

SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Lutheran Center, 2354 Grove Rd., Allentown, Pennsylvania
July 22, 2017

ATTENDANCE. Synod Council Members Present: Dr. Barbara Belón, Dr. Donald Boyer, Pr. Oliver Brown, David Derr, Marlane Druckenmiller, Thomas Engle, Linda Eroh, David Hinrichs, Ruth Major, Louise McCloughan, Jeannette Richardson, Larry Rissmiller, Pr. Carl Shankweiler, Donald F. Smith Jr., Pr. Suzanne Trump, Bishop Samuel Zeiser.

Synod Council Members Excused: Pr. June Bair, Madeline Deegan, Pr. Charles Grube, Pr. Jessica Kingsborough, Elizabeth Leibenguth, Ethan Melber, Pr. Nelson Quiñones, Pr. Deborah Scheffey, Victor Unks, Pr. Gary Walbert.

Synod Council Members Absent: None.

Other Persons Present: Donald Dillman, Treasurer Elect; 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 9:00 a.m. The location of the meeting had been changed from the previously announced location of Craigs Meadows to Schoenersville because of the funeral of Bishop Emeritus Harold S. Weiss, scheduled for Muhlenberg College that same afternoon. Also, the agenda of the meeting was abbreviated so that the meeting could end at 12:00 noon.

DEVOTIONS. Bishop Samuel Zeiser led the day's devotions, which included a service of Holy Communion.

GREETINGS AND ORIENTATION. Mr. Smith welcomed the new members to the council: Louise McCloughan and Donald Dillman. All members present gave brief self-introductions. Mr. Smith thanked Pastor D. Michael Bennethum for updating the handbook for synod council members and highlighted issues in the handbook. The council then divided into its four committees for a period of work.

MINUTES OF THE MARCH 23 MEETING. The minutes of the March 23, 2017, meeting were distributed and approved.

BISHOP'S REPORT. Bishop Zeiser gave his report.

1. Support staff member Deborah Frey collated the evaluations of the 2017 Assembly of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, resulting in a 14-page document. The Kalahari Resort was happy to receive our feedback. The synod had the highest number of persons in attendance at an assembly in many years.
2. The committee for the 2018 assembly has met twice. That assembly may be a two-site assembly with Bear Creek Camp being one of the sites because of the new developments at the camp. The theme "Sharing Ministries, Building Relationships" is being considered.
3. The council is meeting at the Lutheran Center because of Bishop Emeritus Harold S. Weiss's funeral at Muhlenberg College this same day.
4. On July 23 St. John, Gibraltar, will vote for the second time to withdraw from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and affiliate with the North American Lutheran Church. It is a foregone conclusion that St. John will have the required two-thirds vote to withdraw from the ELCA.

5. The Rev. Jennifer Ollikainen, Executive Director of Lutheran Congregational Services, accepted a call in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. Her office had been housed at the Lutheran Center.
6. The pilot project with the Mission Investment Fund concerning the synod's bookkeeping will close at the end of the current fiscal year. Information about what will happen next concerning mission support remittances will be distributed to congregations in September.
7. This synod is receiving five first call candidates this year.
8. David Hinrichs and Donald Smith, stepping down as synod treasurer and vice president respectively, are to be thanked for "extraordinary leadership," discussion, moral support, grace, and professionalism.

Mr. Smith observed that 108 congregations were without lay representation at the 2017 assembly, which represents 40 percent of the congregations, a poor showing even when the assembly attendance was high. He asked, "What can we do?" Various possible issues were raised in the following discussion concerning what the factors might be contributing to absences: cost, the difficulty for people to take off from work, the fact that some congregations are going through transitions in leadership, and the possible effect from having some congregations in union church situations.

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT. Mr. Smith spoke about the work that still needs to be done on the issue of congregations that are closing. With the approval of the Vice President Elect, Dr. Barbara Belón, he and Pr. Carl Shankweiler will continue to work on this issue, now joined by Marlane Druckenmiller and potentially other volunteers. Mr. Hinricks recommended that the persons working on this issue learn about St. Timothy's, Allentown. Dr. Donald Boyer raised the issue of cemeteries.

Mr. Smith also spoke about the need for a committee to be involved in assisting Friedens Evangelical Lutheran Church, Center Valley, a congregation that is taking steps to discipline one of its members as outlined in a letter of July 18 addressed to him and to the synod secretary, Pr. Shankweiler.

SECRETARY'S REPORT. Pr. Shankweiler distributed a printed report that included the following points:

1. By an email vote, the council approved the following resolution concerning Bear Creek Camp; the resolution was presented on March 28, 2017, and adopted by a vote of 21 Yes, 0 No, and 5 Not Voting:

(2017.07.01) Resolved, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the pipeline right-of-way agreement between the Lutheran Camp Corporation of Eastern Pennsylvania and the PennEast Pipeline Company, LLC.

2. By an email vote, the council approved the following resolution concerning a call for Pastor Mark Galbraith; the resolution was presented on April 29, 2017, and adopted by a vote of 21 Yes, 0 No, and 5 Not Voting:

(2017.07.02) Resolved, that a call to special service for one year be extended to the Rev. Mark Galbraith to serve as a full-time intentional interim pastor for Christ's United Lutheran Church, Ashland, effective May 1, 2017.

3. By an email vote, the council approved the following resolution concerning the synod's 2018 program proposal; the resolution was presented on May 1, 2017, and adopted by a vote of 22 Yes, 0 No, and 4 Not Voting.

(2017.07.03) Resolved, that the 2018 program proposal (February 1, 2018 to January 31, 2019) be adopted. The Synod Council is hereby authorized to establish the 2018 budget no later than its January

2018 meeting, making any necessary adjustments to the budget proposed in light of both realistic anticipation of receipts and synod priorities (in consultation with the ELCA Treasurer with respect to the ELCA portion thereof).

4. A letter was received from Pastor Rebecca Middeke-Conlin and others concerning the predominance of males in leadership roles at the 2017 assembly. Copies of the letter have been made available to at least most of the council members.

5. A letter was received from Pastor Philip K. Smith with \$10.00 in two dollar bills and a \$25.00 gift certificate for Victoria's Secret as "lost money" related to the end of Mr. Hinrichs tenure as treasurer.

Pr. Shankweiler then spoke with gratitude about the outgoing treasurer, Mr. Hinrichs. He pointed out as well the decline in mission support income that occurred during that period of time, inviting the council to engage in a hunt for "lost money" by looking for five dollar bills that had been hidden throughout the meeting room. By the end of the search, 66 of the 80 bills had been found as a donation to the synod in Mr. Hinrichs' honor.

TREASURER'S REPORT. Mr. Hinrichs reported that through the end of May the synod experienced a \$66,000 deficit. Income is roughly \$100,000 behind last year, which means that support provided to the ELCA is about \$44,000 lower. He predicted that the transition back from the Mission Investment Fund should be relatively easy. He also pointed out that the synod has one of the largest endowments in the ELCA, so the synod does have resources other than ongoing mission support. He asked, "How can we do things together?"

DIRECTOR FOR EVANGELICAL MISSION REPORT. Pr. Bennethum spoke about a conference dealing with the Congregation Vitality Project in regions 7 and 8 of the ELCA and the search for people to conduct interviews to find effective church planters.

He pointed out that as of July 18, 207 of the synod's 271 congregations had made mission support intentions for 2017, which, compared to 2016, represent a decrease of \$40,000. Making relational visits to congregations began last year, sharing with congregations how mission support dollars are being spent.

He said that eight congregations will be involved in the "Training by the Lake" program. He spoke as well about new church starts, which for us have generally been for people "on the margins." These efforts are "incredibly rich in terms of lives changed," but one major problem is finding funding for them. He explained that he will be attending a program in September in Lancaster concerning ministry funding. "We have congregations with wealth and others that are uncertain if they can keep their doors open."

FINANCE COMMITTEE. David Derr presented three resolutions along with the minutes of the finance committee's July 15, 2017, teleconference.

(2017.07.04) Resolved, that a grant of \$6,000 be made available from the Stewardship Lifters DIG Account, with any balance coming from the Prosser, Pahse, Mission Fund, to support the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod's participation in the pilot "Creating Congregational Cultures of Generosity" program. The resolution was adopted. This action will close out the DIG Account.

(2017.07.05) Resolved, that a loan in the amount of \$150,000 be made from the Church Loan and Development Fund to Christ Mertz, Dryville, for an addition to the church building. The terms of the loan will be \$150,000 with a 7 year repayment schedule at 2% interest. The resolution was adopted.

Concerning loans to congregations, it was pointed out that St. John, Tremont, has repaid its loan earlier than required by its contract.

(2017.07.06) Resolved, that spending policies for synod funds for 2018 be established as follows:

Prosser, Pahse, Mission Fund:	8% of assets,	\$ 58,633
Student Education Fund:	10% of assets,	\$ 12,234
Kelchner Fund:	8% of assets,	\$102,464
Leadership Development Fund:	6% of assets,	\$ 4,107
Social Ministry Fund:	8% of assets,	\$ 40,935

The resolution was adopted.

Mr. Derr reported that the committee will meet the beginning of August to begin the transition of the bookkeeping responsibility from the Mission Investment Fund back to the synod.

Dr. Belón announced the synod's receipt of a bequest of \$39,561.75 from Pauline Gehrig, with the bequest to be added to the Student Education Fund.

Pr. Shankweiler gave an update of the process of trying to sell the building of the former St. Mark's Church, Lackawaxen, with the main issue remaining being the fact that some graves intended for the adjacent cemetery are on the church's land.

PROGRAM COMMITTEE. Linda Eroh will be the new chairperson of the committee.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE. Ms. Druckenmiller reported that the committee received its assignments concerning the nominees needed for the 2018 assembly and discussed the letter from Pastor Rebecca Middeke-Conlin *et al.* Ms. McCloughan has been added to this committee.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE. Dr. Belón still needs to appoint a new chairperson in that the former chairperson, Stacie Bray, has gone off the council. Pr. Jessica Kingsboro reported that Ms. Bray had intended to meet with Bishop Zeiser about the proposed sabbatical policy, but as of the council's meeting date that has not happened.

EN BLOC ITEMS. The following resolutions were adopted en bloc following a motion made by Ms. Eroh and seconded by Jeannette Richardson:

(2017.07.07) 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 (third year):	The Rev. Mark Swanson
Clergy (second year):	The Rev. Peter Roy
Clergy (first year):	The Rev. Kim Lengert
	The Rev. Scott Lingenfelter

(2017.07.08) 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. John Harding, 6/11/2017
The Rev. John Houck, 6/30/2017
The Rev. Keith Rohrbach, 7/1/2017
The Rev. Laura Stoneback, 8/1/2017
The Rev. Jay Wetzel, 7/31/2017
The Rev. David Schaeffer, 8/6/2017

(2017.07.09) Resolved, that the 2018 budget of the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Mission District be approved. A copy of the budget was distributed to the council prior to the vote.

(2017.07.10) Resolved, that the 2018 budget of the East Berks Mission District be approved. A copy of the budget was distributed to the council prior to the vote.

(2017.07.11) Resolved, that Polly Beste, David Fessler, and Thomas J. Lynch be elected to three-year terms on the Board of Trustees of the Good Shepherd Rehabilitation Network, terms commencing in 2017. Biographical information about all of the nominees was distributed to the council prior to the vote.

(2017.07.12) Resolved, that the synod council extend an invitation to the Rev. Jill Bierman, an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament in the United Church of Christ, to serve as pastor of Salem-Hetzel's Lutheran Church, Pine Grove, for a three-year term call beginning September 10, 2017.

(2017.07.13) Resolved, that a part-time call to special service be extended to the Rev. Peggy M. Wuertele to serve as Associate of the Bishop, beginning August 1, 2017, with an annual defined compensation of \$15,600, all of which is to be designated as housing allowance.

NEW BUSINESS.

(2017.07.14) Resolved, that a call to special service be issued to the Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera to serve as a professor of theology at the Moravian Theological Seminary, Bethlehem, beginning August 1, 2017. The motion was made by Pr. Oliver Brown, seconded by Thomas Engle, and adopted.

(2017.07.15) Resolved, that in accordance with 9.81.01.c. of the Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the plan of agreement for the federation of St. John's (Gernant's) Church be ratified. The motion was made by Dr. Boyer, seconded by Mr. Hinrichs, and adopted. The council was provided with the "Joint Resolution of St. John's (Gernant's) Evangelical and Reformed Church, St. John's (Gernant's) Lutheran Church of Leesport Pennsylvania and St. John's (Gernant's) United Church of Christ." The next step towards federating will be to review the governing documents.

(2017.07.16) Resolved, pending certification of an affirmative outcome of the congregational vote to take place on July 23, that in accordance with section *C6.05.g.2. of the Model Constitution for Congregations, the decision of St. John Lutheran Church, Gibraltar to terminate its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and affiliate with North American Lutheran Church (NALC) be approved. The motion was made by Bishop Zeiser, seconded by Ms. McCloughan, and adopted.

(2017.07.17) Resolved, in accordance with S13.21. of the Constitution of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod and contingent upon a positive vote by members of both congregations, that St. Matthew's, Bethlehem and Messiah, Bethlehem consolidate to form a new congregation, Light of Christ Lutheran Church, Bethlehem. The motion was made by Pr. Suzanne Trump, seconded by Mr.

Derr, and adopted. The council had been presented with a letter from the presidents of the two congregations asking for approval of this consolidation, the process of which will take several months.

(2017.07.18) Resolved, that Dr. Barbara Belón appoint a task force to report to the synod council concerning all charges for attending the synod assembly. The motion was made by Pr. Shankweiler, seconded by Dr. Boyer, and was adopted. This resolution arose from a discussion concerning what scholarship assistance might be provided to retired rostered leaders to attend synod assemblies, what the fee structure ought to be, and who might deal with these issues.

2017 SYNOD ASSEMBLY REGISTRATION AND EXCUSE REPORT. The “Report of Committee on Registration and Excuse” for the 2017 assembly was distributed to the council along with “Excuses for 2017 Synod Assembly” as received from those rostered leaders and congregations presenting excuses.

WOMEN OF THE ELCA. No report was received from the Women of the ELCA. They have a new president.

ANNOUNCEMENTS. In preparation for the October 18 synod council meeting, Dr. Belón asked that all members try to visit another congregation in their mission district to get to know that other church.

The next meeting of the synod council will take place at St. Paul Lutheran Church of Smithfield, 139 Craigs Meadow Road, East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, on October 18, 2017, 3:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Subsequent meetings will be held January 24, 2018 (snow date January 31) and March 15, 2018 (snow date March 22), both beginning at 3:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT. Mr. Smith asked for a motion to adjourn, which was made by Ms. Richardson, seconded by Ruth Major, and adopted. He thereby declared the meeting adjourned at 11:58 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carl D. Shankweiler, Secretary