

SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING

**Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
St. Paul Lutheran Church, 548 Old Swede Rd., Douglassville, Pennsylvania
January 24, 2018**

ATTENDANCE. ATTENDANCE. Synod Council Members Present: Dr. Donald Boyer, David Derr, Donald Dillman, Marlane Druckenmiller, Thomas Engle, Pr. Charles Grube, Pr. Jessica Kingsborough, Ruth Major, Louise McCloughan, Pr. Nelson Quiñones, Larry Rissmiller, Pr. Deborah Scheffey, Pr. Carl Shankweiler, Pr. Suzanne Trump, Victor Unks, Pr. Gary Walbert, Bishop Samuel Zeiser.

Synod Council Members Excused: Pr. June Bair, Dr. Barbara Belón, Pr. Oliver Brown, Linda Eroh, Elizabeth Leibenguth, and Jeannette Richardson. Since the last meeting, Madeline Deegan resigned her position on the council.

Synod Council Members Absent: Ethan Melber

Other Persons Present: Pr. D. Michael Bennethum, Executive Associate of the Bishop and Director of Evangelical Mission; Dawn Horvath and Edward Cool attended the meeting during the discussion of Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church; Pastor Gregory Frey attended the opening of the meeting in order to bring greetings from the host congregation.

CALL TO ORDER. Bishop Samuel Zeiser called to order the meeting of the Synod Council of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod at 3:00 p.m. and explained that Vice President Barbara Belón was absent for reasons of health. Greetings from the host congregation, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Douglassville, were offered by Pastor Gregory W. Frey, who explained the congregation's history and creative ministries, such as a ministry fair showcasing a variety of ministries including some from outside the congregation.

DWELLING IN THE WORD. Bishop Zeiser read Psalm 134 and led the council in prayer.

MINUTES OF OCTOBER 18. The minutes of the October 18, 2017, meeting were approved as distributed on a motion by Dr. Donald Boyer, seconded by Pastor Nelson Quiñones.

BISHOP'S REPORT. Bishop Zeiser spoke about the February 2018, visit to the synod by Nick Kiger of the ELCA staff. His visit will include a Mission Support Symposium on February 17, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., intended for synodical leaders. Bishop Zeiser encouraged the members of the council to attend.

He reported about the New to the Synod event held on January 23, commenting on the wide variety of these new pastors and other rostered leaders. "Very encouraging."

Bishop Zeiser explained the first call process, which will begin on February 20 when he represents this region in Chicago, when the persons available for first calls will be assigned to the ELCA's regions. In March a regional meeting of bishops will then assign the candidates to specific synods within the region.

He spoke about the challenge on the part of pastors and congregations for finding supply pastors when the pastors want to take vacation Sundays. Because of the dwindling number of persons willing to serve as supply pastors, alternatives are needed.

He spoke about the 2018 synod assembly, noting that on Friday there will be two periods of time when people can choose among (1) a visit to Bear Creek Camp, (2) participating in a service project in Wilkes-Barre, and (3) visiting interactive displays in the assembly hall—a response to last year’s evaluations which spoke favorably of having opportunities for learning about what other ministries are doing. He said that the committee working on the assembly explored the possibility of electronic voting but felt that the synod is not yet ready for this process. He also indicated that the committee is looking into using Bear Creek Camp as a place to house assembly members and provide breakfast, making this a less expensive option.

VICE PRESIDENT’S REPORT. Although Vice President Belón was unable to attend the meeting, she had sent word that the council should divide into subgroups to deal with four reasons given by congregations for not being represented at synod assemblies:

1. There is a lack of congregational interest in the synod and in the assembly proceedings.
2. Potential assembly members do not want to sit through two days of presentations.
3. Elderly congregational members cannot drive the distances required and/or some folks at the outer boundaries of the synod do not want to drive to assemblies that are not close to where they live.
4. Cost—neither the congregations nor the prospective assembly members have the funds to cover hotel and registration costs.

Time was provided for the four small groups to discuss one each of these four topics.

SECRETARY’S REPORT. Pastor Carl Shankweiler reported that the email vote, called for on November 24, 2017, to approve the following resolution concerning the Rev. Carl Filer was adopted with 23 affirmative votes and no negative votes.

(2018.01.01) Resolved, that a three-year term call to special service be issued to the Rev. Carl Filer to serve as the congregational vitality pastor of St. Paul, Tannersville, beginning January 1, 2018.

Pastor Shankweiler reported that Madeline Deegan has resigned her position on the synod council because of her inability to attend meetings because of her work schedule.

TREASURER’S REPORT. Donald Dillman reported that the audit of the synod’s 2016 financial transactions is now complete. The auditing firm, WIPFLi., which is based in Milwaukee, reported that the net change in assets was a decrease of only \$768 and that no changes were called for in the synod’s financial procedures. He spoke about the 3.4% decline in Mission Support from 2015 to 2016 in contrast to the expectation that 2017’s contributions will show an increase. He reminded the council that in February the task of bookkeeping will revert to the synod’s internal staff, which should be relatively easy because Diane Hemerly, our bookkeeper, maintained the QuickBooks program that was used formerly. He added that the

audit of 2017's transactions should go better than 2016's because now WIPFLi, knows our methods.

DIRECTOR FOR EVANGELICAL MISSION REPORT. Pastor Michael Bennethum announced that the notebooks for synod council members are available for those who did not attend July's meeting.

He indicated that the Congregational Vitality Project now has related resources, including "Cultivating Vital Congregations."

Concerning 2018 Mission Support statements of intention, he said that as of the 23rd of January, 119 statements had been received from 267 ministry entities. Compared to last year, those intentions represent a decrease of only \$7,800, which indicates that the decline in Mission Support has slowed. He encouraged council members to turn in statements if their congregations have not done so.

He also spoke briefly about the synod's new ministries, the upcoming coach training session, and the progress being made to organize within the synod a congregation of Hmong people, an ancient ethnic group from Indochina. Pastor Bennethum explained that he will bring a resolution to the March council meeting about admitting this new congregation into the synod.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. Pastor Shankweiler presented the following resolution on behalf of the Executive Committee; this resolution concerned synod staff salaries for 2018 and called for a 1% salary increase:

Resolved, that 2018 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 18, 2017 meeting and shall apply to calendar year 2018 and all future years unless otherwise provided by this Synod Council. (Numbers are rounded to the nearest dollar.) This represents 1% increase over 2017.

NAME***	BASE SALARY	HOUSING	SS	TOTAL
Zeiser	\$67,874	\$20,000	\$7,279	\$95,153
Gade	\$51,868	\$25,000	\$6,367	\$83,235
Garbe*	\$ 6,893	\$17,000	\$1,979	\$25,872
Wuertele	\$	\$15,762	\$	\$15,762
Shankweiler	\$ 5,487		\$ 455	\$ 5,942
Bennethum**				\$21,647
Huber				\$16,235
Richter				\$18,400
Crawford				\$15,762
Kuritz				\$15,762

* Pastor Garbe will serve full-time until April 1, then move to part-time.

** Pastor Bennethum’s salary as DEM and 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 1% increase in staff compensation means that the 2018 cost for support staff will be \$216,899; the 2018 cost for contract staff will be \$33,506.]

The resolution was discussed at length, with concerns being raised as to the appropriateness—even justice—of cutting the support staff 20% because of financial concerns and then giving all staff an increase. Various alternatives were considered. The council then voted on the resolution, which was not adopted.

Marlane Druckenmiller, seconded by Pastor Suzanne Trump, then moved the following resolution, which was adopted. It called for no increase for the executive staff and a 1% increase for the support staff.

(2018.01.02) Resolved, that 2018 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 18, 2017 meeting and shall apply to calendar year 2018 and all future years unless otherwise provided by this Synod Council. (Numbers are rounded to the nearest dollar.) This represents no increase over 2017.

NAME***	BASE SALARY	HOUSING	SS	TOTAL
Zeiser	\$67,004	\$20,000	\$7,207	\$94,211
Gade	\$51,107	\$25,000	\$6,304	\$82,411
Garbe*	\$ 6,655	\$17,000	\$1,960	\$25,615
Wuertele	\$	\$15,762	\$	\$15,606
Shankweiler	\$ 5,433		\$ 450	\$ 5,883
Bennethum**				\$21,432
Huber				\$16,074
Richter				\$18,217
Crawford				\$15,606
Kuritz				\$15,606

* Pastor Garbe will serve full-time until April 1, then move to part-time.

** Pastor Bennethum’s salary as DEM and 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: providing no increase in staff compensation means that the 2018 cost for contract staff will be \$33,174. The support staff will receive an increase of 1% for a total of \$216,899.]

A second resolution coming from the executive committee was presented by Pastor Shankweiler and was adopted. He also shared with the council the following description provided by the ELCA for the fund in question: “Endowment Fund ‘A,’ of the ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust, was established to allow for the collective long-term investment of funds belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), its congregations, synods, seminaries and other eligible affiliated entities. Fund A is administered by the ELCA. The Board of Pensions of the ELCA, doing business as Portico Benefit Services, is the investment advisor.”

(2018.01.03) Resolved, that Bishop Samuel Zeiser, Treasurer Donald Dillman, and Bookkeeper Diane Hemerly serve as Authorized Participant Representatives with authority to make withdrawals from the Synod’s Fund A account with the ELCA Foundation (two signatures required for any change of distribution or withdrawal).

FINANCE COMMITTEE. The committee presented two resolutions, both of which were adopted. David Derr, committee chairperson, also noted that the committee did not recommend any changes at this time to the 2018 spending proposal.

(2018.01.04) Resolved, that grants be made from the Prosser, Pahse, Mission Fund to the following ministries under development for the 2018 fiscal year:

- Common Ground Recovery Community, Wyomissing - \$12,000
- Hope’s Table, Reading - \$12,000,
- Common Ground Recovery Community, Reading - \$5,000,

(2018.01.05) Resolved, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod join the Southeastern Pennsylvania and Delaware/Maryland Synods in sponsoring the Vibrant Faith Summit that will be held on April 12-24, 2018 at Reformation Lutheran Church, Media with a grant of \$1,500 from the Prosser, Pahse, Mission Fund.

PROGRAM COMMITTEE. In regard to the 2018 assembly, Linda Eroh said that Bear Creek Camp can provide some housing for assembly participants and is looking into providing bus service between the camp and the assembly. Breakfast would be available for those staying at the camp. So far, no decisions are final. On the issue of food contributions, Ms. Eroh said that the committee is looking into that as a service project.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE. Pastor Gary Walbert will be the new chairperson of the committee, and other members are being recruited.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE. Marlane Druckenmiller asked Secretary Shankweiler if a person elected as a “youth” to the synod council could run for reelection if that person is now over the maximum age for a youth representative. He thought not. The issue concerns Elizabeth Leibenguth, who was elected as a youth, whose term will expire with the 2018 assembly, but who will be at or over the maximum age for youth, 18, which is prescribed in the synod’s constitution. Elizabeth may run as a lay female.

The issue of who will take Barbara Belón’s place as a liaison for the Hazleton-Lehighon Mission District was raised; it was agreed to ask Dean Anthony Pagotto for guidance.

Concerning the electing of members to the next ELCA assembly, not all of the information is available concerning the number of openings in each category. For the Committee on Discipline, nominees are needed. Ms. Druckenmiller distributed information sheets about the positions needing to be filled and encouraged the council members to seek persons to stand for election, such as a lay male needed for the synod council.

EN BLOC ITEMS. Pastor Shankweiler, seconded by Pastor Quiñones, moved that the following items be approved en bloc. The resolutions were all adopted.

(2018.01.06) 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, graduate study):	Timothy Garman
Clergy (first year)	Lee Diefenderfer

(2018.01.07) 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. Warren Egebo, February 1, 2018

(2018.01.08) Resolved, that a call to special service be extended to the Rev. George Grubb to serve as Transitional Pastor of St. John, Bath.

(2018.01.09) Resolved, that the Common Ground Recovery Community, housed at Atonement Lutheran Church, 5 Wyomissing Blvd, Wyomissing, PA 19610, be reauthorized as a Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

NEW BUSINESS

Dr. Boyer, seconded by Pastor Walbert, moved that the following resolution concerning Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church be approved; and it was adopted. Representing the uniting congregations were Ed Cool and Dawn Horvath, who answered the council’s questions about the changes taking place.

(2018.01.10) 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 Salem, Bethlehem and Holy Trinity, Bethlehem consolidate to form a new congregation, Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Bethlehem.

Larry Rissmiller, seconded by Dr. Boyer, moved that the following resolution concerning a contract with the Cloud Service Center, LLC, be approved; and it was adopted. In addition to the \$6,588.27 initial cost, the annual fee will be \$2,307.78.

(2018.01.11) Resolved, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod contract with the Cloud Service Center, LLC to provide Information Technology support for the Lutheran Center in Allentown, with an initial contract of \$6,588.27.

Ms. Druckenmiller, seconded by Victor Unks, moved that the following resolution concerning a mission district change be approved; and it was adopted.

(2018.01.12) Resolved, in accordance with Synod Bylaw BLS12.01.c., that the request of Jerusalem (Red) Church, Kempton (00569) to be assigned to the Northern Lehigh Valley Mission District be approved.

(With Pastor Shankweiler and Dr. Boyer needing to attend another meeting, Pastor Bennethum kindly assisted the council by recording the minutes from this point in the meeting.)

Mr. Rissmiller raised the issue of safety in congregations. Pastor Bennethum pointed to materials from Church Mutual Insurance Company and the Department of Homeland Security, which are referred to on the synod's website. Mr. Derr pointed to "Administration Matters," an ELCA e-newsletter for ELCA congregational and synodical leaders, which "addresses common, practical issues including finance, governance, risk management, tax, legal concerns and topics of interest about day to day operations and management in church settings" (ELCA description). Ms. Druckenmiller pointed to St. Luke, Reading, as a congregation that takes security seriously.

DEBRIEFING. Mr. Unks spoke about being impressed by the consolidation process explained by the representatives from Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church. Ms. Druckenmiller spoke in appreciation for the work done by the synod's executive staff.

FUTURE COUNCIL MEETINGS. Pastor Bennethum reported that in recent years approximately one-third of the council members do not attend the July council meeting, so in 2018 the July meeting will be a regular meeting rather than a one-day retreat with orientation for new members. The orientation will occur at another time between the 2018 assembly and the July council meeting. The meeting date will be July 18, 3:00 p.m., at a location in Schuylkill County.

The council was asked to attend a symposium with a representative of the ELCA churchwide organization on Saturday morning, February 17.

ADJOURNMENT. The meeting concluded at 5:23 p.m. when the council adopted a motion to adjourn made by Ms. Druckenmiller and seconded by Ruth Major.

Carl D. Shankweiler, Secretary