D. Shankweiler, Secretary