

MINUTES
Of the Special Meeting
Of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
Of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
January 31, 2011
Paul's Run Retirement Community, Philadelphia, PA

Ms. Patricia Robinson, Vice President, called to order the Special Meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council at 5:25 p.m.

The **first purpose** of the meeting was for the Synod Council to consider whether to grant approval to the action of St. James, Philadelphia, to terminate its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). St. James has stated its intention to become a member of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC). Vice President Robinson introduced the Reverend Stephen Weisser, Chaplain, Paul's Run, who would serve as timekeeper and teller at this portion of the meeting.

Members of the Synod Council and St. James, including its pastor, the Reverend Paul Andell, the Reverend Patricia Davenport, Assistant to the Bishop, and the Reverend Kevin Hilgendorf, Dean, Northeast Philadelphia Conference, introduced themselves.

The **second purpose** of the meeting was for the Synod Council to hear the presentation of the Financial Planning Group and to discuss its recommendations.

Pastor Weisser led devotions.

ST. JAMES, PHILADELPHIA: TERMINATION OF RELATIONSHIP WITH ELCA

The Reverend Raymond Miller, Secretary, reviewed the procedure by which a congregation may terminate its relationship with the ELCA as described in Chapter 9 of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, noting that the reason for this special meeting was found in **9.62.g.** and that St. James had been a member of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA).

Presentation by St. James Leaders

Mr. Larry Thum, Chairperson, St. James' Transition Task Force, began by saying that St. James had been a *Word Alone* congregation for ten years and that it was no longer able to be part of the ELCA, noting differences over worship, evangelism and mission, theology, Christology, Scriptural authority, and the role of bishops. He alleged that the ELCA's teaching was no longer consistent with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, citing a difference between "a theology of divine redemption," as upheld by congregations like St. James, and "a theology of divine acceptance," as purportedly taught by the ELCA.

Pastor Andell said that St. James' decision to terminate its relationship with the ELCA was not

personally directed at the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod but at the churchwide organization, expressing a concern about the ELCA's direction and emphasis. He expressed thanks for his association with the synod, mentioning several colleagues, including the Reverend Claire Burkat, Bishop, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

Open Discussion

Bishop Burkat cautioned St. James' leadership about making broad, unsubstantiated public statements about the ELCA's and, by implication, her theology, advising them to "ramp it down." By speaking more carefully, she said, St. James would be able to build a future relationship, based on respect, with neighboring ELCA congregations.

Stating that St. James has been a wonderful congregation, Mr. Richard Reimet, Treasurer, expressed thanks for St. James' generous mission support and said that the congregation would be missed as part of the Lutheran family.

Ms. Barbara Spencer asked why St. James chose to join LCMC and not another Lutheran church body. Mr. Thum answered that LCMC seemed like "a right fit" for St. James, noting its congregationalist polity and support for women's ordination.

The Reverend Charles Leonard thanked St. James for its partnership with the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, adding that "we share more in common than apart."

A member of St. James asked why the congregation needed synodical approval for termination. Bishop Burkat stated that the need for synodical approval was based on a three-hundred-year old tradition, dating back to the time of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, who advocated a strong bond between synod and congregation.

Pastor Leonard asked how St. James was dealing with those not in favor of termination. Mr. Thum stated that, to his knowledge, no one had left the congregation. Pastor Andell added that, for those not in favor of termination, "their relationship to St. James trumps the [congregation's] decision to leave." He reiterated that no one had left the congregation.

Synod Council Discussion

The Synod Council entered executive session.

Presentation of the Resolution

Vice President Robinson presented the following resolution:

S. C. 11.01.01 Whereas St. James Lutheran Church, Philadelphia, PA, a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), in two legally called and conducted special congregational meetings, held on September 12, 2010, and December 12, 2010, has approved a resolution by the required two-thirds majority of voting members present to terminate its relationship with the ELCA, and

Whereas Bishop Claire S. Burkat, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA, and additional synodical leaders, on two occasions, October 13, 2010, and November 7, 2010, have consulted with St. James members,

RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council, with sadness and regret, grants synodical approval of St. James' action to terminate its relationship with the ELCA.

Synod Council members then voted. Pastor Weisser collected and tallied the ballots.

Secretary Miller reported the following results: 22 total ballots cast, 12 votes needed for approval (simple majority), 21 “yes” votes, 1 “no” vote, no abstentions, and no invalid ballots. He declared that the resolution was approved.

Vice President Robinson offered prayer.

Synod Council members recessed for dinner.

PRESENTATION OF THE FINANCIAL PLANNING GROUP

The members of the Financial Planning Group introduced themselves: Ms. Tracey Beasley, the Reverend Marcia Bell, Mr. Scott Clemens, Mr. Larry House, and Mr. Rod Rothermel. Mr. Christian Hicks was absent.

Bishop Burkat introduced the Reverend Dr. Richard Stewart, Associate Professor of Communications and Parish Administration, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, who would serve as facilitator for this portion of the meeting. Dr. Stewart noted that the financial decisions made by the Synod Council ought to be consistent with the synod’s mission statement and goals.

The Financial Planning Group presented its recommendations in the form of a document entitled *Equipping the Saints and Congregations for the Work of Ministry*.

Bishop Burkat offered alternative recommendations in the form of a document entitled *Missional and Financial Planning Proposal*.

Synod Council members then participated in an open and confidential discussion of the various recommendations, facilitated by Dr. Stewart.

Recognizing the need for further discussion, Synod Council members agreed to re-consider the recommendations on February 24, 2011, and March 24, 2011.

Secretary Miller announced that Mr. Reimet would not be seeking re-election as Treasurer in 2011. He expressed thanks to Mr. Reimet for his faithfulness and dedication as the synod’s treasurer for 32 years.

The Synod Council adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

The Reverend Raymond A. Miller
Secretary, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA