

SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING

**Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Trinity Lutheran Church, Hecktown, Pennsylvania**

March 14, 2019

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

Synod Council Members Excused: Pr. June Bair.

Synod Council Member Absent: Ethan Melber.

Other Persons Present: Pr. D. Michael Bennethum, Executive Associate of the Bishop and Director of Evangelical Mission; Lenna Harris, representing the Women of the ELCA; James Jennings, representing the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

CALL TO ORDER. Vice President Kristen Edelman-Weiner called the March 14, 2019 regular meeting of the Synod Council of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to order at 3:05 p.m.

GREETINGS FROM THE HOST CONGREGATION. The Rev. Christian Eichorn, pastor, welcomed the council to Trinity Lutheran Church, Hecktown, and introduced Judy Carr, the congregation's first female council member (1976) and first female council president (1978) and the chairperson of their recent Phase 3 Renovations. They explained that the congregation was founded in 1763 with their first pastor being the Rev. John Frederici, a classmate of Muhlenberg. The current sanctuary was built in 1849, and the wing where the council met was from 1998. The most recent renovations took ten years to complete, beginning with a long-range planning process and ending in 2018. Guiding the renovations were five principles: the facilities should (1) be welcoming, (2) allow for flexibility, (3) preserve the congregation's heritage, (4) provide a strong centering of liturgical symbols, and (5) include the technology of today.

OPENING DEVOTION. Bishop Samuel Zeiser read Psalm 29, reflecting the "noise made by creation in response to God's love," and the Prayer for Joseph, the Guardian of Jesus, whose day of commemoration is March 19.

GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER ACTIVITY. Linda Eroh, representing the Program Committee of the Synod Council of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, led the council members in an activity based on the question, "What is your favorite color and why?"

MINUTES OF JANUARY 23. The synod council minutes of January 23, 2019 were approved as distributed on a motion made by Donald Dillman and seconded by Dr. Donald Boyer.

WOMEN OF THE ELCA REPORT. Lenna Harris, speaking on behalf of the synodical Women of the ELCA, distributed a flyer for their upcoming justice event, which will deal with trafficking as an international, national, and local problem. Everyone is invited to attend, not only women.

CHURCH COUNCIL OF THE ELCA. James Jennings, a member of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod and of the Church Council of the ELCA, spoke about the ELCA as being in a time of transition. This change can be seen in the large number of council members whose terms are expiring in 2019; only eight members will return in fall. The churchwide expression of the ELCA is preparing for the 2019 churchwide assembly and dealing with the issue of who should take responsibility for the various expressions of the church: churchwide, synods, congregations.

NEW BUSINESS. The following resolutions were adopted as they were moved as a body by Larry Rissmiller and seconded by Thomas Engle. Bishop Zeiser explained that the last issue was necessary so that there is another person (Ms. Edelman-Weiner) close to the synod office who can sign checks. Deacon Marlane Druckenmiller abstained from voting on these resolutions.

(2019.03.01) *Resolved*, That in accordance with BLS10.03.b and BLS10.03.c. of the synod's constitution and bylaws, the Rev. Kathleen A. Ash-Flashner be elected to serve as a part-time associate of the bishop, beginning March 1, 2019, with an initial annual salary of \$15,918.

(2019.03.02) *Resolved*, That in accordance with BLS10.03.b and BLS10.03.c. of the synod's constitution and bylaws, Deacon Marlane E. Druckenmiller be elected to serve as a part-time associate of the bishop, beginning April 1, 2019, with an initial annual salary of \$15,918.

(2019.03.03) *Resolved*, That the following persons be approved as signers for synod financial accounts: Bishop Samuel Zeiser, Ms. Kristen Edelman-Weiner, Mr. Donald Dillman, and Pastor D. Michael Bennethum

BISHOP'S REPORT. Bishop Zeiser reported about several issues.

1. Executive staff changes consist of (a) the retirement of the Rev. Mary Gade, (b) the stepping down of the Rev. Carl Shankweiler because of his mother's health concerns, (c) the addition of Deacon Marlane Druckenmiller to the staff, because of which she is resigning from the synod council, and (d) the addition of the Rev. Kathleen Ash-Flashner to the staff, because of which she is resigning as dean of the Schuylkill Mission District. The Rev. David Rowe will serve as dean of that district on an interim basis.
2. The support staff's reshuffling of roles is progressing well. Deborah Frey and Laurie Christman have taken on the main parts of Brenda Stauffer's work. The staff meets every six weeks to discuss how their work is progressing; the four-day work week is working well.
3. The staff is ridding the building of unneeded items, including furniture. The vandalized doors have been replaced as of March 13.

4. The difficulty in finding a seven-week block of time for Bishop Zeiser's sabbatical has led him to plan to take the following smaller segments:

- June 23-30, 2019
- September 8-15, 2019
- October 20-27, 2019
- November 24-December 1, 2019
- December 22, 2019-January 5, 2020
- March 22-29, 2020

5. Concerning the 2019 assembly, Bishop Zeiser distributed a registration form and indicated that preparations for the assembly are well underway. The proposed agenda was also distributed with the council being encouraged to review it carefully in that all business needs to be carried out in one day. With Ed Cool looking to step down as the person in charge of conducting the elections and counting ballots, the Rev. Kenneth Melber has been enlisted as his "apprentice" so that there is a person prepared to take Mr. Cool's place in the future. Bishop Zeiser also said that the assembly members will be using Guidebook, which the Rev. Michael Bennethum explained will provide a platform so that documents can be posted and updated in real time, making the assembly less dependent on paper documents, a development in accord with feedback from previous assemblies. Bishop Zeiser also listed the next meeting dates of the planning group.

6. Bishop Zeiser reported about the ELCA's 2019 first call process, for which he represented Region 7 at the national meeting to deal with the 108 candidates for ordination, of which only 55 are available to the regions because the others are restricted. As a result of this low number and the fact that Region 7 had six candidates that are restricted, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod did not receive any candidates this year. (The Rev. Lauren Blatt spoke about the need to advocate for gay candidates because it is "not the job of gay candidates to be crucified for a cause.") Bishop Zeiser added that this was his last year as Region 7's representative.

7. Bishop Zeiser pointed to the book *The Invitational Christian* by Dave Daubert, brought to the synod's attention by Pastor Bennethum and addressing the need to be invitational and hospitable. He said that Pastor Daubert will meet with the staff by way of Zoom and that the book is best used with "friends," i.e., a group of people who can work through the book together.

8. He said that he is working with what is left of the congregation known as St. Peter, Ridge Avenue, Allentown, which has not met for two years and is defunct except for the fact that they own property. The synod needs to address this issue, and Bishop Zeiser spoke about the need for legal counsel. Accordingly, the Rev. Carl Shankweiler, seconded by the Rev. Oliver Brown, moved that the following resolution be adopted, which it was:

(2019.03.04) *Resolved*, That Bishop Zeiser be authorized to secure the services of Atty. Richard Santee to assist him in the closing of St. Peter Lutheran Church, 114 N. 10th St., Allentown.

9. Bishop Zeiser spoke about developments at Trinity, Clarks Summit, which has scheduled a March 31 vote to disaffiliate from the ELCA over the 2009 decisions concerning gay clergy.

10. He reported that we received a certificate from the ELCA for giving \$952,118 in Mission Support.

The council then took a five-minute break.

DIRECTOR OF EVANGELICAL MISSION REPORT. Pastor Bennethum explained that Mission Support is the “lion’s share” of the synod’s income. The intentions for 2019 coming from congregations (176 out of 262 reporting) pledge \$1,582,898.36, of which 53% will remain within the synod.

Pastor Bennethum gave an update of the synod’s Synodically Authorized Worshipping Communities (SWAC). These three ministries (two Common Ground campuses and Hope’s Table) are incorporated but are not stand-alone congregations and so are more under the synod’s oversight. Common Ground will be losing its intern at the end of this school year, and so a new intern has been requested (18 ministry sites are seeking interns, of which 12 are available).

He spoke about Café Esperanza, which is not a word and sacrament ministry but a pay-as-you-can café meant to bring people together as a way for the church and world to come together. He distributed some literature about Café Esperanza; and Pastor Blatt, who serves on the board, spoke in greater detail about this ministry. She said that it is located in Reading, was birthed out of Hope Lutheran, is housed in a townhouse in the poorest area of Reading by per capita income, and operates on a system of having the customers pay what they want, with their offering to work another possibility. They seek grants and are looking into selling/handing out wooden nickels as passes. Pastor Bennethum explained that the ELCA is involved through two mission districts and a Domestic Hunger grant. The UCC Foundation is also being approached. He spoke about his appreciation for their “community table” concept, i.e., that a homeless person can sit next to a state senator, business leader, or other person with different life circumstances, all of which allows for the forming of relationships beyond one’s own socio-economic group. In addition to choosing what they want to pay, customers can also select their own service size; and locally produced foods and volunteers are used as much as possible. Those people who are paid receive a “living wage.”

VICE PRESIDENT’S REPORT. Ms. Edelman-Weiner requested prayers for the Montana Synod on the sudden death of their vice president, whom she knew. She also spoke about an event on May 11 for congregations that sponsor Scout units; she herself is involved with Scouts.

SECRETARY’S REPORT. Pastor Shankweiler explained that the sale of St. Mark, Lackawaxen, has been completed. He moved the following resolution, which was seconded by Dr. Boyer and adopted:

(2019.03.05) *Resolved*, That from the proceeds from selling the property formerly owned by St. Mark Lutheran Church, Lackawaxen, the synod council honor the request by St. Mark's final officers that grants be made to two neighboring Lutheran congregations--St. Luke, Greeley and St. Jacobi, Shohola--with the grants being \$4,000 each; and *Resolved*, That from the proceeds from selling this property the \$5,000 fee for the cataloging and perpetual care of St. Mark's

congregational records be paid to the Lutheran Archives Center at Philadelphia in compliance with the synod's standard procedure to pay that fee from congregational resources.

He reported about the work of the Legacy Task Force, which is dealing with the broad issue of closing congregations and the specific issue that arose from the 2018 assembly (i.e., asking congregations to prepare statements of intent concerning where their assets should go if they close). The task force is meeting regularly and working on a comprehensive document that will consist of segments dealing with various issues concerning congregational closing.

Pastor Shankweiler reported that a resignation letter has been received from Deacon Druckenmiller, who is resigning effective April 1 as the “East Berks Mission District representative on Synod Council” because of her new service as an associate of the bishop for that district.

TREASURER’S REPORT. Mr. Dillman distributed an unaudited report for fiscal year 2018 as of January 31, 2019. An audit will be conducted, perhaps at a greater cost because for two years the synod was using the Mission Investment Fund for its bookkeeping, not Quickbooks.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. Pastor Shankweiler said that there was nothing to report from the synod council’s executive committee.

FINANCE COMMITTEE. Dr. Boyer presented the 2020 spending plan as proposed by the finance committee. He noted that the proposed budget represents a drop from \$2,000,000 (2019) to \$1,850,000 (2020) with 47% going to the churchwide ministries of the ELCA. He explained that the lines related to the 2020 synod assembly show \$90,000 in income (high because this will be a three-day assembly) and that representatives of the finance committee met with persons on the team planning the assemblies, discussing the desirability of having a budget for assemblies so that the team can know how much they may spend. They also discussed some specific expenses, such as the significant cost at Kalahari to have a separate space dedicated for worship only. Dr. Boyer said that they met as well with some ministry teams to discuss their needs and expenses. Concerning Section VI of the spending plan, the percentage of funds going to the United Seminary was increased by dropping Region 7 as an expense category. A slight increase in the category of synod staff is to provide raises of 2% and to allow the new bishop more flexibility in building a staff. The total result, explained Dr. Boyer, is a balanced budget that the committee believes is realistic.

Ms. Eroh, seconded by Deacon Druckenmiller, then moved that the following resolution be approved and recommended to the 2019 synod assembly for adoption. The motion was adopted.

(2019.03.06) *Resolved*, That the 2020 spending proposal (February 1, 2020, to January 31, 2021) be adopted. The Synod Council is hereby authorized to establish the 2020 spending proposal no later than its January 2020 meeting, making any necessary adjustment to the proposal in light of both realistic anticipation of receipts and synod priorities (in consultation with the ELCA Treasurer with respect to the ELCA portion thereof.)

PROGRAM COMMITTEE. Ms. Eroh said that the program committee had nothing to report, that Bishop Zeiser had covered the issues related to the 2019 assembly, and that she wanted to meet with the committee members following the present synod council meeting.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE. The Rev. Gary Walbert explained that after Lent the administration committee will deal with the matter of information security, which had been raised by Pastor Bennethum. He noted that this would be his final meeting but that he will continue work on the issue of information security.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE. Deacon Druckenmiller reported that there are now nominees for vice president, secretary, and probably for clergy on the synod council. Still needed are nominees for synod council for a lay female of color and a male youth under age 18. East Berks will need a lay female, and three lay females are needed for the Discipline Committee of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod. She noted that this meeting marks the end of her service as chairperson of the nominating committee.

EN BLOC ITEMS. Pastor Shankweiler moved, seconded by Pastor Walbert, that the en bloc resolutions be adopted as presented. The motion carried.

(2019.03.07) *Resolved*, That the following resolution be recommended to the 2019 Synod Assembly: “*Resolved*, That the 2019 Assembly program (as printed in the Bulletin of Reports) be adopted.”

(2019.03.08) *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. Mary Gade (May 1, 2019)
- The Rev. Elizabeth Mitchell (May 1, 2019)
- The Rev. Barry Mitchell (May 1, 2019)
- The Rev. Donna Deal (July 1, 2019)

(2019.03.09) *Resolved*, That the request to the Roster Committee of the Conference of Bishops to extend the on-leave-from-call status for the Rev. Kim A. Truebenbach be approved.

(2019.03.10) *Resolved*, That the synod council extend an invitation to the Rev. Virginia Heimer, an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament in the United Church of Christ, to serve as pastor of St. Peter’s, Mantzville, beginning on the date established by the congregation.

ADJOURNMENT. Ruth Major moved, seconded by Deacon Druckenmiller, that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was adopted and the meeting adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

Carl D. Shankweiler, Secretary