

# SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING

Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Christ Lutheran Church, Dryville, Pennsylvania

January 18, 2020

**ATTENDANCE.** Synod Council Members Present: Dr. Donald Boyer, Donald Dillman, Pr. Samantha Drennan, Pr. Chris Druckenmiller, Karrison Dubbs, Thomas Engle, Kristen Edelman-Weiner, Thomas Engle, Linda Eroh (off site), Teresa Fry, Pr. Charles Grube (off site), Lenna Harris, Andrew Hottenstein, Ruth Major (off site), Louise McCloughan, Pr. Cheryl Meinschein, M. Jeanette Richardson (off site), Pr. Deborah Scheffey, Pr. Carl Shankweiler, Victor Unks (off site), Bishop Samuel Zeiser.

Synod Council Members Excused: Pr. June Bair, Pr. Lauren Blatt, Martin Everhart, Elizabeth Leibenguth.

Synod Council Members Absent: None.

Other Persons Present: James Jennings, member of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Pr. D. Michael Bennethum, Executive Associate of the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission; Samantha Kelly, Director of Youth, Young Adult, and Faith Formation Ministries.

**DEVOTIONS.** Bishop Samuel R. Zeiser of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod led the opening devotions, making reference to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and the Confession of Peter, with readings from Psalm 18:1-6, Acts 4:8-12, and *More Days of Praise* and the singing of Hymn #603 from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

**GREETINGS FROM THE HOST CONGREGATION.** The Rev. Cheryl Meinschein of Christ Lutheran Church, Dryville, welcomed the council to Christ Church. She noted that this Synod Council meeting was the first group to meet officially in the newly renovated building, which was a \$3.5 million project with only \$300,000 still owed. She explained that the reason “Mertz” is often used in referring to the church is that the donor of the land was a Mertz. She spoke about the close connection between the congregation and Deka Battery (now East Penn Manufacturing), begun by the local Breidegam family. The average attendance at Christ Church is 125.

**CALL TO ORDER.** Vice President Kristen Edelman-Weiner called the January 18, 2020, regular meeting of the Synod Council of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to order at 9:18 a.m. Because of an impending snow storm in many parts of the synod, some council members were physically off site but present electronically. For that reason the Rev. Michael Bennethum explained the Zoom process for electronic participation. Ms. Edelman-Weiner welcomed the day’s guests: George Freestone, Samantha Kelly, and James Jennings.

**GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER ACTIVITY.** Because of the need to shorten the length of the meeting, the council development exercise was postponed to the March meeting.

**MINUTES OF OCTOBER 19 MEETING.** The Synod Council minutes of October 19, 2019, were approved as distributed on a motion made by Donald Dillman and seconded by Dr. Donald Boyer.

**NEW BUSINESS.** The following resolution was adopted as it was moved by Mr. Dillman and seconded by Andrew Hottenstein:

**(2020.01.01) Resolved, That in accordance with section \*C6.05.g.2). of the Model Constitution for Congregations, that the decision of Altalaha Lutheran Church, Rehlersburg, to terminate its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and become an independent congregation be approved.**

The following resolution was adopted as it was moved by Dr. Boyer and seconded by Thomas Engle. Dr. Boyer made the point explicit that Ms. Kelly is an independent contractor, not an employee of the synod; this distinction is important for tax purposes. The Rev. Chris Druckenmiller asked if this contract has a term; Dr. Boyer replied that it does.

**(2020.01.02) Resolved, That based on the recommendation of the synod's Youth, Young Adult, and Family Ministry Team, that the contract with Samantha Kelly for Youth, Young Adult, and Faith Formation Ministry Services be approved.**

The following resolution was adopted as it was moved by Victor Unks and seconded by Teresa Fry:

**(2020.01.03) Resolved, That the functions and events of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod and its mission districts and clusters be planned in such a manner and conducted in such places that persons with physical, mental, sensory, or other challenges are not excluded; and, be it further**

**Resolved, That congregations whose facilities are not accessible might consider undertaking the necessary renovations so that they too can be added to the list of architecturally accessible facilities; and, be it further**

**Resolved, That the second Sunday in October be declared Disability Awareness Sunday, emphasizing, through education and worship, sensitivity toward and inclusion of persons with disabilities and the mission which is mutually shared by all baptized persons, regardless of their limitations.**

**CHURCH COUNCIL REPORT.** James Jennings, who serves on the Church Council of the ELCA, expressed his appreciation at attending the Synod Council meeting. He explained that the next meeting of the Church Council will be in March, when the council is trying to meet in coordination with the Conference of Bishops of the ELCA. Mr. Jennings said that he enjoys the opportunity to interact with the liaison bishops who attend every council meeting and sees the bishops as a resource in knowing what is actually going on in the church. Mr. Jennings reported

that he is now the chairperson of the ELCA's Budget and Finance committee and a member of the Board Development Committee and—by virtue of being chairperson of the Budget and Finance Committee—a member of the ELCA's Executive Committee. Concerning the budget, (1) there has been a five-synod test on how to finance the church, and (2) healthcare benefits have been a challenge with the committee looking at that issue as well.

## **BISHOP'S REPORT.**

**2020 Synod Assembly.** Bishop Zeiser reported that the planning team for the 2020 Synod Assembly met at Kalahari the previous week. George A. Freestone, chairperson of the synod information-gathering team for the election of a bishop, put together a schedule for events to be held in February at which people will have the opportunity to meet and talk about the synod's needs and the skills that are needed in a new bishop.

Mr. Freestone, a member of Advent, West Lawn, then spoke and distributed a flow chart for the events and planning steps to take place between December and May. He said that the goal is to produce a list of "prioritized mission/ministries" for the synod and the "attributes" for the next bishop. He listed the members of his task force ("NEPA Synod Info Gathering Team"): Todd Gimbi, the Rev. Nelson Quiñones, Jaime Taylor, and Deacon Janet Stump. He highlighted the three data-collecting regional meetings for February (on first, eighth, and fifteenth) at which the task force hopes for a good turnout to complete a survey (February 29 is a makeup day). He explained that on March 14 the Synod Council will receive a report from the task force concerning preliminary feedback. He noted that the ELCA will help distill the information. He added that in April and May there will be another series of meetings to ask people if there is anything that they want to add to what has been presented, which will then result in the production of a "deliverable report." He stressed that the task force wants a "nice turnout" in February and so encouraged the council members to attend and to talk up the meetings.

The Rev. Samantha Drennan responded by calling the task force's work "fantastic and organized." Lenna Harris asked if information about the February events will be sent out to the synod. Mr. Freestone said that the answer is yes and that some information has already been shared. Pastor Drennan spoke about these events being on Facebook. Bishop Zeiser said that he put out a notice to the deans and encouraged them to promote the meetings. Mr. Freestone spoke about his presence at the council meeting as intending to encourage attendance at the three regional meetings and about the task force's hope of having seventy-five to one hundred persons attend the southern meeting, twenty-five to fifty at the north, and fifty to seventy-five at the central meeting. The meetings will be from 9:00 to 12:00 on Saturdays; there is no limit to the number of persons who may attend from a congregation.

Bishop Zeiser observed that this plan has similarities to the process used to fill pastoral vacancies in congregations whereby a booklet is presented to candidates describing the congregation (the report of the February meetings) and a town hall meeting is held (the second series of meetings in April and May) so that the call committee and staff can have information for making a decision.

The assembly theme, "We Are Church Together," is intended to remind us of our interdependencies. There will be two eucharistic services, the first to recognize the ministry of

deacons and the second to highlight the fiftieth anniversary of the ordination of women in our predecessor bodies, the fortieth anniversary of the ordination of the first woman of color, and the tenth anniversary of the 2009 decisions concerning gender issues for ordained clergy. The Rev. Catherine Ziel will preach, and the Rev. Donna Deal will preside. "Guidebook" will be used to help to cut down on paper and make it easier to amend assembly resolutions. The agenda is 99 percent complete.

Sufficient counters are needed, that is, about twenty-five people who are not voting members. Persons willing to serve are encouraged to contact the synod office or Edward Cool, chairperson of the Elections Committee; meals will be provided for the counters.

In the near future the location of the 2021 assembly needs to be identified.

**Sharing Space at the Lutheran Center.** Bishop Zeiser said that since September consideration has been given to renting space at the Lutheran Center, Schoenersville. The Metropolitan Community Church, which has been renting space from a congregation of the United Church of Christ, is looking for a new home and asked if the synod would be willing to rent them space. The Property, Finance, and Executive Committees have worked on this issue; and the discussions have progressed to the point of the Metropolitan Community Church's affirmation that the price that the synod would need to charge to cover additional costs is acceptable to them. A lease agreement is still needed, but the Executive Committee is presenting a resolution that would authorize this matter to move forward. Dr. Boyer, seconded by Mr. Hottenstein, moved that the following resolution be adopted, which it was after a period of discussion.

In the discussion, Pastor Druckenmiller asked what the Metropolitan Community Church will do in our facilities. Bishop Zeiser explained that the greatest use will be of the sanctuary and the two offices assigned to them. He further explained that any scheduling of events will need to go through Laurie Christman of our support staff. The use of space and financial aspects will need to be monitored so that the \$1,000 rent per month is not too high or too low. Ms. Harris asked if this will be a long- or short-term arrangement. Bishop Zeiser answered that it will be long term; this congregation has been in existence for some time but does not want to own a building. Pointing out that this congregation is primarily LGBTQ+ in its membership, Pastor Meinschein asked about the possibility for opposition. Bishop Zeiser responded that the synod asked the congregation for a statement of faith in order to be certain that their beliefs fit our statements of faith and will not be an embarrassment. He noted that it is possible that there could be a negative response even though many members of the synod will be unaware of the nature of the congregation. Dr. Boyer thanked Mr. Dillman and Mr. Cool for studying the costs associated with this rental. Ms. Edelman-Weiner pointed out that Mr. Cool oversees our property and the elections.

**(2020.01.04) Resolved, That Bishop Zeiser be authorized to rent, on behalf of the synod, the Lutheran Center, Schoenersville, to the Metropolitan Community Church of the Lehigh Valley for an initial monthly fee of \$1,000.00, which may be adjusted as costs become better known for the increased use of utilities, cleaning services, and the increased wear and tear to the building, it being understood that for this amount the congregation will have use of the sanctuary (when not being used for synodical functions, including funerals), two offices**

**dedicated solely to the congregation's use, and the main conference room, social hall, and kitchen (when not being used for synodical functions).**

**Introduction of Sammy Kelly.** Samantha (“Sammy”) Kelly was again introduced and invited to speak about her work with the synod. She said that she has been getting to know people and processes related to her work. Her contractual work with the synod will be primarily with the Youth, Young Adult, and Family Ministry Team, with a lesser amount of work with the Faith Formation Resource Team. She explained that she wants to help keep congregations connected. She said that she has worked at New Life Lutheran Church, New Tripoli, for five years, where she is Pastoral Assistant. She is a graduate of the United Lutheran Seminary. Her husband, William (“Billy”) Miller, is Youth Director for the Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church.

**Closed Congregations.** Bishop Zeiser spoke about the two closed congregations now being dealt with by the synod. St. Peter (Ridge), Allentown, owns ten acres of land in Lower Macungie Township; Atty. Blake C. Marles is working to get the synod a deed to this land. Because the congregation no longer has a verifiable membership list, it has been necessary to go to the Orphans’ Court Division, Lehigh County, for a deed. Bishop Zeiser explained that for that purpose he needed to sign an affidavit.

St. Matthew’s, Allentown, is another case where the synod needs a deed. He said that he heard the following from Atty. Richard E. Santee Jr. on January 17: “I have checked with a real estate lawyer and I have . . . sent him the documents to prepare a deed confirming the Synod’s ownership. In the meantime, there is nothing to prevent you from listing the property with a realtor, noting the Synod as the ‘equitable owner’ of the property; the minutes of the Synod meeting . . . assuming ownership should satisfy a realtor for the time being.”

**VICE PRESIDENT’S REPORT.** Vice President Edelman-Weiner said that because of the weather, she proposed that the day’s agenda be altered so that business matters could be dealt with first. Mr. Dillman, seconded by Mr. Hottenstein, moved that the agenda be so altered, and the motion was adopted. Therefore, the new order was the Executive Committee, the Finance Committee, the *en bloc* items, and the Administration Committee. After a break, it was agreed to consider the reports in this order: the treasurer’s report, the vice president’s report, and then the remaining agenda items in their original order.

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.** The following resolution was received from the Executive Committee and was adopted. Mr. Dillman explained that the amount being sought for staff raises is in accord with the 2020 spending plan, even allowing for a cushion between projected income and expenditures.

**(2020.01.05) Resolved, That 2020 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 19, 2019, meeting and shall apply to calendar year 2020 and all future years unless otherwise provided by this Synod Council. (Numbers are rounded to the nearest dollar.) This represents a 2 percent increase over 2019.**

NAME**	BASE SALARY	HOUSING	SS	TOTAL
Zeiser, Samuel	\$70,519	\$20,000	\$7,498	\$98,017
Garbe, Kurt	\$19,348	\$17,000	\$3,011	\$39,359
Wuertele, Peggy		\$20,400		\$20,400
Bennethum, Michael*				\$22,298
Huber, Jean				\$18,764
Richter, John				\$18,953
Crawford, Fred				\$16,236
Kuritz, Peter				\$16,236
Ash-Flashner, Kathleen				\$16,236
Druckenmiller, Marlane				\$16,236

\* Pastor Bennethum's salary as DEM and the majority of 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 2 percent increase in staff compensation means that the 2020 cost for support staff will be \$138,115; the 2020 cost for contract staff will be \$34,514.]

**FINANCE COMMITTEE.** The Finance Committee presented the following resolution, which was adopted. Dr. Boyer, chairperson, said that he wants to look into including these ministries in the general fund because of the ongoing nature of these grants from year to year.

**(2020.01.06) Resolved, That grants be made from the Prosser, Pahse, Mission Fund to the following ministries under development for the 2020 fiscal year:**

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

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

**(2020.01.07) 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 (third year):	The Rev. Lee Diefenderfer
Clergy (third year):	The Rev. Carl Wenzel
Clergy (second year):	The Rev. Christina Johnsten
Deacon (first year):	Deacon Patrice Kidd
Deacon (second year):	Deacon Jacqueline Grauel

**(2020.01.08) 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. John Minnich (February 9, 2020)**

**The Rev. Raymond Hand (March 1, 2020)**

**(2020.01.09) 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.**

**(2020.01.10) Resolved, That a call to special service be issued to the Rev. Brian Holben to serve as staff chaplain, Lehigh Valley Hospital Center, effective January 1, 2020.**

**ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE.** Pastor Drennan drew the council's attention to the written Administration Committee report that she had emailed to all members on January 15. She reported that Pastor Meinschein was reviewing the current personnel manual and pointed out that the staffing configuration may be different when the new bishop takes office. Bishop Zeiser asked if the report will be ready by September 1, 2020; Pastor Meinschein said that the portions not related to the new bishop's staffing plans will be done by that time. Pastor Drennan said that the committee is also working on the issue of cyber security.

Concerning the installation of the new bishop, she said that there are sixteen documents on the ELCA's website concerning this one issue! The date of the installation has been established, October 11, 2020, with the planning committee now consisting of herself, Pastor Meinschein, and Ms. Edelman-Weiner but with the intention that other persons representing various aspects of the synod's life will be included. The location for the installation will be First Presbyterian Church, Allentown; that congregation is willing to hold the installation, having also held the ordination service for the local Episcopal bishop. The synod's Worship Ministry Team is already involved. After the installation service, a public reception will be held at First Presbyterian; a dinner will follow at Muhlenberg College for a more limited number of guests. Mr. Dillman said that the Finance Committee discussed this service and its costs and would like to talk to Pastor Drennan and others as soon as possible about what needs to be included financially, while Dr. Boyer pointed out that the current Synod Council meeting was the last point at which changes could be made to the 2020 budget. Dr. Boyer said that he wants to see the installation carried out "with class" but also be able to afford it, with the current estimate being \$25,000 for the day's events. Pastor Drennan assured the council that the committee is concerned about costs and what might be donated. In terms of how to proceed, Bishop Zeiser suggested asking the deans and the Women of the ELCA for their involvement. Ms. Edelman-Weiner said that this planning group will be a task force in that it will come to an end with the conclusion of the installation. Dr. Boyer raised the issue of security, with Mr. Dillman also mentioning traffic control. Pastor Bennethum pointed out that PEMA (Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency) has money to assist with such events. Pastor Drennan spoke of the need to contact the police, and it was agreed that this needs to be done. Ms. Harris asked what the address is of the church; Bishop Zeiser said the corner of Cedar Crest Boulevard and Tilghman Street (3231 W. Tilghman St., Allentown).

**NOMINATING COMMITTEE.** It was reported that the Rev. Lauren Blatt updated the forms for making nominations for the 2020 assembly and has them posted on the synod's website.

**TREASURER’S REPORT.** Treasurer Dillman supplied a three-document written report through Pastor Bennethum’s email of January 13 to the council members: (1) “Financial Report as of October 31, 2019,” (2) “Financial Report as of December 31, 2017,” and (3) “Letter from the Auditor Regarding the FY2018 Audit.” He pointed out that 94 percent of the Mission Support pledged for 2019 has been received, which he considered good. He also reported that the audit report for 2018 has been received and was a bit more expensive because of the change from the ELCA’s Mission Investment Fund system back to the synod’s own bookkeeping system. He said that with the synod now having its own data for two years, there should not be a problem in auditing the results of future years.

**VICE PRESIDENT’S REPORT, CONT.** Ms. Edelman-Weiner explained that the “2020 Bishop Election Process” document had been sent to the council members on January 13 by Pastor Bennethum. She said that in spring 2020 the mission districts will have the information being gathered concerning what the synod is looking for in a new bishop. Another part of the election process for a new bishop will involve the candidates meeting with three groups of mission districts during the 2020 assembly, rather than needing to visit all nine districts separately. There will also be time for caucuses. She mentioned that the Revs. Colleen Cox and Michelle Kaufman are the persons collecting the names of counters. She explained that Synod Council members have vote at the assembly. She reported that the ELCA considers the 60-40 rule to be important, i.e., that at least 60 percent of the persons voting are laypersons, and so she encouraged the council members to get as many lay members for the assembly as possible. This issue is made more difficult now by the fact that deacons are considered ordained, that is, part of the 40 percent. “We need to say that lay people matter.” Using Pastor Drennan’s term “Bishtallation” for the new bishop’s installation, Ms. Edelman-Weiner encouraged council members to contact Pastor Drennan or herself if they are interested in participating. She also encouraged the council members to attend one of the three information gathering events in February.

**SECRETARY’S REPORT.** On January 15 Pastor Shankweiler distributed by email his written report, “Report of the Secretary and Archivist, January 18, 2020.” Included among the matters covered were email votes by the council which resulted in the following two resolutions being adopted. He also distributed by email the vote tallies for these two resolutions.

**(2020.01.11) Resolved, That Steven Morrison, Dr. Jaan Naktin, Dr. Peter Quinn, and Donald Snyder be re-elected to three-year terms on the Board of Trustees of the Good Shepherd Rehabilitation Network, terms commencing in 2019 and continuing until 2022.** (Presented by email on July 2, 2019, to the Synod Council.)

**(2020.01.12) Resolved, That the secretary of the synod be authorized to apply to M & T Bank for a Business Credit Card on behalf of the synod, with the authorized users of the card being the bishop and any other staff members designated by the bishop.** (Presented by email on November 6, 2019, to the Synod Council.)

His written report included a copy of the letter sent to the Synod Council by the Williams Valley Ministerium and notice that the synod’s constitution, as revised by the ELCA’s 2019 required

provisions, is now posted on the synod's website. He also spoke about the current state of St. Matthew Lutheran Church's property on South 10<sup>th</sup> Street in Allentown, where the former tenant still has many of her belongings in the church's former parsonage. Pastor Bennethum stated that it is time for the secretary to inform the synod's units when their reports for the 2020 assembly are needed.

**DIRECTOR FOR EVANGELICAL MISSION REPORT.** Pastor Bennethum reported that 44 percent of the congregations have submitted Mission Support intentions for 2020 totaling \$952,000; he encouraged council members to check with him about whether or not their congregations submitted their intentions. He reported that Café Esperanza is set to open on March 20. He explained that most of the synod's congregations come under the "parent organization" ruling regarding Pennsylvania sales tax and that if a congregation's exemption is expiring on March 31, a new certificate will be issued.

**PROGRAM COMMITTEE.** Linda Eroh said that there was nothing new for the committee to report but that she needs the date of the next assembly planning committee meeting. Pastor Bennethum will give that date to her.

**WELCA REPORT.** Ms. Harris said that the WELCA Spring Justice Retreat, "Diversity—Reaching Across Barriers to Live as God's People," will be held on March 28, 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Breinigsville. The presenters will be the Rev. Jeffrey J. Butz (Pastor of Zion, Maxatawny, and adjunct professor of world religions, Penn State) and the Rev. Kristen Glass-Perez (Chaplain at Muhlenberg College). Ms. Harris pointed out that although the Women of the ELCA sponsor the event, all persons are welcome to attend.

**ADJOURNMENT.** Vice President Edelman-Wiener declared the meeting adjourned at 11:02 p.m. on a motion by Pastor Shankweiler, seconded by Mr. Dillman. The next council meeting will be held March 14, 2020, at St. John, Mahoning; the snow date will be March 21.

Respectfully submitted,

Carl D. Shankweiler, Secretary