

SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Faith Lutheran Church, Blakeslee, Pennsylvania
October 17, 2018

ATTENDANCE. Synod Council Members Present: Dr. Donald Boyer, Donald Dillman, Marlane Druckenmiller, Karrison Dubbs, Kristen Edelman-Weiner, Thomas Engle, Martin Everhart, Pr. Charles Grube, Elizabeth Leibenguth, Ruth Major, Louise McCloughan, Pr. Nelson Quiñones, Larry Rissmiller, Pr. Carl Shankweiler, Victor Unks, Pr. Gary Walbert, Bishop Samuel Zeiser.

Synod Council Members Excused: Pr. June Bair, Pr. Lauren Blatt, Linda Eroh, Pr. Jessica Kingsboro, Jeannette Richardson, Pr. Deborah Scheffey.

Synod Council Member Absent: Pr. Oliver Brown, Ethan Melber.

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.

CALL TO ORDER. Vice President Kristen Edelman-Weiner called the October 17, 2018 regular meeting of the Synod Council of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to order at 3:04 p.m.

GREETINGS FROM THE HOST CONGREGATION. Mr. Philip Newlander, President of Faith Lutheran Church, Blakeslee, welcomed the council to Faith. He expressed the regrets of the Rev. Debra North, Pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, at her not being available to greet the council; and he explained the history of the congregation. He said that the congregation enjoys an average attendance of about 90 persons during the summer (a “boost” in attendance and finances at that time of year) with winter’s attendance being about 40. He mentioned the groups and events that use Faith’s building, including concerts. Bishop Samuel Zeiser observed that “Sunday morning is a lot of fun here.”

DWELLING IN THE WORD. Bishop Zeiser then read Psalm 138, speaking about confidence and the good things that God has done; he led the council in prayer.

MINISTRY UPDATE. Dan Scharnhorst, Executive Director of Bear Creek Camp, expressed his appreciation for the support given to the camp by the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod. He said that 2018’s attendance again increased (attendance has increased 80% since 2012), and he reported about research that shows the positive impact of camping on the lives of children and youth. He mentioned many other positive developments, such as the camp’s first gala fundraiser (\$22,000 raised for camperships), the first 5K race (100 persons participated), and the approximately 60 people on staff during the summer. When Bishop Zeiser asked Mr. Scharnhorst what the synod could do for the camp, Mr. Scharnhorst replied that the synod does well and “lifts up” the camp at the synod’s annual assembly. Bishop Zeiser encouraged the council to get this positive information about the camp into the hands of the synod’s

congregations, adding “this is an amazing ministry.” Dr. Donald Boyer pointed to the beneficial effect the camp had in the lives of his daughter and granddaughter and suggested that the council meet at the camp for its July 2019 meeting, that being a time when the summer campers are present.

MINUTES OF JULY 18. The synod council minutes of July 18, 2018 were approved as distributed on a motion made by Donald Dillman and seconded by Thomas Engle.

BISHOP’S REPORT. Bishop Zeiser began his report with a review of the most recent meeting of the Conference of Bishops and the preliminary first call consultation held on September 27. Of the candidates for first calls, only 39 were available after those administratively assigned (86) and restricted (13) were removed from the total of 138 graduates. Region 7 received one candidate, who is going to the New England Synod.

Bishop Zeiser passed around the proposed ELCA statement, “A Declaration of Our Inter-Religious Commitment,” which will be acted upon by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America when that council meets in November. He spoke about the excitement of attending the banquet for the Fund for Leaders, when students receiving grants for their seminary educations were recognized; the recipients include Andrew Berdahl of Orefield.

The ELCA fund campaign. Always Being Made New, is at 82.1% of its \$190,000,000 goal in gifts; of our own congregations, 87.1% have participated with our goal being 100% participation. The deadline for completing this campaign has been extended to June of 2019; Guy Ehler and Bishop Zeiser are working to help our synod reach the goal of 100% participation.

The “Draft Social Statement on Women and Justice” was received by the Conference of Bishops and will go next to the church council. The final review by those two groups will occur in spring of 2019, after which the proposed statement will go to the 2019 Assembly of the ELCA for final action.

The synod’s 2019 assembly will be a one-day event, June 1, at the Genetti Ballrooms, Hazleton. The synod staff involved in assembly planning met and reviewed the 2018 assembly; other people who said they would assist for 2019 are being contacted. Concerning the 2018 assembly, the synod uses CVENT for the registration process, the cost for which was assigned to the cost of the 2018 assembly, which had an effect on the balance sheet for the assembly. In 2019 both worship and business meetings will take place in the same space; eating will take place in a tent. There will be elections for vice president and secretary.

Bishop Zeiser announced that he is anticipating taking his sabbatical from June 9 through July 27, 2019. He said that on September 15 he participated in the seating of Bishop Kevin Nichols, the new bishop for the Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem, and on September 22 he was involved in the installation of the Rev. Patricia A. Davenport as the new bishop for the Southeast Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA. He will ordain the most recent of our first call candidates, Drew J. Neidig, on October 20, after which Pastor Neidig will serve Calvary, Laureldale.

Bishop Zeiser reported that a group of fifteen persons from the Loebau-Zittau District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony visited the synod from October 6 to 15. It was a “fine exchange.”

He explained that a sinkhole opened up on the synod’s property in Schoenersville, just west of the building. The hole was filled. On October 6 the synod’s office building was broken into; Bishop Zeiser said that he and Pastor Mary Gade went to investigate when a neighbor reported the issue of Pastor Gade. The state police came as well. The person who broke into the office building was found inside, asleep. One door was broken and needs to be repaired.

Bishop Zeiser reflected upon his service as chairperson of the Program Committee in 2007, when that committee dealt with the process of electing a new bishop. Based on that experience, he recommended that planning for the election of a bishop requires more than one year’s time and more than four people. He recommended that a special task force be established and begin its work in the next few weeks. He also recommended that the task force be as inclusive as possible and include nine persons, with recommendations being welcomed. In January he would like an initial report that includes a timeline for the election process.

In response to this discussion Marlane Druckenmiller moved, seconded by Dr. Boyer, the following resolution, which was adopted:

(2018.10.01) Resolved, that the synod council authorize Bishop Zeiser to create a special task force for the purpose of developing a process for the election of bishop at the 2020 synod assembly.

Finally, Bishop Zeiser reported that former synodical vice president, Donald F. Smith Jr., Esq., will retire as Executive Director of the Berks County Bar Association and the Law Foundation of Berks County. Unknown to Mr. Smith, a charitable 501(c)3 organization is being formed in his honor, with the synod being asked to make a contribution thereto. Bishop Zeiser stated that he has authorized a \$1,000 gift from discretionary funds under his control and asked that this matter be kept confidential until after the October 25th event that will note Mr. Smith’s retirement.

VICE PRESIDENT’S REPORT. Ms. Edelman-Weiner said that she will attend the ELCA’s gathering for synodical vice presidents in Chicago. She is looking forward to the event, concerning which Bishop Zeiser thanked her for attending.

SECRETARY’S REPORT. The Rev. Carl Shankweiler reported that there were two email votes since the last council meeting with all council members who voted doing so in the affirmative. He made tallies of both votes available and invited the council to offer corrections, of which there were none. The vote on the New Ringgold Parish was called for on August 29; the vote on First Hungarian was also called for on August 29.

(2018.10.02) Resolved, that upon the unanimously adopted petitions of Advent Lutheran Church, Tuscarora, and Friedens Lutheran Church, New Ringgold, the synod council approve the

dissolution of the New Ringgold Pastoral Charge contingent upon the division of all jointly held property and in accordance with section S13.21. of the Constitution and Bylaws of the synod.

(2018.10.03) Resolved, that the Synod Council of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), hereby affirms the right of Zion (First Hungarian) Lutheran Church, 938 E. Fourth St., Bethlehem, to sell any or all of its real estate and real property prior to its dissolution as a congregation, a power which is possessed by congregations within the ELCA under our principles of organization as expressed in our constitutions and bylaws.

He reported that the sale of the former property of English Lutheran Church, Minersville, has been completed. The sales price was \$7,500 in that it was sold to another congregation (Ark of Refuge), although on paper we hold a mortgage to the total of \$20,000 in order to protect our financial interest if the Ark congregation should close or resell the property in the near future; this mortgage will be considered fully paid in eight years.

Pastor Shankweiler gave an update on the pending sale of St. Mark, Lackawaxen, and introduced Karrison Dubbs, who was attending her first meeting as a member of the council.

TREASURER'S REPORT. Mr. Dillman reported that the audit for 2017 has been received. The loss for the year was \$19,698. The audit report needed to cover each of the synod's special funds. No recommendations were offered by the auditing firm for improving our processes.

He distributed a paper, "Schedule A Class and Type Codes," which lists all of the synod's special funds and identifies who is responsible for oversight of the funds and where they are invested. One of those funds, Growth in Excellence, has a balance of \$13,872 and has not been used for years. He recommended that this fund be transferred to the Leadership Team Grant Fund. Accordingly, Pastor Shankweiler moved, seconded by Louise McCloughan, the following resolution, which was adopted:

(2018.10.04) Resolved, that the Growth in Excellence Fund be closed and that the money held in that fund be transferred into the Leadership Team Grant Fund.

DIRECTOR FOR EVANGELICAL MISSION REPORT. The Rev. D. Michael Bennethum reported that the Mission Support consultation process is underway with eight people making visits to congregation councils (Ruth Major, Marlane Druckenmiller, and Martin Everhart from the synod council with five additional persons from the Mission Support Table). On October 2 a mailing about 2019 intentions was sent out, with seven intentions already having been returned. He added that rostered ministers recently received the newest copy of "Stories of Faith in Action," which reports "the impact of our ministries."

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. No report.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE. No report.

FINANCE COMMITTEE. Two resolutions were presented by the committee for consideration and were adopted. They were also moved and seconded as follows: Mr. Everhart, seconded by

Ms. Major, for the first resolution; Dr. Boyer, seconded by Larry Rissmiller, for the second resolution. With the synod's bookkeeping work again being done inhouse, the second resolution would return the work of auditing to the firm used prior to the experiment of having the ELCA's Mission Investment Fund perform the synod's bookkeeping.

(2018.10.05) Resolved, that a loan in the amount of \$7,000 be made from the Church Loan and Development Fund to St. John Lutheran Church, Tamaqua for sidewalk repairs. The terms of the loan will be \$7,000 with a 2-year repayment schedule at 2% interest.

(2018.10.06) Resolved, that the auditing firm Campbell, Rappold, and Yurasits be granted a three-year contract as the synod's auditor at a fee in the range of \$19,000 to \$23,000 for the year ending January 31, 2019 and with a not-to-exceed fee of \$18,000 and \$19,000 respectively for years two and three of the contract.

PROGRAM COMMITTEE. No report.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE. Ms. Druckenmiller stated that the committee met and is in good shape for the 2019 elections. A male nominee under age 18 is needed for synod council, and three lay females are needed for the Committee on Discipline, for which the ability to maintain confidentiality and the possession of counseling skills would be desirable.

EN BLOC ITEMS. Pastor Shankweiler, seconded by Mr. Dillman, moved that the en bloc items be adopted; they were all adopted as presented.

(2018.10.07) 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.

(2018.10.08) 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.

(2018.10.09) Resolved, that a call to special service be issued to the Rev. Kristen Glass Perez to serve as Chaplain at Muhlenberg College, effective June 15, 2018.

(2018.10.10) 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 (fifth year): The Rev. Rashion Santiago
Clergy (first year): The Rev. Dr. Anja Stuckenberger
Clergy (first year): The Rev. Carl Wenzel
Clergy (first year): The Rev. Robin Henry

(2018.10.11) 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":

Michael Krenz (September 1, 2018)
The Rev. Richard Schoenleber (March 1, 2019)

NEW BUSINESS.

The following resolution was adopted as it was moved by Mr. Dillman and seconded by Pastor Nelson Quinones:

(2018.10.12) Resolved, that the portion of the 2019 Executive Staff salary to be designated as housing be as follows:

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

The following resolution concerning Zion's St. John (Reeds) Lutheran Church was adopted as it was moved by Dr. Boyer and seconded by Ms. Druckenmiller. Pastor Shankweiler noted that following the first vote by Zion's St. John (Reeds) to terminate its relationship with the ELCA, he wrote to the congregation to alert them to their probable need to establish themselves as an independent non-profit organization in that they are not currently planning to affiliate with another established church body and they will lose their exemption(s) as part of the ELCA.

(2018.10.13) Resolved, pending certification of an affirmative outcome of the second congregational vote, that in accordance with section *C6.05.g.2. of the Model Constitution for Congregations, the decision of Zion's St. John (Reeds) Lutheran Church, Stouchsburg to terminate its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America be approved.

A lengthy discussion ensued concerning the proposed revision of the synod's Policy on Sexual Misconduct of Rostered Ministers as presented by Bishop Zeiser; this proposed revision reflects work done by him and by Pastor Gade, with consultation with the ELCA's counsel in Chicago. (The proposal as presented and the final document, both being lengthy, are appended to these minutes rather than being included here.) Bishop Zeiser pointed to the need for revisions to the current policy because of the change in the ELCA's definition of its rosters, especially the addition of the roster of Word and Service, and because of the issues raised earlier in 2018 when he was questioned by a newspaper reporter concerning the synod's policies. Changes in the proposal as compared to the existing policy include replacing "pastors" with "rostered ministers," replacing "advisory panel" with "bishop's panel," and replacing "meeting" with "interview."

As the proposed revision was discussed by the council, the following points were made and changes were agreed to:

General statement: Bishop Zeiser pointed out that this is a church policy, not a legal policy, but that changes to the current policy are encouraged by legal counsel.

General statement: Dr. Boyer pointed out that the level of incidence of sexual misconduct in the Roman Catholic Church, though much in the news, is not as great as misconduct in the public schools and other public sectors.

Page 1, definition of Employee: replaced “has called” with “is served by.” There was a discussion as to whether a definition of Employee is even needed given the limited to non-existent use of that term in the document, but Bishop Zeiser said that this definition was requested by the ELCA counsel.

Page 2: Bishop Zeiser pointed out that the first two paragraphs under “Education Awareness Program” are new.

Page 2, item B: Bishop Zeiser highlighted that the synod secretary needs to send out the policy as indicated in order to show that we are trying to be a responsible church. Victor Unks advocated giving a copy of the policy to every rostered leader who is new to the synod at the time of his/her arrival.

Page 2, paragraph beginning “This Statement of Policy”: drop “As noted above.”

Page 2, item B: change “every six years” to “every three years.”

Page 3, the top item 3: add after workshop “at least every three years.”

Page 3, items D1 and D2: Bishop Zeiser pointed out that although these sections are present in the current policy, they were not always enforced. But with sexual misconduct being a “front-burner issue,” the synod can no longer be lax in following these provisions.

Page 4: Bishop Zeiser pointed out that changes are incorporated in the proposal concerning the involvement of law enforcement personnel in order to protect the synod against misrepresentation.

Page 4, fifth line from the bottom: change “victim(s)” to “victim’s(s).”

Pages 4 and 5: Bishop Zeiser pointed out that the word of a complainant is not automatically accepted but that an investigation is undertaken to ascertain the truth of the complaint.

Page 5, item D7: to Elizabeth Leibenguth’s question as to whether a minister could be reinstated if found to be not guilty, Bishop Zeiser responded that he/she could not return to the same place but could be restored to the roster. He added that if a pastor does not resign when asked, then the bishop can try to resolve the matter or call a bishop’s panel.

Page 6: Bishop Zeiser pointed out that items F and G were added here in the correct place for sequence.

Page 7, second full paragraph: in two places change “ministers” to “minister’s.”

Pages 8 and 9: Bishop Zeiser pointed out that the material concerning the care of congregations was restructured.

Page 9, bottom item 2: correct “of” at the end of the first line to “or.”

After the conclusion of this discussion and the changes made by consensus to the proposed document, Pastor Shankweiler moved, seconded by Thomas Engle, the following resolution, which was adopted:

(2018.10.14). Resolved, that the Synod's Policy on Sexual Misconduct of Rostered Ministers be approved as revised by the synod council on October 17, 2018.

WOMEN OF THE ELCA. No report.

ADJOURNMENT. Pastor Gary Walbert moved, seconded by Mr. Dillman, that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was adopted and the meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Carl D. Shankweiler, Secretary