

SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
St. Paul Lutheran Church of Smithfield, 139 Craigs Meadow Rd., E. Stroudsburg, Penna.
October 18, 2017

ATTENDANCE. Synod Council Members Present: Pr. June Bair, Dr. Barbara Belón, Dr. Donald Boyer, Pr. Oliver Brown, Madeline Deegan, David Derr, Donald Dillman, Marlane Druckenmiller, Thomas Engle, Pr. Charles Grube, Linda Eroh, Pr. Jessica Kingsborough, Elizabeth Leibenguth, Ruth Major, Louise McCloughan, Pr. Nelson Quiñones, Jeannette Richardson, Pr. Deborah Scheffey, Pr. Carl Shankweiler, Pr. Suzanne Trump, Victor Unks, Pr. Gary Walbert, Bishop Samuel Zeiser.

Synod Council Members Excused: None

Synod Council Members Absent: Ethan Melber, Larry Rissmiller

Other Persons Present: Pr. D. Michael Bennethum, Executive Associate of the Bishop and Director of Evangelical Mission; Dan Scharnhorst, Executive Director of Bear Creek Camp; Lenna Harris, President of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Women of the ELCA.

CALL TO ORDER. Vice President Dr. Barbara Belón began the meeting of the Synod Council of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod at 3:05 p.m. Greetings from the host congregation, St. Paul Lutheran Church of Smithfield, were offered by Adrian Marhenko, president of the congregation. He explained the various uses of Celebration Hall, the room in which the council was meeting. He described the congregation as active and strong and in the process of calling a pastor. Bishop Samuel Zeiser pointed out that a recently ordained pastor, Deborah J. Taylor, came from this congregation.

DEVOTIONS. Bishop Zeiser led the day's devotions using Psalm 130, discussing the Psalm with reference to recent disasters including a mass shooting in Las Vegas. He asked, "What hymn would you use in dealing with a disaster?" Various members of the council shared their answers.

COUNCIL DEVELOPMENT. Linda Eroh, representing the Program Committee of the Synod Council, based her assignments for the council member discussion on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) document, "Called Forward Together in Christ: ELCA Future Directions 2025." The first issue raised in this document is "The ELCA—who we are." Mrs. Eroh divided the council into small groups to discuss several points related to this issue; the groups then reported back to the council.

MINISTRY UPDATE: BEAR CREEK CAMP. Dan Scharnhorst, Director of Bear Creek Camp, gave the council two handouts: "Comments from Campers" and "Northeast PA Synod Campers." He pointed out that attendance has increased five years in a row. Thirty-four percent of this year's summer campers came for the first time. Growth is expected next year, too. Sixteen cabins have been built with six more to come; each cabin has ten beds. He sees donations to the camp as investments and expressed gratitude for the synod's support. He stated that he wants the camp to be a resource for growing the church and that he is willing to visit congregations to represent the camp. Dr. Belón spoke about reunions that still take place among people who attended the synod's former camps, Camp Miller and Camp Hagen, and the impact camping can have on people for their entire lives.

IMPRESSIONS FROM VISITS TO NEIGHBORING CONGREGATIONS. Dr. Belón asked the council to report about what impressed them from visits made to other congregations in response to her asking that such visits be made. She encouraged council members to try to make more visits before

the January meeting. She also spoke about the need to push boundaries so that congregations can reach out and join others in ministry.

MINUTES OF THE JULY 22 MEETING. At 4:12 p.m. Dr. Belón called the regular business meeting to order. The minutes of the July 22, 2017, meeting were distributed and approved on a motion made by Dr. Donald Boyer and seconded by Jeannette Richardson, with the following corrections and additions included: (a) Ethan Melber was absent for the July meeting, not both present and absent; (b) “Pr.” was added before Nelson Quiñones’s name; and (c) the meeting ended at 11:58 a.m., not 11:58 p.m.

BISHOP’S REPORT. Bishop Zeiser gave his report, which included information that he gained from attending the most recent meeting of the Conference of Bishops, September 28 to October 3.

1. The next ELCA Youth Gathering will be held in Houston.
2. A social statement concerning women and justice is being developed with Pastor Lori Kochanski of this synod serving on the committee that is developing the statement; hearings will soon be held on the proposed statement.
3. Another matter under development is the entrance rite for persons becoming deacons. Will they be consecrated, invested, or ordained?
4. Our vice president, Dr. Barbara Belón, attended a churchwide meeting for synodical vice presidents.
5. The recent first call assignment consultation dealt with 225 requests for first call candidates with only 78 graduates being available; of those 78, 14 are restricted to specific synods.
6. The 2018 synod assembly, to be held June 8 to June 9 at the Mohegan Sun Arena, Wilkes-Barre, will have as its theme “Sharing Ministries, Building Relationships.” Bear Creek Camp will be an auxiliary location which assembly members may choose to visit.
7. Theological education is a priority in the ELCA with the presidents of the ELCA’s seminaries attending the recent meeting of the Conference of Bishops; the presidents will attend one meeting annually.
8. Bishop Zeiser distributed the booklet showing the most recent recipients of ELCA Fund for Leaders grants.
9. At the 2018 synod assemblies there will be five synods electing new bishops, with a new bishop just having been elected by the Florida-Bahamas Synod of the ELCA.
10. The Campaign for the ELCA has raised \$125 million with \$26 million pledged, putting this campaign at 64% of its goal.
11. Two important topics for conversation are (a) closing congregations and (b) lay presidency, i.e., how to deal with congregations (such as in providing holy communion) where no ordained clergy are available.
12. In response to recent hurricanes (Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, etc.) and fires (California), \$5 million has been given to Lutheran Disaster Response with 7,000 individual donations being first-time gifts.
13. For the 2019 churchwide assembly this synod will have 26 voting members; in 2016 the number was 30. This change in numbers is based on the annual reports from congregations and how many members they show this synod to have as compared to other synods.
14. Bishop Zeiser reported that he performed four ordinations on our territory since the last synod council meeting with a fifth ordination scheduled for November.
15. There will be a visit by Nick Kiger, ELCA Associate Director for Mission Support, on October 24 concerning the Mission Support process in our synod.
16. Since the council last met, Messiah and St. Matthew congregations in Bethlehem have united to become Light of Christ Lutheran Church. They are also involved in a Bethlehem initiative (Bethlehem United Proclamation of the Gospel), which includes St. Peter’s, Bethlehem and Pastor Gerald Kulp.

VICE PRESIDENT’S REPORT. Dr. Barbara Belón made the following points:

1. A number of synods did not have their vice presidents at the national meeting because they did not have the funds necessary to send them.
2. She said that she received nine invitations in response to her request that congregations invite her to meet with them. “Fascinating.”
3. She asked, “What are the churches in your district doing on a *regular* basis? We don’t normally know. Go to your area and ask, ‘How can we capitalize on that?’ The goal is to give people opportunities. I thought I could see what people are doing, but maybe my role can be that of an advocate.”
4. Concerning the issue of voting members at synod assemblies, she asked the council what stood out from the reasons given for non-attendance in a document titled, “Summary of Responses For Non-Attendance At Synod Assembly—October Agenda.” The answers given were “cost” and “distance.” She asked that council members return to their districts and, for the January council meeting, ask what solutions exist for these issues.
5. Dr. Belón reminded the council that a Consultation Committee was elected to deal with problems within congregations. Issues can be raised with the vice president, who then she brings the problems to this committee. Ours is a good committee, and it has already dealt with one issue.

SECRETARY’S REPORT. Pr. Shankweiler reported that by an email vote on a matter submitted to the council on August 26, the council approved the following resolution concerning Treasurer Donald Dillman’s signing authority by a majority of 23 Yes, 0 No, and 3 Not Voting, with Mr. Dillman himself abstaining:

(2017.10.01) Resolved, that upon taking office as treasurer of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on September 1, 2017, and continuing until he is no longer the synod's treasurer, Mr. Donald Dillman be an authorized signer for all synodical bank accounts and other financial accounts, both for the signing and endorsing of checks and other financial instruments.

Pr. Shankweiler reported that Pastor Graham Reinhart, a former member of the synod staff, sent the synod his greetings and a copy of *The Manual of the Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and the Adjacent States, 1931*, for either the synod office or the archives.

Pr. Shankweiler reported that the correspondence concerning the disaffiliation of St. John’s, Gibraltar, has been completed, with the ELCA secretary’s acknowledging that St. John’s is no longer a congregation of the ELCA. He also gave an update on the efforts to sell the buildings of the former St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, Lackawaxen, and distributed copies of an eighteenth century print showing Wittenberg, Germany, as it basically was in the time of Martin Luther.

TREASURER’S REPORT. Mr. Dillman reported that the finance committee is waiting for the audit report from last year; the audit is being conducted by a firm hired by the ELCA’s Mission Investment Fund (MIF), which is currently performing the synod’s bookkeeping tasks. The questions raised thus far have dealt mainly with accounting procedures. This process is taking a long time in that this firm has never audited our synod before.

He also informed the council that on October 21 he will be part of a synodical workshop for congregational treasurers; and he reminded the council that starting February 1, 2018, the synod’s bookkeeping work will again return for us to carry out these tasks in house.

Ms. Richardson, seconded by Elizabeth Leibenguth, moved that the treasurer's report be approved; the motion was adopted.

DIRECTOR FOR EVANGELICAL MISSION REPORT. Pr. Michael Bennethum spoke about the 2017 Mission Support response: through September 30, 207 of the synod's 264 congregations and 3 authorized worshipping communities had made intentions for 2017, and about 64% of what was committed had been remitted. He said that last year the strategy for dealing with Mission Support included the making of relational visits to congregations, and these are continuing with reports from visits having been received so far this year. He spoke about the availability of print resources and distributed copies of *Stories of Faith and Action: 2018-2018*.

Regarding 2018 grants from the churchwide expression of the ELCA, he said \$18,000 will come to the Wyomissing campus of Common Ground Ministry and \$10,000 to the downtown Reading campus. Hope's Table, Reading, will receive \$9,000. "Renewal Grants" are now being redesigned and called "Congregational Vitality Grants." He reported that the Congregational Vitality resources continue to be well used, including with congregations in transition.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

When the council resumed meeting after a brief break, a lengthy discussion took place concerning the synod's financial condition and the Finance Committee's request that the bishop adjust staff salaries in order to reduce expenditures by approximately \$150,000. The resulting changes would be as follows: (a) full-time staff members Karen Matthias-Long and Pastor Kurt Garbe would be cut to 25% time beginning February 1; (b) support staff members would be cut 20% each when the synod begins its summer office schedule, which in 2018 would mean closing the office on Fridays and not reopening in fall; and (c) when Brenda Stauffer retires at the end of 2018, she will not be replaced.

Bishop Zeiser explained that at a previous meeting of the council (October 12, 2016) he spoke about the continuing deficits and said that in spite of our best efforts there is a continuing decline in Mission Support. By lowering the percentage of the funds that go to the churchwide ministries of the ELCA and by not replacing some staff members when they retired, the synod was able thus far to avoid making involuntary staff cuts. But with income continuing to decline, the finance committee asked the bishop to look at staffing cuts as a way to reduce spending. The finance committee was willing to wait until the beginning of fiscal year 2018 so that the people most affected could find new calls.

The ensuing discussion included questions and comments about the need to prioritize; the impact these changes will make to the synod's ministries; whether volunteers and committees of volunteers can perform tasks now carried out by paid staff; whether making staff cuts could lead to accusations that the synod was overstaffed to begin with; how cutting salaries is the only alternative now that again cutting the percentage of revenues going to the churchwide expression of the ELCA and again cutting the synod's agencies and institutions are considered off the table by previous council action; whether income could be raised; how the reality from the beginning of Bishop Zeiser's tenure has been financial pressure to reduce staff, but how this decline in income has been part of the synod's life for decades; how these cuts could be very painful to the people affected, which is often the case when necessary downsizing occurs; how staff expenses could be reduced if volunteers were used to carry out staff functions in mission districts; the fact that Bishop Zeiser wants to leave a financially stable synod to his successor; the realization that this financial situation is facing the entire ELCA and not only this synod; and the observation that the task of deciding how to reduce the staff should not fall to the bishop alone.

Pr. Shankweiler, seconded by Dr. Boyer, moved the following resolution: Resolved, that synod staffing changes be delayed for six months from the proposed dates so that the synod council can investigate options for increasing income and changing staffing. Bishop Zeiser spoke against the resolution as adding uncertainty to the process already taking place. The resolution was not adopted.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE. Madeline Deegan reported that the Administration Committee will work on the sabbatical policy for the bishop.

FINANCE COMMITTEE. David Derr presented the following resolution on behalf of the Finance Committee:

(2017.10.02) Resolved, that a grant of \$22,500 from the Prosser, Pahse, Mission Fund be given to St. Paul's, Tannersville to support the congregation's redevelopment plan. The resolution was adopted.

PROGRAM COMMITTEE. Ms. Eroh said that the Program Committee had nothing to report.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE. Marlane Druckenmiller reported that the committee is working on finding nominees as required for the synod's 2018 assembly regarding the synod council and members of the 2019 ELCA assembly. She asked Pastor Shankweiler to review constitutional provision S6.04.B09 in regard to electing a "youth": Can someone elected as a "youth," i.e., younger than age 18, be reelected to that youth slot if she or he has turned 18? Ms. Druckenmiller said that everyone whose terms on the synod council will expire in 2018 has agreed to stand for reelection.

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

(2017.10.03) Resolved, that Hope's Table, housed at Hope Lutheran Church, 601 N. Front Street, Reading 19601, be reauthorized as a Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community (SAWC) of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

(2017.10.04) Resolved, that Common Ground Recovery Community—Downtown Reading Campus, meeting at Trinity Lutheran Church, 527 Washington Street, Reading 19601, be reauthorized as a Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community (SAWC) of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

(2017.10.05) Resolved, that a two-year term call to special service be issued to the Rev. Carey Miller to serve as transitional pastor of St Paul, Breinigsville, beginning November 1, 2017.

(2017.10.06) 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 (fourth year): The Rev. Rashion Santiago

Clergy (third year): The Rev. Peter Roy

Clergy (third year): The Rev. George Grubb

Clergy (first year): The Rev. Lori Kochanski

(2017.10.07) Resolved, that in accordance with section 7.41.08. of the ELCA Constitution, "disability roster status" be granted to Pastor Thomas Cvammen effective October 1, 2017.

(2017.10.08) 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. Robert C. Reier (September 12, 2017)

(2017.10.09) Resolved, that Pamela deCampli be elected to a three-year term on the Board of Trustees of the Good Shepherd Rehabilitation Network, term commencing in 2017. Prior to voting, the council received biographical information about Ms. deCampli.

(2017.10.10) 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. Robert Kramer (January 1, 2018)

NEW BUSINESS. The following resolutions were moved, seconded, and adopted:

(2017.10.11) Resolved, in accordance with *C8.02.e. of the ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations, that seasonal member voting be permitted in the congregations of this synod. Prior to this resolution’s adoption, Ms. Druckenmiller moved, seconded by Ms. Eroh, to table this resolution, citing the need for additional information. The motion to table failed, and the resolution was adopted with Ms. Druckenmiller abstaining.

(2017.10.12) Resolved, that the portion of the 2018 Executive Staff salary be designated as housing be as follows:

Samuel Zeiser	\$20,000
Mary Gade	\$25,000
Kurt Garbe	\$17,000
Peggy Wuertele	\$16,000

(2017.10.13) Resolved, that a call to special services be issued to the Rev. Thomas Daniel Clayborne to serve as interim pastor of St. John, Nazareth for one year beginning November 1, 2017.

WOMEN OF THE ELCA. A written report was prepared and distributed by Lenna Harris, President of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Women of the ELCA, though she herself needed to leave before this point in the meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS. The next meetings of the synod council will be held on January 24, 2018 (snow date January 31) and March 15, 2018 (snow date March 22), both beginning at 3:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT. The meeting adjourned at approximately 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carl D. Shankweiler, Secretary