

MINUTES
of the 137th MEETING
of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
December 10, 2015
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, King of Prussia PA

Devotions of Advent readings and prayers were led by Pr. Julie DeWerth, Dean and host pastor
Vice President Tracey Beasley called the meeting to order at 4:33 pm

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Synod Council approved the Minutes of the 136th meeting of the Synod Council as presented.

SETTING THE AGENDA

Vice President Tracey Beasley presented the agenda for the 137th meeting with the following additions: Report from the Nominations Committee, Election of new Synod Council members. The revised agenda was adopted.

ELECTION OF NEW MEMBERS TO SYNOD COUNCIL

Pr. William Rex, term expiring in 2018, and Pr. Stephen Keiser, term expiring 2017, have both resigned from Synod Council for personal reasons.

Pr. Laura Tancredi, St. Paul's Ardmore, was presented for the term expiring 2018
Pr. Bryan Penman, St. Mark's Conshohocken, was presented for the term expiring 2017

Synod Council unanimously approved these persons, and Pastors Tancredi and Penman took their seats for the meeting.

BISHOP'S REPORT

Desecration of local mosque

Bishop Burkat shared that she received an email from Imam Shehata from the Al-Aqsa Islamic Society mosque which had been desecrated this past week. The Muslim community feels supported and affirmed by the interfaith community in Philadelphia, and is grateful for the prayers of the various faith communities.

Bishop's Convocation

Convocation was wonderful. There were 112 participants who attended at Bear Creek Mountain Resort and Conference Center. The new facilities worked well. The theme for the Convocation was "Thinking Outside the Walls: Surprising Places to be the Church" and focused on two "new" ventures in the church: Pub Theology and Dinner Church. As part of the discussion we had intentional conversation on race and injustice. This was very important conversation, even as it was uncomfortable for many.

Newly Ordained

Bishop Burkat was delighted to report that she presided at seven Ordinations this year! Intentional efforts to address the coming clergy shortage are paying dividends in our Synod, and we are seeing an increase in the number of pastors under the age of 50. This is a hopeful sign for the future of the Church.

Update from the Conference of Bishops

The Bishop directed the Council's attention to the section of her report that highlighted actions and discussions by the Conference of Bishops, particularly those issues coming before the 2016 Church-wide Assembly.

Regarding the report of the Theological Education Advisory Committee, which the Bishop had included with her report, the Baker/Tilly report in the back section is most enlightening. The current way we are training and educating people for the work of the Church is unsustainable.

The Bishop opened the floor for discussion and questions.

Ms Susan Pursch requested a regular report on the Forward Together in Faith Campaign at each Synod Council meeting. Bishop Burkat and Treasurer Janet Neff will plan make narrative reports.

Actions on the Roster

Secretary Richard presented the actions on the roster.

Call to Specialized Ministry:

S.C. 15.12.01 RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve a call for Ms. Anne Confer Martens as Associate Chaplain at the Hill School in Pottstown, PA effective January 23, 2016. The Synod Council unanimously approved.

Call to Interim Ministry:

S.C. 15.12.02 RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the Rev. J. Christian McMullan to interim ministry at St. Luke Lutheran Church in Gilbertville, PA effective January 1, 2016, and extending until a pastor is called by the congregation or until Pastor McMullan resigns this call, whichever comes first. The Synod Council unanimously approved.

Synodical Appointment:

S.C. 15.12.03 RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the Reverend Boyce Daniel Whitener, Jr. to a two-year term call under synodical appointment at the Lutheran Church of God's Love in Newtown, PA effective January 15, 2016 to January 14, 2018. The Synod Council unanimously approved.

Retirement Request:

S. C. 15.12.04 RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grants retirement status The Rev. Robert E. Mitman effective March 1, 2016. The Synod Council unanimously approved.

On Leave from Call Requests:

S. C. 15.12.05 RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grants on leave from call status to the Rev. Kristine Peterson request second year on leave status effective July 14, 2015. The Synod Council unanimously approved.

S. C. 15.12.06 RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grants on leave from call status to the Rev. Peter J. Naschke first year effective August 10, 2015. The Synod Council unanimously approved.

S. C. 15.12.07 RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grants on leave from call status to the Rev. Christopher Weidner first year on leave status effective December 7, 2015. The Synod Council unanimously approved.

S. C. 15.12.08 RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grants on leave from call status to the Rev. Jackson Haas first year on leave effective January 1, 2016. The Synod Council unanimously approved.

Information Not Requiring Action: Transfers

The Rev. Peter Hutchinson *to* New Jersey Synod effective September 29, 2015

The Rev. Deborah Dawson *to* Southwestern Minnesota Synod effective October 1, 2015

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Vice President Tracey Beasley shared that there is now a tab on SharePoint for Policies. The Synod's Director of Operations the Synod Secretary will post policies as appropriate.

Vice President Beasley presented the following response to the resolution adopted at the Synod Assembly regarding Solidarity with Persecuted Christians. Ms Joyce Brown Adams drafted this response for review and revision by the Executive Committee.

S.C. 15.12.09 RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council adopt the following Statement on Solidarity with Persecuted Christians:

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America stands in solidarity with the Christians and people of more than 60 nations that are suffering persecution for openly acknowledging and practicing their Christian faith.

The Christian Church is under attack and has been described by Mgr Bashar Matti Warda, Archbishop of Erbil in Iraq, as dissolving in front of the eyes of its own people. Christians in Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Pakistan, Nigeria and Korea are suffering various forms of persecution.

The attack on Christians is worldwide and extends beyond Iraq and the beheading of Egyptian Christians and American citizens by ISIS. It has taken the form of rape, enslaving and kidnapping of Christians in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria and Sudan. Christians in India live in fear, while North Korea continues to imprison large numbers of Christians in labor camps. The Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod agrees with and supports those who describe this problem as being major and serious but not unsolvable. The congregations and people of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod are encouraged to join with those crying out from the Christian community by calling for action from our governmental leaders, by becoming educated and informed, and through prayer. Demonstrating our belief in the power of prayer,

Good and gracious God, we pray for our brothers and sisters who suffer at the hands of their persecutors for demonstrating their love and belief in you. We pray that you give them strength and courage and that you make your presence felt despite their suffering. We pray for their captors and persecutors as you have taught us to pray for those who would do us harm. We ask you to guide our leaders to work to end the persecution of people of faith throughout the world. We ask for your divine intervention as we acknowledge that in you all things are possible. Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray. Amen.

The Synod Council adopted this Statement unanimously.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

It has come to the attention of the Executive Committee that the Synod Council should vote to approve the Audit committee. The members of the committee as put forward by the Bishop and Vice President are Ms Susan Purcsh, Chair, Mr. Donald Gleiter, Pr. Lizette Rios-Sanchez, and Mr. Philip Tackett

S.C. 15.12.10 RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the Audit Committee. The Synod Council unanimously approved.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer Janet Neff shared the following information and observations:

The Finance Committee has been reconfigured as Pr. Stephen Keiser has resigned from Synod Council, so the Committee did not have a report. The new Chair is Ms Sue Massey.

We are \$180,000 behind in our partnership support. Pr. Larry Smoose and the Stewardship Committee is following up with contacts to congregations that are behind in their stated support, and asking those congregations that are current to consider additional support. Please look at your congregation's giving record, and that of congregations close to you. Encourage each to follow up on their partnership support.

We will need to look at what decreases may need to be made in our spending plan. The Finance Committee will be looking at this in January to see where we are, highlight where we are over extended and offer suggestions to the Bishop and the staff of areas where reductions might be considered.

A large part of our deficit continues to be the cost of maintaining the properties of closed congregations. We anticipate a closing on the sale of one of the properties soon, but cannot predict exactly when.

The Treasurer then entertained questions and comments.

Mr. Rod Rothermel asked what the negative \$141,000 reflects on the balance sheet. Ms Neff explained it is the current cost for the Forward Together in Faith Campaign, which we owe back to ourselves from the receipts of the Campaign when they come.

Ms Susan Pursch stated that she feels we need to be looking forward with realistic expectations. This gap is not looking likely to close. Is there a deeper concern or unrest among our congregations?

Vice President Beasley replied that congregations are scared about membership declines, but are not necessarily discontented with the larger church.

Bishop Burkat added that we are seeing change at the local level that is calling for more resources locally. For instance, we are seeing several congregations that have added second staff members, indicating growth and not decline, but such additions need resources. They are not expressing animosity toward the Synod, but there are limits what they can share beyond the congregation.

Pr. Tom Lang noted that the “greatest generation” members are passing away; newer families have no sense of stewardship because they are not aware of the needs or interrelation with the congregation and the broader Church. They are also so mobile that they are not present as much. There is also a huge consumeristic mindset among our society that draws resources from church support.

Pr. Patricia Davenport, Director of Evangelical Mission shared she does not believe congregations are against the Synod. She spoke of one congregation that is decreasing its support but not feeling good about it. This congregation wants to restore its percentage of giving as soon as they can.

Ms Janet Neff shared that Grace, Royersford lost an independent daycare, hitting the congregation for 60K per year. Grace is decreasing support, but not because of discontent with the Synod.

Mr. Rod Rothermel said the bottom line is that income is down for congregations, so income to the Synod is down. We have done a great job bringing down our deficit over the past three years. Now need to look hard again at the rest of the expenses.

Secretary Richard commented about the importance of keeping the broader Church before the congregation. By sharing regularly how our offerings have an impact through the Synod and the ELCA we can show people why this is support important.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Audit Committee

Ms Susan Pursch, Chair, referenced the written report from the Audit Committee sent to the Synod Council. There were no questions raised.

Constitution Committee

Pr. Jane Marston, Chair of the Constitution Committee recommended approval of the following constitutions:

S.C. 15.12.11 RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the Congregational Constitution for Atonement Lutheran Church, Philadelphia. The Synod Council unanimously approved.

S.C. 15.12.12 RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the Congregational Constitution for Community of Love Lutheran Church, Oxford. The Synod Council unanimously approved.

S.C. 15.12.13 RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the Congregational Constitution for Advent Lutheran Church, Harleysville. The Synod Council unanimously approved.

Administration Committee

Ms Doreen Kinzler, Chair, reported the committee will be meeting with Pr. Sue Lang to work on Synod Assembly. As this will be the first time for Pr. Lang to coordinate the Synod Assembly, all involved will be learning how this committee can best help with the process.

Nominating Committee

Vice President Beasley presented on behalf of Ms Joyce Brown-Adams, committee Chair. The Nomination form has been revised. It has been modified to more closely mirror information needed when submitting names for Church Wide Assembly, and to include information that will be helpful for our database. The Form will not be valid without a photo. The form will also not be accepted if it is not complete.

MISSION MOMENT

Mr. Dan Scharnhorst, Executive Director of Bear Creek Camp, reported on the very successful year experienced by the Camp. There has been a 51% increase of SEPA kids since 2012. Summer program attendance went up 12% this year even though there was a National Youth Gathering! Attendance from both Northeastern and Southeastern Pennsylvania Synods went up, and non-Lutheran attendance also increased by a significant amount.

The focus is not only on sharing the Gospel at camp, but encouraging kids to explore the question “how do we take this home?” The staff of Bear Creek Camp is focused on making a difference in life and living the faith.

OLD BUSINESS none

NEW BUSINESS none

Meeting adjourned at 5:54 pm with prayer by Pr. Patricia Davenport

The 138th meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council will be Thursday, February 18, 2016, 4:00 p.m., at Trinity Lutheran Church, Lansdale, PA.

The Reverend Karl M. Richard
Secretary
Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA