

SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING

**Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Trinity Lutheran Church, Pottsville, Pennsylvania
July 18, 2018**

ATTENDANCE. Synod Council Members Present: Pr. Lauren Blatt, Dr. Donald Boyer, Pr. Oliver Brown, Donald Dillman, Marlane Druckenmiller, Kristen Edelman-Weiner, Thomas Engle, Linda Eroh, Martin Everhart, Pr. Charles Grube, Elizabeth Leibenguth, Ruth Major, Louise McCloughan, Jeannette Richardson, Pr. Deborah Scheffey, Pr. Carl Shankweiler, Victor Unks, Pr. Gary Walbert, Bishop Samuel Zeiser.

Synod Council Members Excused: Pr. June Bair, Karrison Dubbs, Pr. Jessica Kingsboro, Pr. Nelson Quiñones, Larry Rissmiller

Synod Council Member Absent: Ethan Melber

Other Persons Present: Pr. D. Michael Bennethum, Executive Associate of the Bishop and Director of Evangelical Mission; Kathy Walter, representative of the Women of the ELCA; James Jennings, member of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Pr. Fred Crawford of the synod staff and Christine Miller, Vice President of the Joint Church Board of St. Peter's Church, Mantzville, arrived later in the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER. Bishop Samuel Zeiser called the July 18, 2018, regular meeting of the Synod Council of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to order at 3:00 p.m.

GREETINGS FROM THE HOST CONGREGATION. The Rev. Harold Hand Jr., Senior Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Pottsville, welcomed the council and introduced Cheryl Kephardt, who assisted with refreshments. He explained that Trinity began in a log structure in 1834. Coal was a major industry at the time; there were many persons of German background in Pottsville. In 1867 the congregation began worshipping at the present location and expanded their structure with several additions since then (the Sunday School area in 1911, the purchase of a neighboring synagogue in 1956, and the demolition of the former synagogue and the building of a new addition and parking lot in 2000). He explained that nearby there had also been English Lutheran Church, which merged with Trinity in 1974. In the 184 years of Trinity's existence there have been eight senior pastors. He explained the congregation's staff, including Assistant Pastor Christopher Rothharpt, and expressed gratitude for the congregation's volunteers. He explained several of the congregation's ministries, including an impressive scholarship fund.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS. Bishop Zeiser explained that the former vice president, Dr. Barbara Belón, moved out of the synod since the time of the 2018 synod assembly. He welcomed to the council the Rev. Lauren Blatt and, returning, Martin Everhart. Another new member, Karrison Dubbs, could not be present. He introduced the new interim vice president, Kristen Edelman-Weiner, a person of "ecclesiastical substance" who sees us as part of the whole church. Ms. Edelman-Weiner then spoke, explaining that she wants to be

a liaison between the council and the synod's congregations after the model set by Dr. Belón. She expressed the need to engage in more conversation about the synod and the exciting ways in which we can reengage with congregations.

OPENING DEVOTIONS AND INSTALLATION OF NEWLY ELECTED MEMBERS.

Bishop Zeiser then read from Romans 12:1-5 and installed the newly elected council members.

GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER. The Rev. Oliver Brown, representing the Program Committee, spoke about "Called Forward Together in Christ," specifically the section "Who We Are." This part of the document deals with our unity, purpose, and values such as dignity, compassion, and justice. Bishop Zeiser spoke of "Called Forward" as a foundational document to move us into the future, while Linda Eroh pointed out that the entire document is available at ELCA.org.

MINUTES OF MARCH 15. The synod council minutes of March 15, 2018 were approved as distributed on a motion by Donald Dillman, seconded by Jeanette Richardson.

BISHOP'S REPORT. Bishop Zeiser spoke about being a participant in the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering in Houston and at two preliminary events: MYLE (Multicultural Youth Leadership Event) and the tAable (for "young people who live with a wide range of physical, cognitive and emotional disabilities"). There were 620 participants from our synod; over 31,000 from the entire ELCA. The Rev. Jami Possinger was our event coordinator, while Deacon Kathleen Schaeffer was the coordinator for our Synod Day. The third day of the event was Servant Day, when Bishop Zeiser was part of six congregations working at S.H.A.P.E. Community Center (the six congregations included Trinity, Pottsville). Some of the participants suggested raising money to help S.H.A.P.E., and so Bishop Zeiser and another pastor each offered to match up to \$500. He observed that "the way the church comes alive is profound" and needs to be affirmed. (The Rev. Charles Grube added that by attending the Youth Gathering his group was motivated to engage in ministry back home.) The next gathering will be in 2021 in Minneapolis.

Bishop Zeiser shared a summary of the 2018 assembly evaluations as compiled by Deborah Frey and said that she will give the entire report to anyone wanting a copy. He focused on the comments related to the question, "What will you take back?" He wanted the council to "feel confident about the impact of a synod assembly." (Ms. Richardson suggested sharing this information with those congregations that did not attend.)

Bishop Zeiser explained that the staffing adjustments have the Rev. Kurt Garbe working for the synod 50% of the time; his other employment is as the visitation pastor for United Proclamation of the Gospel, a cooperative ministry of St. Peter's Lutheran Church and Light of Christ Lutheran Church, both of Bethlehem. His synodical responsibilities include events coordination, working with several leadership teams, providing staff support for our global companion synod relationships, and the Lehigh Mission District. Brenda Stauffer will retire in December and not be replaced.

The bishop spoke about the synod's policy on sexual misconduct, which needs to be revised in part to use current terminology. He also informed the council about a newspaper investigating a

misconduct issue from years ago that involved one of the synod's congregations. In his discussions with the reporter, he referred to the synod's policy, which also needs to be updated because of new reporting responsibilities to the civil authorities. (The existing policy has already said that reporting needs to be done if a minor is involved.) Bishop Zeiser recommended that if any council members were approached by the press about this matter that they (a) indicate that we are in the process of revising our policy and (b) direct the inquirer to Bishop Zeiser for a response. He did provide the current policy to the council so that all members could offer their insights, after which the proposed revision will go to the general counsel of the ELCA for review before coming back to the synod council for approval.

A considerable amount of discussion then took place about issues related to sexual misconduct policies such as insurance (congregations should be sent the synod's final policy as a model for their own; a congregation is liable if their former insurance company from the time of an incident is no longer in business), having an attorney from Pennsylvania review the proposed policy, what timeline should be followed when accusations are made (waiting to report an incident involving only adults has been done at times in the synod in order to consult with an attorney, for example), what penalties result from being found guilty (the resignation of a call and possibly the removal from the roster as well), how charges are evaluated ("a bishop does not impose a conviction" but can facilitate the process of investigating; there can be "well founded" accusations involving irrefutable proof in contrast to weaker cases such as those involving hearsay evidence), how accusations involving a minor are handled (they need to be reported even if hearsay), the role of the Discipline Committee (which usually deals with congregational members but could be made the investigating team), and other resources currently available to assist congregations (such as guidance from Church Mutual Insurance Company).

JAMES JENNINGS. James Jennings, who serves on the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, gave the synod council an update on the issues facing the ELCA's churchwide organization. Issues that he discussed included Congregational Vitality, developing leaders, forming a governance document for a churchwide organization that is smaller and more manageable. He said that the ELCA's partners need to deal with how to adjust in these times of resource realignment. He said that he appreciates the council's work and feedback and is looking forward to the next ELCA assembly in 2019 in Milwaukee. Bishop Zeiser pointed out that Mr. Jennings is available to meet with congregations, and Mr. Jennings added that he can talk especially about ELCA finances.

SECRETARY'S REPORT. The Rev. Carl Shankweiler reported that there were no email votes since the last council meeting but that the executive committee adopted a resolution at its July 9 meeting with all executive committee members voting in the affirmative:

(2018-07-01 by the Executive Committee) Resolved, that Kristen Edelman-Weiner be appointed interim vice president of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod until a new vice president can be elected at the 2019 synod assembly.

He spoke about the impending sale of St. Mark, Lackawaxen, for which we are now waiting for the potential buyers to conduct a new inspection of the property and receive clearance from their

title insurance company. We also do not yet have the adjacent cemetery's acceptance of the sliver of land that contains graves.

Concerning English, Minersville, which the synod now owns, he moved the following resolution, which was seconded by Pastor Blatt and adopted:

(2018-07-02) Resolved, that the secretary of the synod be authorized to sell the property formerly owned by English Lutheran Church, Minersville, for \$7,500 to another Christian congregation; and, if that kind of sale is not possible by the end of August, that arrangements be made to sell the property at public auction with a reserve price of \$20,000.

TREASURER'S REPORT. Mr. Dillman reported that a draft copy of the audit for 2017 has been received and will be reviewed by the committee. The Finance Committee now consists of three persons: Dr. Donald Boyer, chairperson; Ms. Richardson, and Mr. Dillman.

WOMEN OF THE ELCA. Kathy Walter explained that she was filling in for Lenna Harris as the representative of the Women of the ELCA. She reported that the Women of the ELCA had a "wonderful" convention on June 2 at Schwartzwald Lutheran Church with Karen Voris, a presenter from Alaska, and a workshop led by abused women. Their fall service event will be announced through their newsletter, "Flame." Their fall cluster meetings will be focused on the theme of water. Their 2018 designated offering is for disaster relief; their March 30, 2019, justice event will be about human trafficking.

ST. PETER, MANTZVILLE. The Rev. Fred Crawford of the synod staff and Christine Miller, Vice President of the Joint Church Board of St. Peter's Church, Mantzville, were introduced and explained St. Peter's desire to cease being a union church and become a federated congregation related to both the ELCA and the United Church of Christ. The background of the Lutheran congregation was explained (it was once part of a four-church parish), and a letter was read from Kim Kistler, President of the Joint Church Board, about developments within the congregation. Pastor Crawford answered questions from the council about what federating means and how pastoral candidates for a federated church are handled.

Marlane Druckenmiller, seconded by the Rev. Deborah Scheffey, then moved the following resolution, which was adopted:

(2018-07-03) Resolved, in accordance with ELCA bylaw 9.91.01.c., that the plan of federation for St. Peter's Church, Mantzville be approved.

DIRECTOR FOR EVANGELICAL MISSION REPORT. The Rev. Michael Bennethum distributed two information sheets concerning (1) synod staff responsibilities and (2) contact information for synod council members. He said that 194 intents from congregations have been received for 2018 Mission Support—out of approximately 267 congregations—and that a little over 44% of the pledged amount had been received by the end of June, i.e., \$743,000. He thanked the members of the council for giving and asked them to encourage congregations to submit their intentions for 2018 Mission Support. Pastor Bennethum reported that he is assisting the Hmong congregation to become incorporated and have a Pennsylvania sales tax exemption; he also spoke about the issue of leadership transition in that their pastor is planning for his

retirement. He mentioned that Ricardo Riqueza, an intern from Brazil who is related to the Sierra Pacific Synod, is now working with two of Common Ground's "three and one-half campuses."

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. At a previous meeting of the council, Dr. Barbara Belón had suggested that a welcome gift be presented to the Hmong Community Evangelical Lutheran Church. After considering several questions and suggestions—some of which did not apply in that the Hmong congregation has full access to their host congregation's worship facilities and has itself been in existence as a congregation since 1996—it was agreed to give a gift in their honor. Ms. Druckenmiller, seconded by Dr. Boyer, moved the following resolution, which was adopted:

(2018-07-04) Resolved, that \$1,000 from synodical funds be given to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Fund for Leaders in honor of the Hmong Community Evangelical Lutheran Church, the newest congregation on the roster of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod,

FINANCE COMMITTEE. Two resolutions were presented by the committee for consideration; both were adopted.

(2018-07-05) Resolved, that a loan in the amount of \$31,000 be made from the Church Loan and Development Fund to St. Mark Lutheran Church, Birdsboro for an upgrade to the church's HVAC system. The terms of the loan will be \$31,000 with a 7-year repayment schedule at 2% interest.

(2018-07-06) Resolved, that spending policies for synod funds for 2018 be established as follows:

- 8% of the Prosser, Pahse, Mission Fund (\$59,805)
- 8% of the Kelchner Fund (\$105,926)
- 10% of the Student Education Fund (\$14,525)
- 6% of the Leadership Development Fund (\$4,544)
- 8% of the Social Ministry Fund (\$41,360)

PROGRAM COMMITTEE. Ms. Eroh, chairperson, spoke about the work and plans of the committee.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE.

The Rev. Gary Walbert, chairperson, spoke about the proposed policy granting a sabbatical to the synod's bishop, including points such as the strain a bishop's travel and work places on his/her family and the need for renewal, including educational opportunities. He presented the proposed policy as it emerged from the committee.

Sabbatical Policy Proposal for the Synod Bishop

After seven years of service in the Office of Synod Bishop, the bishop may take a seven-week sabbatical leave.

A sabbatical leave is a designated period of time away from ministry responsibilities to be used

for professional growth and personal renewal. It is intended to sharpen skills and renew enthusiasm for ministry by means of deliberate study, reflection, and refreshment. During the calendar year in which the sabbatical leave is taken, two weeks of vacation will be granted. All compensation will be maintained at current levels during the leave. The Bishop will bear the cost of the sabbatical activity.

Prior to requesting approval of the Synod Council for the sabbatical leave, the bishop shall make arrangements with mission district deans, neighboring synod bishops, and other appropriate entities for the purpose of providing pastoral care during the bishop's absence. The bishop will provide at least six months' notice prior to the leave and a summary of intent of the sabbatical leave to the Synod Council for its consideration. Upon approval by the Synod Council, the bishop will inform appropriate churchwide office personnel. Congregations and rostered ministries of the synod will be informed in a timely manner of the dates encompassing the leave.

Upon completion of the sabbatical leave, the bishop will provide the Synod Council with a report on the leave, including a report on the benefits accrued during the leave.

The ELCA and Portico Benefits Services websites have helpful resource information pertaining to sabbatical leaves.

Considerable discussion took place concerning the proposed policy, when it should take effect, to whom it should apply, and some of the specific wording. Pastor Scheffey pointed out that "sabbatical leave" is redundant and need only be "sabbatical." Ms. Druckenmiller spoke about the length of the sabbatical, with the result being that the wording would be "up to seven weeks." The consensus that emerged concerning how to deal with the issue of coverage was to approve the policy as presented with an effective date of September 1, 2020 (that is, the beginning of the next bishop's term, as was the original intent) but then entertain a subsequent motion to make the policy apply also to Bishop Zeiser. This last consideration emerged when Pastor Shankweiler reflected that all of the reasons given by Pastor Walbert for supporting a sabbatical for a future bishop could apply also to Bishop Zeiser and that he (Shankweiler) "could defend" to the assembly the application of this policy to our current bishop. (The original intent was to have this policy go into effect only after the end of Bishop Zeiser's term in office so as not to make it appear that he supported this sabbatical policy for his own benefit.)

At the point of action on this motion, Vice President Kristen Edelman-Weiner began to chair the meeting. The proposal from the committee was then adopted with an effective date of September 1, 2020.

(2018-07-07) Resolved, that the Sabbatical Policy for the Synod Bishop be approved as follows:

Sabbatical Policy for the Synod Bishop

After seven years of service in the Office of Synod Bishop, the bishop may take a seven-week sabbatical of up to seven weeks.

A sabbatical is a designated period of time away from ministry responsibilities to be used for professional growth and personal renewal. It is intended to sharpen skills and renew enthusiasm for ministry by means of deliberate study, reflection, and refreshment. During the calendar year in which the sabbatical leave is taken, two weeks of vacation will be granted. All compensation will be maintained at current levels during the leave. The bishop will bear the cost of the sabbatical activity.

Prior to requesting approval of the Synod Council for the sabbatical leave, the bishop shall make arrangements with mission district deans, neighboring synod bishops, and other appropriate entities for the purpose of providing pastoral care during the bishop's absence. The bishop will provide at least six months' notice prior to the leave and a summary of intent of the sabbatical to the Synod Council for its consideration. Upon approval by the Synod Council, the bishop will inform appropriate churchwide office personnel. Congregations and rostered ministries of the synod will be informed in a timely manner of the dates encompassing the leave.

Upon completion of the sabbatical, the bishop will provide the Synod Council with a report on the leave, including a report on the benefits accrued during the leave.

The ELCA and Portico Benefits Services websites have helpful resource information pertaining to sabbaticals.

This policy will take effect September 1, 2020.

A motion was then made by Dr. Boyer, seconded by Pastor Blatt, and adopted as follows:

(2018-07-08) Resolved, that the Sabbatical Policy for the Synod Bishop as adopted become effective in 2018 and be awarded to Bishop Samuel Zeiser.

Pastor Walbert mentioned that the committee will be dealing with the election of a new bishop in 2020 but that there was no report at this time.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE. Ms. Druckenmiller stated that at the 2019 assembly the synod will need to elect a vice president (four-year term), secretary (four-year term), and persons to the synod council.

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

(2018-07-09) Resolved, that the 2019 budget of the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Mission District be approved.

(2018-07-10) Resolved, that Sandra Bodnyk, Al Diaz, Paul Emrick, Gary Schmidt, the Rev. John Richter, and Jonathan Warner be re-elected to three-year terms on the Board of Trustees of the Good Shepherd Rehabilitation Network, terms commencing in 2018.

(2018-07-11) Resolved, that a call to special service be issued to Deacon Tammy Rade to serve as a mental health therapist at Thaxton Holistic Wellness Center and Counseling Solutions, Scranton, beginning June 11, 2018.

(2018-07-12) 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. Rebecca Knox
 The Rev. Elizabeth Haines
Clergy (second year): The Rev. Kim Lengert
 The Rev. Scott Lingenfelter

(2018-07-13) 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. Dawn Richie (effective July 1, 2018)
The Rev. James Bowers (effective July 1, 2018)
The Rev. Harold L Hand Jr. (effective December 1, 2018)
The Rev. Peter Kuritz (effective September 1, 2018)

NEW BUSINESS. Pastor Crawford explained that before the October meeting the council might be asked by electronic vote to issue a call to special service for a pastor who would serve St. John, St. Johns, and Trinity, West Hazleton.

ADJOURNMENT. Mr. Everhart moved, seconded by Ms. Richardson, that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was adopted and the meeting adjourned at 6:01 p.m.

Carl D. Shankweiler, Secretary