

MINUTES
of the 161st MEETING
of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
Zoom Meeting
June 18, 2020
4:00 p.m.

DEVOTIONS

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley invited the Reverend Karen Sease, Assistant to the Bishop, to lead the Synod Council in devotions. The devotions were based on Isaiah 58:6-12, through which Pr. Sease offered prayer for the world and the troubled times in which we live. All were invited to offer their petitions in the chat feature of Zoom, which were read by Pr. Sease for the benefit of all.

CALL TO ORDER

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley called the 161st meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 4:15 p.m.

The Reverend Karl M. Richard, Secretary, called the roll. A quorum was declared.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the 160th meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council were approved as presented.

SETTING THE AGENDA

The Synod Council adopted the Agenda for the 161st meeting as presented.

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

Bishop Patricia A. Davenport began by expressing her thanks.

She thanked the Synod Council members who are willing to continue to serve, even as their terms would have expired, as we move forward in this time of the corona-virus.

She thanked the Deans and all Rostered Ministers for their faithfulness, their creativity, and their willingness to work in new ways forced on us by the pandemic. Deans and Conferences are meeting virtually and continuing Pericope Studies via Zoom. Bishop Davenport noted the level of “care fatigue” many of our Rostered Ministers are experiencing. We are facing both the opportunities, but also the challenges that come with the use of so much virtual meeting space. We are adjusting to the reality that we will need to continue this into the future, likely beyond the time we can gather again in person.

Churchwide Conversations

Bishop Davenport expressed her gratitude to LAMPa and Ms. Tracey DePasquale, who facilitated a conversation on the Draft Social Message, Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy.

The Conference of Bishops joined in a conversation on “Becoming the Body of Christ: Condemning White Supremacy.” With a focus on Micah 6: What does the Lord require? That

we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God, Bishop reminded the Synod Council we cannot just quote scripture: we need to LIVE scripture.

The Conference of Bishops also held a wide-ranging conversation about re-opening buildings. The Conference invited people from across the ELCA with expertise in various areas to discuss how we can open as safely as possible. Topics discussed included virtual communion, physical isolation, and how to continue being the Church in this time of the pandemic.

We as a Synod are encouraging our congregations to wait until at least July 1st before reopening our buildings, but we are paying attention to the trends across the nation as we consider the safety of the people of our Church

The Authentic Diversity Advisory Team met. This team is working to recommend ways in which we can prioritize the discussion of, and focus on work to fight, systemic racism and white supremacy.

Ecumenical Conversations

Bishop Davenport and other leaders have been holding conversations across the five-county area to speak not only about the COVID-19 pandemic, but also about the issues of race relations. Bishop was able to be a part of several multi-faith prayer vigils and a peaceful protest for Black lives.

Bishop Davenport then opened the floor for questions:

Pastor Jennifer Phelps asked what the Bishop feels are the most amazing things happening in ministry in the Synod in this pandemic time.

Bishop Davenport listed many things:

- There is a lot of good preaching and good music that is offered on various virtual platforms. She has been able to see the many ways in which congregations are worshipping by entering numerous virtual worship experiences.
- Emmanuel Souderton has been engaged in an impressive food ministry.
- It is wonderful to see the number of people making masks for use in this time.
- Cases of materials have been collected and shared with the Welcome Church.
- Congregations are receiving new members virtually.
- The Holy Spirit is always at work. In the midst of the pandemic, in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd, our rostered leaders are stepping up and making their voices heard.

Bp. Davenport called on Mr. Bill Graham, who shared how his church had a worship service to commemorate the “Emanuel 9,” those members of the Bible Study at Mother Emmanuel AME Church in Columbia, SC who were killed by a white supremacist. Mr. Graham’s daughter is a reporter with the Philadelphia Inquirer that was arrested at a recent protest for racial justice, even as she was wearing her press credentials. He and his wife are very proud of her.

Pastor Gwendolyn King stated that she is bursting with pride as she listens to the Bishop speak both ecumenically and across the community, presenting the gospel with grace and the power of

the Spirit. She asked when we might hear details of the ideas the Conference of Bishops has been discussing regarding virtual communion and the other topics Bishop had mentioned.

Bp. Davenport shared that everything we have is and will be posted on MinistryLink. Ultimately the choice of what to do regarding communion is yours. There is a division in the Conference of Bishops, where some Synods welcome offering virtual communion, and others are holding the line that “I will not commune until all can commune.” Each Pastor will need to work with their congregation’s leadership to see what they choose to do.

Pr. Phelps affirmed what the Bishop expressed. She noted there is a wide range of opinion in the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians. She suggested it may be useful to tell the stories of why people have made the choices they have made to further the conversation and the decision making process.

Bp. Davenport encouraged people to connect with Pastor Robert Fisher to share this information so we can all benefit from the collective deliberations. For instance, if you choose to do remote communion, share how and why you are doing what you are doing. There are ways to approach this so there is a sense of respect and awe, not chaos and confusion.

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Vice President Beasley referred the Council to the report in their packets. She noted that it was the decision of the Executive Committee to leave all committees and boards the same as they have been. Since we did not have the Synod Assembly, and therefore did not have elections, this board has not significantly changed, so the proposal is to not change the Committee assignments at this time. She asked if there were any questions or concerns with this arrangement. With no objections raised, she thanked the members of the Council for continuing in their current assignments for the coming year.

At a meeting with the Synod Vice Presidents there was a lot of conversation regarding opening congregations and how to keep budgets going. Ms. Beasley asked that as you pray for our Synod, please continue to pray for our congregations as well.

Ms. Beasley noted that in this time of virtual meetings and working from home she is having a hard time closing off from work, and this is not helpful. She expressed her thanks to the Synod staff for the amazing amount of work they are doing, even as we are working remotely. She encouraged the staff to not overwork.

Ms. Beasley also expressed her thanks to those of the Synod Council who are supporting other members of this board and the deans of their Conferences. She encouraged members to continue to offer such signs of support to each other.

She thanked Council members who are willing to stay on the board; your ongoing service is incredibly helpful to the Synod. Vice President Beasley also thanked Ms. Elizabeth Young, who has decided she is not able to continue beyond this meeting. Ms. Beasley stated Ms. Young has been an asset to this board.

Vice President Beasley concluded by reminding all to take care of each other, wear your masks, and continue to be safe.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Pastor Karl M. Richard, Secretary, began his report by presenting the Actions on the Roster.

Actions on the Roster

Term Call to congregation of a Full Communion Partner denomination:

S.C. 20.06.01. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the Rev. David Bruner as Pastor of Adult Discipleship and Intergenerational Mission (PADM) at Paoli Presbyterian Church, Paoli, Pennsylvania. This renewable term call is effective January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020. This call requires an annual report to and meeting with the synodical bishop for the length of this call.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Request to Move from On Leave Roster to Retired Roster:

S.C.20.06.02. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grants the Rev. David Oppold retirement status, effective June 1, 2020

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Requests to Move from Active Roster to Retired Roster

S.C.20.06.03. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grants the Rev. Susan Folks retirement status, effective June 1, 2020

S.C.20.06.04. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grants the Rev. Shirley Guider retirement status, effective July 1, 2020

S.C.20.06.05. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grants the Rev. Cynthia Krommes retirement status, effective September 1, 2020

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolutions.

Information Not Requiring Action

Transfers:

The Rev. David Brunner from Central/Southern Illinois Synod effective January 1, 2020
(*pending Synod Council call approval*)

The Rev. Carolann Hopcke to Nebraska Synod effective May 1, 2020

The Rev. Amy Hotter from New Jersey Synod effective May 26, 2020

Affirmation of email votes

Two votes had been taken via email since our last regular meeting of the Synod Council. One resolution was put forward to establish and account with the ELCA Federal Credit Union, and a

second resolution was put forward to authorize signatories for this account. Both resolutions had received approval by more than two-thirds of the membership of the Synod Council, with no negative votes presented.

S.C.20.06.06. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council affirms the email votes that established an account with the ELCA Federal Credit Union, and the authorized signatories of Bishop Patricia A. Davenport, Ms. Janet Neff, Mr. Martin Schwab, and Ms. Yvonne Curtis.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Proposed Amendment to the By-laws regarding Annual Synod Assembly

To honor the spirit of our constitution, by-laws, and continuing resolutions, while recognizing the impact events such as the current pandemic bring to fulfilling the letter of this governing document, the Executive Committee presents the following resolution:

S.C.20.06.07. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the following amendment to by-law S7.11.01. for presentation to the Synod Assembly for adoption:

A regular meeting of the Synod Assembly shall be held annually unless performance becomes impossible or impracticable, especially as a result of an event or effect that could not have been anticipated or controlled, such as a public health crisis; severe acts of nature or weather events including floods, fires, earthquakes, hurricanes, or explosions; war, acts of terrorism, and epidemics; acts of governmental authorities such as expropriation, condemnation, confinement orders/recommendations; strikes and labor disputes; or other such events that make the meeting impossible or impracticable.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Ms. Janet Neff, treasurer, shared the following from her written report.

Our receipts from congregations are down but we understand the difficulties many of our congregations are facing at this time. We have also had losses in our investments which has impacted our ability to meet our ministry goals. The loss in investment income has had an impact across our budget.

We have received funds from the Paycheck Protection Program in the amount of \$168,000. This came not from the ELCA Federal Credit Union, but from Wells Fargo.

We received a grant of \$7,500 from the ELCA to assist congregations during the pandemic. We also received \$35,000 from Lutheran Disaster Relief to assist congregations with their feeding ministries.

Mr. Albert Glenn, chair of the Finance Committee, made his report.

The Committee met in its capacity as providing oversight to the Synod's finances. They reviewed financial statements, and found no concerns. Thanks were expressed to Mr. Martin Schwab, the Synod's Senior Accountant, for his faithful work.

St. Petri-Hope

The Finance Committee discussed the concerns regarding the funds from the sale of the building of the former St. Petri-Hope. As opposed to the way our policy is established, St. Petri-Hope sent notes designating how the money from the sale of the congregation should be used. Our Synod policy states that when a property of a former congregation is sold, 15% of the proceeds are placed in the Synod's general fund, and then, following the payment of expenses of the remaining properties under management, the remainder of the other 85% goes to the Fund for Mission. The Board of Trustees of the Fund for Mission is then tasked with determining where those funds are used. The Committee discussed whether the designation from the former congregation should be seen as binding, or as a recommendation. The Committee does not see a need to ask for any action from the Synod Council in this matter. The Committee is looking at this in terms of oversight and transparency. One expenditure has gone to the desired purpose of the former congregation: funds of the Fund for Mission from the former St. Petri-Hope were tapped to assist a congregation in NE Philadelphia.

Mr. Schwab shared that the portion that covered the outstanding expenses of the other properties under management has been deducted.

Mr. Dave Ehret expressed his concern that, if we acquiesce to this arrangement, it may set a precedent, allowing other congregations to then determine what they want done with the money from the sale of their former buildings.

Mr. Everett Wick, member of the Finance Committee, stated the Committee has decided we do not want to accept money with restrictions.

Pastor Serena Sellers said that this has happened in the past, close to the time of the founding of the Fund. We do not want to encourage it, but we want to be sensitive in the midst of the difficult process of closing a congregation

Approval of funds from the Fund for Mission

Mr. Glenn described that, for some time, we have been using money from the Fund for Mission for the 03 Mission portion of our budget. We have drawn from the Fund for Mission to close the gap for this portion of the budget without approval of the Board of Trustees of the Fund for Mission.

The Committee discussed two issues regarding this:

1. Should this be happening without such authorization?
2. Should we use Fund for Mission money when there has been a surplus in the overall receipts of the budget, or should such surplus funds be used for the 03 Mission portion of the budget?

The purpose of the Fund for Mission is to fund new ministry initiatives that are brought to the Trustees of the Fund for Mission. The Committee did not make a decision on issue "2." The

Committee did address issue “1,” concurring that the process laid out in the Fund for Mission guidelines should be followed.

Bishop Davenport said there is a reason for process. We do want to follow the process and guidelines for future expenditures.

Mr. Ehret asked whether, or where, there is there an accounting of this Fund for the Council.

Ms. Sandra Zimmerman inquired as to how many years we have been using money from the Fund for Mission to close the deficit in the Mission portion.

Treasurer Neff said these expenditures have been in the 03 category of the budget. None of the money has been used for anything other than mission items. She said the reason it has not been approved by the Trustees of the Fund for Mission is that the Trustees have not met for a long time. Ms. Neff stated that we have not had any other expenses that were approved by the Trustees, as they have not met.

Bp. Davenport shared that in the past money from the Fund for Mission was used to cover staff salaries. That is no longer happening. We will now follow the process to build transparency and trust.

Seminary Debt

Mr. Glenn reminded the Council that in the current budget we have \$50,000 designated for assistance for rostered ministers saddled with seminary debt. The Finance Committee has developed a formula for distributing this money to those with need. Eighteen rostered ministers applied, and sixteen were eligible according to the guidelines adopted. The money will be allocated to each in proportion to the amount of current outstanding seminary debt. As the new budget continues to allocate \$50,000 for this purpose, we will be able to receive additional applications for debt assistance next year.

Vice President Beasley asked for a copy of the governing documents for the Fund for Mission so she can be clear about the requirements for the Trustees.

MISSION MOMENT:

Pastor Robert Fisher, Assistant to the Bishop for Communication and Mission Interpretation, presented the Mission Moment.

Pr. Fisher picked up on the question asked earlier in the meeting: “What exciting things are occurring in ministry around our Synod?” Pr. Fisher shared that many things are happening.

- He feels it is particularly exciting to see how leaders with no previous experience with technology have been creating wonderful virtual worship experiences.
- Many people from out of the area have been able to come into our congregations, and so evangelism is happening on-line.
- There has been an increase in on-line giving, to the point where some of our congregations are actually ahead of expenses at this time.

- Many congregations have stepped up their quilting efforts, and have been making masks for health care workers and fellow members in order to battle the corona-virus.
- And many food ministries have been stepping up to provide for those in need. For example, “Welcome Bread,” a program which started out of the Welcome Church, has been collecting so many sandwiches that they cannot use any more at this time.

To emphasize the power of these feeding ministries, Pr. Fisher shared video segments from four different programs in SEPA Synod.

Feast of Justice

Pastor Tricia Neale, Executive Director of Feast of Justice, which is based at St. John’s, Mayfair, shared about their ministry. As the pandemic came upon the nation, and the danger to staff and clients was seen to be so profound, the question was raised, “Do we close our doors? Or do we step up our efforts?” When they saw the great need in the Northeast, they knew they could not stop.

This program has exploded in size. Pre-pandemic, Feast of Justice fed 285 households each week. They are now one of the City’s “supersites.” The supersites are assisting 800 households, and Feast of Justice is serving an additional 900, for a total of 1,700 households per week. This has been an amazing faith journey. “Initially there was enormous doubt, but God told us that this is what we are here for, for such a time as this.”

Pottstown Cluster of Religious Communities

Barbara Wilhelmy, Executive Director, described this program. They formed 50 years ago as many religious organizations discovered they were all helping the community in similar ways. They focus on food security, housing stability, and a variety of educational efforts. They have learned that if the worship community and the community in general work together, they can have a greater impact. Pre Covid, they had 400+ families come to their site. Post Covid, they have seen a decrease in people coming to their site, and so they pushed their food distribution out to the neighborhoods that most need it. Pottstown school district provides free lunches to all children who need them. When the schools closed, the district set up 4 feeding sites at the 4 elementary schools around town. The Cluster paired with the schools, realizing that families with kids that need food also have adults that need food. So they set a program to bring food to those families.

The Lutheran congregations have been a strong part of this effort, especially Emmanuel, Pottstown which is a site for the program’s community meals. Emmanuel opens its building every Friday evening for these community meals. Originally these were served inside, but since the restrictions on gatherings have been implemented, they have been offering take away meals so people who rely on this meal can continue to receive it.

Emmanuel Lutheran, Souderton – “E-meals”

Pastor John Hiedgerd shared how Emmanuel, Souderton has played a large role in meeting the needs of food insecurity in the time of the shutdown. They decided to make paper bag meals to distribute, for free, to the community. Donations came in, and the ministry began quickly and organically. Partnerships were formed with community groups like the Indian Valley Boys and

Girls Clubs to work together to help feed the community. This program has not only helped those in need by distributing 17,000 meals so far, it has also energized the congregation around a signature ministry. This ministry has not been at the expense of Emmanuel's regular operation. People of the congregation have been supporting this ministry with gifts in addition to their regular offerings. In fact, Emmanuel has had an increase in regular offerings over last year. People in the community and in other churches have also supported this effort, and Emmanuel received a grant from SEPA Synod to make this happen. Through social ministry this has been marketed to the community, and the community has responded.

Christ, Upper Darby

Pastor Stephen Keiser shared the work they are doing in Eastern Delaware County. Even before the pandemic they had programs established with PhilAbundance to provide fresh produce to the community. Prior to the pandemic they were serving about 200 people each Friday morning. Post pandemic that number has grown to 300. PhilAbundance provides the food; they provide the volunteers.

Christ Lutheran also has an emergency food cabinet providing groceries to individuals in the community. Pre pandemic they assisted 3 households per week. They are now up to 10 households per week. They have received money from the Synod to assist with this so food can be available.

One new program since the pandemic is a Hot Meal program they are offering in cooperation with the Upper Darby Community Outreach Corporation. Every Tuesday and Thursday they either give out or deliver over 200 hot meals to the community. The money from the Synod has helped with this as well. Each evening's meal costs between \$400 and \$500.

God has been seen in the generosity of people in a most stressful time. Even as people have experienced deep grief and anxiety, they have still opened up to care for others in this time. Synod support and local support has been generous and helpful. In the midst of pandemic, and in the aftermath of the protests around George Floyd, we are helping people rebuild.

Vice President Beasley thanked Pr. Fisher for sharing about these ministries.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Constitution Committee

Pr. Sellers, chair of the Constitution Committee, said the committee did meet, has reviewed several constitutions, and has sent word back to congregations as to next steps needed. They are waiting to hear back from the congregations, and so do not have any need for action at this time.

Investment Committee

Mr. Dave Ehret, chair of the committee, shared that the Investment Funds have made a surprising comeback.

- As of May 31 we have seen a year to date increase of \$87,000 in our Vanguard unrestricted fund.
- Vanguard restricted funds are at \$875,000. A few expenditures were made for cemetery expenses.

- Including money added to the investments in January, investments in T. Rowe Price funds are up \$1,141,000.

The total portfolio of the Synod is valued, as of May 31, at \$6,903,638.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

None

Meeting adjourned at 6:07 p.m. with prayer by Pr. King

The next meeting of the SEPA Synod Council will be September 24, 2020 at 4:00 p.m., and will be held via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,
The Rev. Karl M. Richard, Secretary
Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA

Approved by Synod Council September 24, 2020