

MINUTES
of the 162nd MEETING
of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
Zoom Meeting
September 24, 2020
4:00 p.m.

DEVOTIONS

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley invited the Reverend Dr. William Flippin, Director for Evangelical Mission, to lead the Synod Council in devotions. Dr. Flippin spoke of the changing times in which we live and encouraged the Council to discern the times, and then be adaptive to the times. We need to continue to revise our practices to be relevant. We should be like the tribe of Issachar in 1st Chronicles 12:32: “from Issachar, men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.” This tribe was able to see where the culture and the times were going, offering early support to King David, having as a leader a woman, Deborah, when others would not. We need to move from our previous metrics and way of operating, and adapt to the new times. We need to move away from despair, and embrace enthusiasm for what God is doing. We need to recognize that God is restoring God’s appointed time.

CALL TO ORDER

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley called the 162nd 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 161st meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council were approved as presented.

SETTING THE AGENDA

The Synod Council adopted the Agenda for the 162nd meeting with the addition of the Nominating Committee to the Committee Reports.

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

Bishop Davenport thanked Dr. Flippin for his devotions. She highlighted that we need to let all people know that God is in control of this. But we are also people of action, and we need to be faithful in how we live in this time.

Meetings attended – questions solicited

Bishop Davenport shared that the days are busy and full of meetings, even as they are held remotely. On one day she had a communicator Zoom meeting, followed by a Faithful Innovation meeting, which then went to a meeting of the Conference of Bishops and then a special meeting of the Muhlenberg College Board, to a meeting with the African Descent Lutheran Association. The reality is that we all have so much going on. Bishop is mindful of this, and encourages each person of the Council to keep a healthy balance. Even as we need to step up our game in new ways to meet the current challenges, we should work hard to stay grounded.

Bishop said that her report is a reporting of these various meetings, which she attends on our behalf. So what questions does the Synod Council have about them that she can answer?

The Reverend Gwendolyn King asked if there is anything that has given the Bishop joy in the busy-ness.

Bishop is grateful for this Council, and the way in which the congregations of the Synod are actively living out the faith. Bishop asked about what our communities of faith are doing to combat the violence and racial injustice that is so present in our nation.

Some of the responses included keeping our doors open through feeding programs, recovery programs, and providing safe places for children to be off the streets. Conversations are being held with the police community to strengthen ties and understanding, to learn what is happening in our neighborhoods, and determine how we can be present for the vulnerable among us.

On October 8th there will be a rally “Taking a Stand against Violence.” Information will be available soon.

The issues we face are global. There are fires and floods in our nation, and there are fires and floods in Sudan. The pandemic and climate change are affecting not just the United States, but the world. We need to push and to pray, until something happens.

The Reverend Serena Sellers asked if there is an update on Bishop Munga and our companion synod, the North East Diocese of Tanzania.

Bishop said that the word on Bishop Munga is good. A video of his progress was shared with her, and showed him up and walking around the yard. As for the Diocese, we have not yet heard about the progress regarding the election of their next bishop. The pandemic is certainly impacting them and their ability to meet. The amount of fresh air meeting space they have will be helpful for them.

Bishop also noted that the at the Churchwide level strategies are still moving forward to address the reality and effects of systemic racism. Among the items that have been discussed is the possibility of supporting reparations as a part of the response.

Sexual Misconduct Policy

As part of her report, the Bishop yielded her time to the Reverend Dr. Delores Littleton, advisor to the Bishop on fitness for ministry, who led the Synod Council in a conversation on the latest draft revisions to the Sexual Misconduct Policy. Dr. Littleton leads the Healthy Boundaries workshops for Rostered Ministers, and this document is a key piece of her work on behalf of the SEPA Synod.

Dr. Littleton shared that not much of the content has changed. It has been revised to fit current language of rostered ministers, and has removed language from the former “Visions and Expectations,” which is no longer in effect. In place of the language from “Visions and Expectations” language from the document “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline” has been added. She then asked the Council for their questions and comments.

Mr. Phil Tackett questioned the last line on the first page, where it says “the synod reserves the right to depart from these policies and guidelines whenever the synod deems appropriate.” He stated this allowance feels overly broad.

Dr. Littleton replied that there are 10 responses the bishop does follow, but each case is unique, and so we need to be able to work through these with as much discretion as possible. One size does not fit all situations.

Pr. Sellers suggested we revise the sentence to read, “the synod will follow the guidelines in this document whenever possible, and yet there will be times when we need to depart from them.”

The Reverend Matt Staniz suggested it may be a more simple change to add the words “necessary and” before “appropriate.”

Bishop Davenport noted that whenever we feel a need to depart from the guidelines we consult ELCA general counsel Tom Cunniff before proceeding.

Mr. Albert Glenn asked if the definitions under “*Sexual Matters*” are set, or if we have some discretion in the wording. He expressed his feeling that they do not make provision for non-married persons.

Bishop Davenport responded that we are not able to alter that section, as it is from an ELCA document. We do, however, have some discretion in how we apply these expectations.

Mr. Glenn replied that this is helpful, but he believes there is a difference between something over which we have discretion, and something that is a violation of the guidelines.

Dr. Littleton noted that the last line on the first page, which is currently under discussion, gives the bishop leeway to deal with this issue as seems necessary.

Mr. David Ehret asked if there is anything that alerts another synod if there is an instance of sexual misconduct.

Dr. Littleton answered yes. The bishops have a process to send word to each other regarding issues of misconduct, both sexual and other instances of misconduct beyond this document’s concern.

Bishop Davenport reiterated this, saying the bishops have an understanding among themselves, “if you know something, say something.” It is a part of the mobility process.

Pr. Staniz moved: that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council amend the draft SEPA Synod Policy Statement on Sexual Misconduct by adding to the last sentence on the first page the words “necessary and” prior to the word “appropriate.”

The Synod Council adopted the motion.

Dr. Littleton asked if there were any further questions or items to discuss. As there were none, she thanked the Synod Council for their consideration, and said she will use this document as amended in her ongoing work with the Synod.

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley referenced the three reports that had been submitted to the Council in their packets. She asked if there were any questions regarding them. There were no questions raised.

Vice President Beasley then asked the Council “What joys or concerns are you experiencing in this time?”

Pr. King said the congregation she is serving (St. Stephen’s, Feasterville) is working well to consider how they will be open and active. Pr. King shared that she has been working with many people in her congregation, colleagues across the Synod, and making inquiries beyond the Synod with colleagues in Chicago, California, Colorado and Texas, to gather information from a wide variety of sources to help make grounded and informed decisions.

Ms. Joyce Maloney shared that Trinity, South Philadelphia, has been opened as a facility where families with children may have a place to go.

The Reverend Dr. Jennifer Phelps shared that she and the folks at Trinity, Perkasie are seeing much of the stress that is hitting families as the fall comes, the pandemic continues, and school begins, but are also seeing signs of hope that folks are still working to remain strong.

Pr. Sellers noted that information from Lutheran Disaster Response says that after 6 months people hit a wall. Knowing this helps us to normalize this stress, and we can say “yes, this is normal.” That can help us know we are OK.

Ms. Doreen Kinzler shared that St. John’s in Mayfair is continuing its partnership with Feast of Justice food ministry, and continuing to care for people in the neighborhood as well as in their congregation.

Mr. William Graham shared that Prince of Peace has been back to in-person worship since the first Sunday in July. The only conflict: the congregation wants to sing. Mr. Graham was not in favor, but the congregation is singing with masks. Pr. Cornelius Eaddy is doing a great job, and everyone loves Pr. Eaddy.

Mr. Adam Clark shared that Zion in Olney is still doing worship on-line only, via zoom, and people can call in as they wish. They are discussing when to come back in-person. Many members of the congregation are elderly, and are at high risk. They have voted to stay on-line, but after Zoom worship those who wish may come to the church to receive communion from the pastor. They are discovering that many people do not know how to properly wear a mask, and they feel they cannot put people at risk this way.

Vice President Beasley thanked all for sharing their experiences. She also noted that Pr. Bob Fisher, Assistant to the Bishop for Communications and Mission Interpretation, has been hosting a gathering of people to share what is being done across the Synod, so all can learn from each other. Thank you, Pr. Fisher.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Actions on the Roster

The Reverend Karl M. Richard, Secretary, presented the following actions on the Roster:

On Leave Extension Request to ELCA Conference of Bishops:

S.C.20.09.01. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT Deacon Laura Book be granted Family Leave from the ELCA Conference of Bishops, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council request approval of this Family Leave from the ELCA Conference of Bishops Roster Committee.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Invitation to UCC Minister to Serve ELCA Congregation in SEPA Synod:

S.C.20.09.02. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve entry rite, Invitation to Extended Service, for the Rev. Dr. Karyn L. Wiseman at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Huntingdon Valley, PA beginning October 1, 2020 until September 30, 2021. This invitation is renewable annually by Synod Council.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Call to Specialized Ministry:

S.C.20.09.03. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend a one-year renewable call to Specialized Ministry to the Rev. Sabrina LaBelle beginning August 1, 2020 to July 31, 2021.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Call to Interim Ministry:

S.C.20.09.04. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the Rev. Susan M. Lang to interim ministry at Christ, Trumbauersville, PA beginning June 1, 2020, and extending until a pastor is called by the congregation or until Pastor Lang resigns this call, whichever comes first.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Requests to move from Active Roster to On Leave from Call Roster:

S.C.20.09.05. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend on leave from call status to the Rev. Dwight Mason, second year, effective August 26, 2020

S.C.20.09.06. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend on leave from call status to the Rev. Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld, first year, effective August 5, 2020

S.C.20.09.07. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend on leave from call status to the Rev. Katherine Steinly, first year, effective August 17, 2020

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolutions.

Information Not Requiring Action

Transfers:

The Rev. Cynthia D. Muse *to* Southwestern Washington Synod effective June 30, 2019

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

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

The Rev. Sabrina LaBelle *from* Pacifica Synod effective Aug.1, 2020 (*pending Synod Council call approval*)

The Rev. Harold W. Bixby *from* Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod effective Aug. 31, 2020

The Rev. Adrienne Meier *to* Indiana-Kentucky Synod effective September 8, 2020

Virtual Meetings for Congregations

Secretary Richard shared with the Synod Council that a set of Guidelines is being developed to assist congregations with how to hold virtual meetings and votes to continue their work safely during the pandemic. As it is developed it will be shared with the Deans and posted for congregations to access.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER:

Ms. Janet Neff, treasurer, highlighted the following from her written reports.

Mission Support

Mission Support from congregations through August is below projections by \$98,000. She believes this is due largely to the financial constraints from the pandemic. By comparison, Mission Support from congregations through August 2019 was below projections by only \$7,000.

Ms. Neff will be hosting a Zoom meeting for treasurers to check in and see how they are doing. The hope is that as people begin to return to their buildings there may be an increase in support. In this meeting with treasurers Ms. Neff will be mentioning about our Covid-19 fund, and share with them how they can apply if they need assistance.

Paycheck Protection Program

We have received \$168,000 from the federal Paycheck Protection Program, and that is helping with the day-to-day expenses of the Synod, particularly salaries.

Investments

We have had significant gains in our investments, and that has helped our revenue stream. We have also had a reduction in expenses, particularly in travel and other items, which have saved about \$49,000.

Overall we are in good financial position, with assets of \$7.6 million, versus liabilities of \$66,000.

Healing the Heart Fund

We have had a strong response to this fund, with nearly \$17,000 contributed to date. Most of this money has been disbursed to assist Bishop Munga. The rest will be sent as we are able to determine to what agency we need to send it.

Designated Funds

Mr. Ehert asked about the status of the \$7,000 in scholarships for members of the former Resurrection, Havertown.

Ms. Neff shared that we have moved this amount to the Fund for Leaders, per the guidance of the original document regarding these funds.

Mr. Ehret asked further if there is a way to put a sunset provision in other such restricted funds so we can move them after a period of time.

Ms. Neff answered that it depends on how the fund was established. Generally if there is to be a change to a restricted fund it would need to come to Synod Council for a vote to change its allocation.

Mr. Ehret said he wanted to make sure there are not funds that are lost in the shuffle, and suggested this be considered for future funds as they are established.

Expense for Property in Norristown

Vice President Beasley asked about the note of a \$43,000 expense for the property of the former Grace, Norristown.

Ms. Neff shared that the code enforcement officer of the borough hit us with fines if we did not do certain improvements to the facility, specifically painting the exterior of the building.

REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Mr. Glenn, chair of the Finance Committee, shared the report.

The Finance Committee met in September and reviewed the financial statements. All the reports and transactions seemed in order.

Fund for Mission

The main topic of discussion at the meeting was whether there should be a reconsideration of how we are using the Fund for Mission. In particular, the conversation centered around the question of whether this Fund should be transitioned to an Endowment.

The Fund for Mission had been established by action of the Synod Council. Would changing this Fund to an Endowment too drastically alter the way this fund was intended to be used? Would such a change limit the availability of funds? There is no recommendation from the Committee at this time.

Secretary Richard and Pr. Sellers gave clarification of how money is placed in the Fund for Mission. After a property of a former congregation is received by the Synod, the Bishop is authorized to designate the sale of the property. When a property is sold, 15% of the net sales price (that is, following closing costs) goes to the general, Unrestricted Fund of the Synod. From the remaining 85%, the debts incurred for all properties under management are cleared. Then the amount remaining from the sale goes to the Fund for Mission.

MISSION MOMENT

The Reverend Dr. Guy Erwin, former Bishop of the Southwest California Synod, ELCA and newly elected President of the United Lutheran Seminary, was welcomed to give the Mission Moment.

President Erwin began his remarks.

Thank you – and it is great to be in this position. I feel like I have landed on my feet, even as it has only been 7 weeks. Currently I am living in an apartment over the Synod Office. Bishop can tap on the ceiling with a broom and I will be there.

It is a great joy to be in one of the 5 diverse synods in the ELCA. I hope we can make some “Good Trouble” together as the Church. My husband and I have not yet found a church home, but are looking for one.

I have met your ADLA chapter, and was thrilled to be asked to be a preacher for the Martin Luther King, Jr. program. We are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Urban Theological Institute. We have a wake-up call to our very white church to confront racism at every level. We are starting the process to bring on a person to deal with issues of diversity and inclusion.

As an institution coping with the Pandemic I believe we are doing well. We have been entirely on-line this semester, something that began last semester. While this is going well, we long for the day when we can be together. It was quite a time to for my husband and me to move across the country to this area. We are being cautious, but venturing out to see the area and get a feel for it. I am grateful for the partnership with SEPA Synod.

As we go forward as a seminary we want to both raise the salaries, and increase the diversity, of our faculty. We are rethinking what theological education means in this time. We want to make lifelong learning opportunities available to more people – lay as well as rostered.

When the board asked which of the honorary named chairs I wanted with my name, I said the Ministerium of Pennsylvania chair. It is the second oldest chair, but it emphasizes the long-standing relationship we have together in this area. I am most proud of this title.

Mr. Glenn asked how enrollment is this year, both in terms of numbers and diversity.

President Erwin shared that we are slightly higher in enrollment, although some students have deferred because of the pandemic. We are hoping for them to return next year. I am pleased with how strongly our D. Min program has been received at this time. I look forward to a long and healthy relationship.

Bishop Davenport thanked President Erwin for his presentation, and prayed for him and the Seminary community.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Forward Together in Faith

Vice President Beasley gave a reminder that the deadline for grant applications for the coming year is October 31st. Grants will be distributed January 31st, 2021

Constitution Committee

No report

Investment committee

Mr. Dave Ehret, chair of the Investment Committee, shared we have a current gain of \$636,000. \$383,820 was reinvested in the beginning of September.

The total Investment Portfolio stands at \$7,770,836

He asked the Council for any questions.

Vice President Beasley noted the portion of the T Rowe Price funds dedicated for the Synod Vitality Team. Is that new?

Mr. Ehret replied that this is about 2 years old. It has been held in a money market account.

Nominating Committee

The Reverend Lydia Posselt, chair of the Nominating Committee, noted we have many positions to fill. We need names for last year's open seats, this year's coming changes, and voting members for the next Churchwide Assembly in 2022. We will need all hands to help to fill the many positions. We need to reflect the diversity of our Synod in all these positions. She reminded the members we cannot accept more than one nomination from any one congregation on Synod Council. She further reminded them that according to our policy, a person may serve on Synod Council, as a Dean, or as a member of the Candidacy Committee. If they are in one position and are nominated to serve in another, they will need to choose in which area they wish to serve.

Mr. Henry Geyer asked about those who filled out forms last year – do they need to re-submit for the upcoming Synod Assembly?

Pr. Posselt said the Committee will follow up with those people to see if they are still willing to be considered. If they are, she does not expect they will have to re-submit their forms. All members of the Council whose terms are ending are encouraged to consider if they are willing to serve another term and if so, to submit their paperwork to the Committee.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

Pr. Gwendolyn King asked if it is appropriate to offer an announcement as new business. She was given permission, and she announced that members of the Synod Council should check the

United Lutheran Seminary website for an event recognizing the 40th anniversary of women of color and the 50th anniversary of women.

Bishop Davenport requested a moment of personal privilege: She said, “Thank you for your holding the synod staff in prayer in these unusually difficult times.” She expressed profound thanks to Sr. Accountant Martin Schwab; Director of Operations Ms. Yvonne Curtis; Assistants to the Bishop Pr. Sease, Pr, Fisher, and Director of Evangelical Mission Dr. Flippin; Ms. Cynta Outterbridge and Ms. Mercedes Lee for doing double duty – assisting Dr. Flippin, but also covering Youth ministry while we have a vacancy in this area.

Bishop also expressed thanks to Pr. King for representing not just her congregation but also the Synod Council in so many ways; and Mr. Bert Glenn and the Finance Committee for considering how we can more effectively work with what we have as a Synod.

Mr. Bill Graham encouraged the Synod Council to get out and vote. This is our greatest constitutional obligation. All the veterans want is not flowers, but that we get out and vote.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

Pr. Phelps closed meeting at 6:10 with prayer.

The next meeting of the SEPA Synod Council will be December 10, 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 December 10, 2020