

MINUTES
of the 165th MEETING
of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
Zoom Meeting
April 8, 2020
4:00 p.m.

DEVOTIONS

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley invited the Mr. Everett Wick to lead the Synod Council in devotions. Mr. Wick based his devotion on John 20:19 – 23, where the disciples are locked in the “upper room” in fear following the crucifixion of Jesus. He noted parallels to today, where we are in troubled times, and many are confused and afraid. What are our fears and concerns at this time? What can we do? How can we see the power of the Resurrection in these days? How can we, like the disciples, finally move from fear to proclaiming the good news of Jesus and his power over all things, even death, even our fears? In this passage Jesus calms the disciples by saying, “Peace be with you.” He then breathes the Holy Spirit on the disciples and commissions them. As he said to the original disciples, so Jesus says to us, “Peace be with you.” And then, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” We need to go and speak this good news to a fearful world.

CALL TO ORDER

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley called the 165th meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 4:31 p.m.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the 164th of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council were approved as presented.

SETTING THE AGENDA

The Synod Council adopted the Agenda for the 165th meeting as presented.

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

Bishop Davenport thanked Mr. Wick for his devotion, calling us to speak out about Jesus.

Thank you, Synod Council

Bishop thanked the Synod Council for its ongoing work in lifting up the Name of Jesus. She expressed particular thanks to those whose terms are ending with the April 24th Assembly. Among those who are not eligible for re-election, Bishop thanked Pastor Laura Tancredi, Ms. Joyce Maloney, and Mr. Philip Tackett. She also thanked those whose terms are ending, and are eligible and willing to stand for re-election, which include Vice President Tracey Beasley, Pastor Joseph Klinger, Pastor Serena Sellers, Mr. Albert Glenn, Mr. Everett Wick, and Ms. Sandra Zimmermann. And she also expressed her gratitude to those who have chosen not to stand for re-election; Mr. Tyler Emig, Ms. Hanna Malesich, Pastor Matt Staniz, and Ms. Suwah Davies.

Mr. Henry Geyer is also among those who will not stand for re-election because he is moving from our territory. We wish him well in his move.

Churchwide Happenings

Conference of Bishops

The Conference continues to meet virtually each week, building relationships, welcoming new members, and saying farewell to those whose service is ending.

Document on Discipline

Among the items the Conference of Bishops is addressing is the ongoing revision of the document for discipline of Rostered Ministers. The LGBTQIA+ community has expressed concerns, but their input is being heard for the re-write. There will also be language to address retired persons who are not honoring their covenant to move on after they end their call. In the document there will be provision for a Bishop to use discretion in matters of discipline, making allowances for those who may be holding to the spirit, if not the letter, of the “law.”

The document will be voted on later this month.

Immigration Concerns

There was also a conversation with LIRS regarding programming for fostering children. We need to reinstitute some programs for helping unaccompanied minors as they enter the country.

Authentic Diversity Advisory Team

The primary function of the ADAT is to support the Task Force for Strategic Authentic Diversity in their quest to fulfill the resolution adopted at our 2016 Churchwide Assembly to address the challenge of becoming an authentically multiethnic, multicultural church. The quest was recently attacked in the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, which was dealt with swiftly by our team calling for a meeting and a response as noted in the latest issue.

How do we face our fears? Forget Everything And Rise! The Churchwide Assembly says we are going one direction; then two writers challenge this direction. The Team has pushed back to say NO, this is where we are!

Mr. Albert Glenn asked about the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* – is this a mainstream journal, or a fringe publication?

Pastor Gwendolyn King said it is a theological journal of the ELCA, and the author of the article, Ted Peters, is a Lutheran theologian.

Bishop Davenport noted if you read his article and the two letters that were in response to his article, you will see that he is just wrong. Representatives from the *Journal* came to address the Authentic Diversity team and were apologetic, but they did not describe any ramifications for Dr. Peters. They sent three white people to defend a white author and defend the system.

Still, this encounter provided a chance to bring to the fore the work that needs to take place and address the hurt that exists for persons of color.

Ecumenical Happenings

Ecumenical leaders in the *Religious Leaders Council* of Interfaith Philadelphia continue to meet to discuss issues related to the pandemic, poverty, and food scarcity. They continue efforts to address gun violence, particularly through the “Heeding God’s Call” initiative. How do we break this? It is about how we show up. We can show up and be negative, or we can show up and be positive, in our witness, in our love and respect for all our people. We need to declare that resorting to violence and guns is not how we live. We live in unity and harmony, we respond with love and not hate, and not killing each other. The neighborhood and the religious communities are striving to work together to say this has got to stop.

Synod Happenings

Communications

Pastor Bob Fisher, Assistant to the Bishop for Communications and Mission Interpretation, has been hosting a weekly meeting for congregational communicators. In this people are sharing what they are doing to continue ministry during the ongoing pandemic. We still need to encourage safe practices and wearing of masks.

Lay Leaders

Bishop thanked Vice President Beasley for meeting with the lay leaders of our congregations. It was a well attended, and well received meeting for these lay leaders.

Assistance for Rostered Ministers

Ms. Barb Debski of Portico Benefits provided a program on “Sabbath” for our Synod’s rostered ministers, focusing on the need to care for yourself as you are caring for others.

Dr. Stephen Treat provided two sessions to offer support to our rostered ministers. Among the topics discussed were self-care, challenges of Covid, anxiety and depression, and dealing with isolation.

Food Ministries

Many of our congregations have “upped their game” in feeding ministries. Emmanuel, Souderton has passed 90,000 E-meals distributed to the community; St. Mark’s, Philadelphia, Feast of Justice, St, Peter’s Oak Lane, Olney, and Tabor have all been doing significant work in feeding the hungry. The Lutheran Tribe is saying, “Pandemic, get out of our way! We are doing what God has called us to do.”

Prayer Concerns

Pastor Bill Vanderslice died suddenly, and we grieve his loss. Before he died he planned his own memorial service, another example of his caring for people even as he went to the Lord. We also mourn the passing of a former SEPA pastor, John Cochran, who always called us to faithful work and witness to Jesus. Pastor Rich Stewart had emergency surgery, and needs prayer, and Pastor John Carlson has contracted Covid-19, but is recovering.

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Vice President Beasley referenced the proposal in her report that would move the meeting time of Synod Council from 4:00 – 7:00 p.m. to 6:00 – 9:00 p.m., and to have three of the five

meetings remain on Zoom, rather than travel across the Synod for each meeting. She asked members their opinions on the proposed change.

Pastor Joey Klinger noted that it was difficult to fill nominations for Synod Council because of the time of the meetings. A move to start in the evening may assist us in getting people who have day jobs to serve without impacting their work schedules.

Pastor Serena Sellers noted that in congregational life meetings are in the evenings, and for her this change would make serving more difficult.

Mr. Phil Tackett shared that one of the things he has appreciated in his time on the Synod Council is the chance to move around the Synod and see the various churches and their ministries. It has also been an honor for congregations to host the Synod Council.

Ms. Beasley noted that she is blessed that her job can let her move her time, but not everyone can.

Mr. Wick stated a change to 6:00 would be beneficial for him, not because of work, but scheduling would be easier.

Pr. King asked if this change is for the long term, or short term because of Covid-19.

Ms. Beasley said it would be long term regarding the time, and Zoom at least through the pandemic.

Ms. Janet Neff asked about doing a hybrid format. When restrictions lift might we still want to use Zoom going forward?

It was moved that we accept the proposal as it is, with the understanding that we will evaluate Zoom use as we go forward and restrictions are lifted.

The Synod Council approved the motion. The time change will take affect with the June meeting of the Synod Council.

Vice President Beasley invited Ms. Carrie Schwab to give an update on the Synod Assembly.

Ms. Schwab shared that we have low registration for Assembly so far. There are 27 churches unaccounted for in Assembly participation.

Mr. Glenn note that some churches do not have settled pastors.

Ms. Schwab acknowledged that, but they would still have lay voting members to send to the Assembly.

There is a packet of information going out to those who have registered with what you need to do and how to participate.

April 22nd at 7:00 p.m. will be the main time we need voting members to attend to be trained on the LUMI platform we will use for the Assembly.

Three resolutions have been sent to Reference and Counsel for consideration.
Four requests for scholarships were received this year; all were granted.
There will be links to sign up for the two pre-discussions – 4/13 on the Constitution, 4/20 on the budget. Both presentations will be at 7:00 p.m.
ELCA Representative Phil Hersch does feel the time we have allotted is sufficient for his presentation to the Assembly.

We need more volunteers to help with the help desk. We need a few for the whole day, but a few just for the first couple hours.

Pastor Jenn Phelps asked if this is a remote job, or on site?

Ms. Schwab said it is remote: questions will be directed to the people to address.

Pr. Phelps – do we need these people to be voting members?

Ms. Schwab – it is better if they are not, so voting members can focus on the meeting.

Ms. Sandra Zimmerman – what time do these people need to be available?

Ms. Schwab – 8:00 a.m. They will need to be online slightly before that.

Vice President Beasley thanked Ms. Schwab for the update.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Secretary Richard gave an update on the proposed easement for a pipeline to cross the property of Bear Creek Camp. The proposal is being reviewed by our Synod Attorney. The questions raised by Synod Council are being asked, and we anticipate the proposal being set to come to the Synod Council at the June meeting

Actions on the Roster

Secretary Richard brought forward the following actions on the Roster.

All were adopted without objection by the Synod Council.

Renewal of Term Call

S.C.21.04.01. 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, 2021 through December 31, 2021. This call requires an annual report to and meeting with the synodical bishop for the length of this call.

Renewal of Call to Specialized Ministry

S.C.21.04.02. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend a one-year renewable call to Specialized Ministry to the Rev. Ghislaine Cotnoir beginning May 15, 2021 to May 14, 2022.

Renewal of Call to Unusual Circumstances

S.C.21.04.03. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council, in accord with bylaw 7.41.15., in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, renew a call as Spiritual Director to the Rev. Leslie M. Richard under *Unusual Circumstance* for a period of one-year effective June 1, 2021.

On Leave from Call Request

S.C.21.04.04. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend on leave from call status to the Rev. DeBorah GLod, second year, effective May 1, 2021.

Information not requiring action

Death

The Rev. William A. Vanderslice, March 24, 2021

Request to elect a member to the United Lutheran Seminary Board of Trustees

S.C.21.04.05. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council elect Mr. Christopher Mondics to a second term on the United Lutheran Seminary Board of Trustees, term ending 2023.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution without objection.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

Ms. Janet Neff, treasurer, noted that we are only one month into the new fiscal year, and so there is not much of a trend on which to report. At this point Mission Support is over budget by \$20,000, and expenses are lower than budgeted. With more resources in than out, we are doing well, but again, this early in the year it is not enough to call a trend.

MISSION MOMENT

Pr. Gwendolyn King, co-chair of the Anti-Racism Team, presented the Mission Moment. Pr. King was joined in the presentation by other members of the Anti-Racism Team, including Pr. Susie Folks, co-chair; Ms. Fern Hagedorn; and Pr. Serena Sellers.

Pr. King noted that the four of them represent one-third of the Team, which has 12 members in total at this time. She thanked the Council for the opportunity to present on the Team's efforts, and its primary mission in the Synod.

She began by saying we the Anti-Racism Team is a faith-based group within the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, and all are volunteers. The work of the Anti-Racism Team (ART) is anti-racist education that leads to action. To emphasize the biblical grounding of the Team's work, each member shared a piece of scripture with a brief explanation of its connection to Anti-Racism education.

Pr. Susie Folks read Genesis 1:26 – 31 "Let us make humankind in our image..."

Pr. King expanded: All humans are created in the image of God. God calls the creation "good." Racism says that one group is better than another, and therefore is against the created order.

Pr. King read Galatians 3:27 – 28 "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Pr. King expanded: Racism contradicts the call of baptism, where all are one in Christ.

Ms. Fern Hagedorn read Ephesians 2:11 – 22 “So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth...were at that time without Christ, being aliens...and strangers to the covenants of promise...But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ...So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone...”

Pr. King: Christ breaks down walls that separate us. Racism separates us, and therefore is contrary to the work of Christ.

Pr. Sellers read Revelation 5:8-14 “...You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God...”

Pr. King: For every tribe and nation, God’s plan is that we gather to worship around the throne. Racism works against this truth.

This is the understanding of the ART; anti-racist education that leads to action. Racism is a sin and stands against God’s plan and God’s kingdom. We consider this to be sacred work.

Pr. King offered some history to the creation of the ART:

- In 1993 the ELCA Social Statement “Freed in Christ...” was shared.
- In May of 2009 SEPA Synod brought into existence a task force to bring understanding and knowledge of racism, and steps to be an actively anti-racist church. Ms. Inez Torres-Davis (formerly an Associate in Ministry and now a Deacon in the ELCA), came to SEPA Synod to train us in anti-racism understanding and techniques. She has been the Director for Justice of the Women of the ELCA since 1997, the year the Women of the ELCA declared themselves an anti-racist organization.
- 2011 SEPA Synod stated its desire to be an anti-racist organization.
- June of 2016 brought a reconstitution of the Racial Justice task force, and Pr. Chris Weidner was named the task force leader. This team reconnected with Deacon Torres-Davis for further training.
- 2019 Churchwide Assembly issued a repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery.
- 2019 Churchwide Assembly issued the Apology to Persons of African Descent.

Pr. Sellers interjected that, for those who are not aware, which is most Americans, the Doctrine of Discovery was a series of Papal Bulls that said those who were not Christian could have their property and persons confiscated. This led to perpetual indentured servitude, or slavery. This was not started with the government, but with the Church. Knowing this history is not just academic. It gives a chance to understand what is happening and see how this is impacting life and people right in front of us. This can move us to change how we respond.

Pr. King resumed.

The SEPA Synod Assembly passed a requirement for rostered leaders to undergo anti-racism training as regularly as boundary training.

We want to do this training, but also want to have other opportunities for people to be able to gather in other settings to discuss and learn. For instance, we have had a few book studies. One was discussing America's Original Sin, by Jim Wallis. This 6-session study was held in June and July of 2020.

The second discussed Waking Up White, by Debbie Irving. This was a 4-session study, held January and February of 2021.

Our Team has been meeting with ARTs of other synods, including the North Carolina Synod and Metro New York Synod. Pastor Linda Manson, who recently served in SEPA Synod and a member of ART, has invited us to work with Metro NY Synod. Pr. Manson also said that in Metro NY, the team is paid. Our ART is finding we lack credibility in some circles because we are all volunteers. The question from other teams is, "Do we as a Synod put our money where our mouth is." We are doing more than anyone else, but we were the only group without a budget. Others evaluate us as how seriously we are taken if we do not have a budget.

The ART is planning an open house in May for those who would like to know more about our team and the work we are doing, or how to get this training into the congregations. SEPA Synod also has resources we have been using and offer to the Synod.

Ms. Fern Hagedorn described some of the education the ART has been providing via Facebook and blog posts. The Team is grateful to Pr. Fisher who has helped with the posting, and who has kept an archive of them. Ms. Hagedorn asked how many of the Council have joined the Facebook group, and encouraged those who have not to sign up for it. In response to these posts the ART has received comments like 'Why wasn't I taught that in school?' and 'I never knew what white privilege meant.' These comments demonstrate that we are making an impact.

Pr. King noted there are some events marked on the calendar of the ELCA which are coming soon, including:

- Juneteenth, which this year is Saturday, June 19th, is now on the calendar of observations.
- A commemoration of the "Emmanuel 9", those killed in Mother Emmanuel AME Zion Church in Charleston, SC, is June 17th.

In addition, Tuesday, June 1st, marks the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Massacre, where as many as 300 Blacks were killed in an attack by white supremacists on "Black Wall Street."

On May 25, 2020, when George Floyd was killed there was an increase in interest in congregations and among members in how we can know more and address this systemic racism. What has been happening in your congregations?

Pr. Sellers: At Christ, Kulpville, we had members in marches, and we included prayers in our services.

Pr. Matt Staniz: St Luke's Devon has posted sermons and prayers about systemic racism.

Bishop Davenport: Some of our rostered ministers have peacefully protested. Some were bold enough to proclaim God's love and were able to quote publicly and at personal threat.

Pr. King: Our bishop has been a strong proponent of our work. We want to have helpful conversation about race. We want to be moved to action for racial justice. It is in keeping with God's plan that this sin be broken, and justice and love be restored.

Pr. Folks stated the Team name was changed from "Racial Justice" to "Anti-Racism" because you cannot do racial justice until you recognize the sin. And this is not a "one and done" enterprise. It needs continual education, self-examination, and work.

In Waking Up White, Debbie Irving says, "You need to be able to confess that you don't know what you don't know." Do not make people of color explain things to you. Seek out mixed communities to help you grow.

Pr. Sellers encouraged members of the Council to ask the question in your congregations. Have our rostered ministers taken the anti-racism training/education?

Mr. Glenn asked, "If the answer is no, but they would like to, how do they go about this?"

Pr. King said have them email us at antiracism@sepa.org and we can let them know when the next training event is.

Ms. Hagedorn emphasized that the team needs more workers. If you, or someone you know, is willing to make the commitment to join in this work, please let us know.

Pr. Folks closed the session with prayer.

Bishop Davenport thanked the Anti-Racism Team for their work on behalf of our Synod.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Audit Committee

Mr. Phil Tackett, Chairperson, presented the report on the Audit. He noted that the Report is in the packet. He highlighted the following things:

- There is sufficient cash on hand to meet expenses.
- While congregational giving was down last year, the decrease was less than it has been in previous years. With congregations not worshipping in person, and struggling because of the pandemic, this decrease could be expected.
- The Paycheck Protection Program loan received by the Synod has been forgiven, and the amount of the loan is now considered an asset.
- We have eliminated depreciation as a line item in the budget, as we have cleared those items.
- The audit does provide an accurate representation of the Synod's financial position.

Mr. Tackett asked that the Synod Council approve the audit for submission to the Synod Assembly.

S.C.21.04.06. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the Audit Report to be submitted to the Synod Assembly for reception. **The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.**

Investment Committee

Mr. David Ehret, chairperson, shared the status of the Synod's investments.

- The T. Rowe Price Real-estate fund has been liquidated, and the proceeds split between the existing Science and Technology Fund and a new fund, the Blue Chip Growth Fund.
- The T. Rowe Price Large Cap Core Fund has been liquidated, and the proceeds placed in the Blue Chip Growth Fund.
- Year to date we have a gain of 4.5%

The total Investment Portfolio stands at \$9,340,818.

Nominating Committee

Pr. Joey Klinger noted that we have one last minute nominee in addition to those in the submitted report. Mr. Graeme Brown has agreed to stand for Lay Man, Young Adult.

Pr. King asked that her name in the report be Gwendolyn, not Gwen.

Mr. Glenn noted that there are two “n”s at the end of his name, where the report has only one.

Pr. Klinger said he would be sure to correct those errors for the report to the Assembly.

Constitution Report

Pr. Serena Sellers brought forward the request that the Synod Council approve the Constitution of St. John, Mayfair. There are some typos in the document, but none that would interfere with its implementation.

S.C.21.04.07. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the Constitution of St. John Lutheran Church, Mayfair, Philadelphia.
The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

The meeting adjourned at 6:56 p.m. with prayer by Vice President Beasley.

The next meeting of the SEPA Synod Council will be June 17, 2021, at 6:00 p.m., and will be held via Zoom.

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

Approved by Synod Council June 17, 2021