

MINUTES
of the 158th MEETING
of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
United Lutheran Seminary, Philadelphia Campus
7301 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia, PA
December 12, 2019

WELCOME AND DEVOTIONS

The Reverend Jane Marston, Dean of the NE/nW Philadelphia Conference, welcomed the Synod Council and led devotions: Lessons and Prayers for Advent.

CALL TO ORDER

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley called the 158th meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 4:14 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the 32nd Annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod were approved as presented, with one spelling correction of “McMullan.”

The minutes of the 157th meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council were approved as presented.

SETTING THE AGENDA

The Synod Council adopted the Agenda for the 158th meeting as presented.

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

Bishop Davenport noted that all had received her report, and asked if there were any questions regarding the report, or any other issue whatsoever.

The Reverend Serena Sellers asked if there is a process set for the restructuring of the Synod Staff.

Bishop Davenport said there is. Job descriptions have been revised. The current staff is using a team approach so nothing falls through the cracks in the midst of the restructuring. There is a staff retreat planned to discuss this further. There is an intentional effort to take into account issues that have been raised in the Conferences at their assemblies.

Ms. Janet Neff, treasurer, asked “What is your greatest joy as our bishop in this season?”

Bishop Davenport replied that she is delighted to see the Synod Council here in this busy season. All but two are present, ready and willing to do the work of the Synod in this busy time.

Mr. Albert Glenn asked if members of the Synod Council have questions or ideas regarding the structuring of the Synod would that be welcomed, and to whom one would submit the inquiry. Bishop – you can submit questions or ideas to either the bishop or to Ms. Yvonne Curtis, Director of Operations.

The Reverend Joey Klinger asked if the Bishop is able to keep a healthy balance in this hectic season.

The Bishop said she is.

Actions on the Roster

Secretary Richard presented the following actions on the roster, all of which **the Synod Council adopted unanimously.**

On Leave Extension Request to ELCA Conference of Bishops

**S.C.19.12.01. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT Deacon Suzanne Rigg be granted her second *On Leave From Call* extension from the ELCA Conference of Bishops Roster Committee, and
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council request approval of this extension from the ELCA Conference of Bishops Roster Committee.**

Call to Specialized Ministry

S.C.19.12.02. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend a three-year renewable call to Specialized Ministry to the Rev. DeBorah Glod as Chaplain/Spiritual at Compassus Hospice & Palliative Care in Fort Washington effective November 11, 2019 to November 10, 2022.

Term Call Extension

S.C.19.12.03. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend a three-year renewable term call to the Rev. Tricia Neale as Executive Director at Feast of Justice in Philadelphia effective December 1, 2019 to November 30, 2022.

Request to move from Active to On Leave from Call Roster

S.C.19.12.04. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant on leave from call status to the Rev. Donna Wright, first year, effective July 2, 2019

Requests to move from Active to Retired Roster

S.C.19.12.05. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grants the Rev. Jonathan Shin retirement status, effective June 25, 2019

S.C.19.12.06. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grants the Rev. Harold Evans retirement status, effective April 1, 2019

S.C.19.12.07. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grants the Rev. Dyan Lawlor retirement status, effective December 1, 2019

S.C.19.12.08. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grants the Rev. Joseph Varsanyi retirement status, effective January 1, 2020

Information not requiring action

Resigned from the ELCA Roster

The Rev. Ashley Rossi effective October 10, 2019

Transfer

The Rev. Terrance W. Goad to Lower Susquehanna Synod effective June 20, 2019

The Rev. Amy S. Hotter to New Jersey Synod effective September 19, 2019

The Rev. Stephen B. Johnson from North Carolina Synod effective September 28, 2019

The Rev. Burlington B. Latshaw III to NEPA Synod effective Oc. 24, 2019.

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Vice President Beasley noted that her report had been submitted to the Council, and asked for questions regarding it.

Synod Office Space

Mr. Glenn asked about the status of the Synod office space at the Seminary.

Bishop Davenport asked the Rev. Dr. Martin Otto Zimmann, representative and host from United Lutheran Seminary, to respond from the perspective of the school.

Dr. Zimmann shared the Seminary would like the Synod to stay as long as they can. There are still some questions about how we can make revenue streams that allow for sustainability, but there is not a definitive answer as to what that will entail. At the moment, the Seminary is grateful for the Synod's presence as long as the Synod is pleased to be on the Seminary campus. Bishop Davenport stated that we as the Synod are looking at all options, and at various partnerships. While we like the idea of working together to remain here, the rent is too high, and we need to be good stewards of the resources entrusted to us. We have looked at three ministry sites as well as some corporate sites for possible office space.

All Saints Appeal

We have received \$29,000 toward our goal of \$35,000 for this appeal. Receipts from previous years have been: \$18,000 in 2018; \$26,000 in 2017; \$28,000 in 2016; \$46,000 in 2015.

Resolution from St. John's, Richlandtown

The following resolution was received from the congregation council of St. John's, Richlandtown:

In response to the ELCA's declaring itself a sanctuary church

WHEREAS, we understand the church's call to be one of welcoming all people who come to our door and endeavoring to help them as we are able; and

WHEREAS, we support the church caring for legal immigrants and refugees in this country, including through churchwide efforts like the program Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, and the strategy to Accompany Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO); and

WHEREAS, we recognize that there is a problem with the immigration system as it currently exists in our country and that, in its current form, it puts vulnerable people at risk, especially children; and

WHEREAS, in the current political context, the word "sanctuary" is ambiguous and can be understood by others to mean that the church is proposing to undertake illegal activities on behalf of migrants, an assumption that could have dangerous consequences for individual congregations and the church; and

WHEREAS, the process of passing the resolution at the 2019 Churchwide Assembly to declare the ELCA a sanctuary church left out local voices and more careful deliberation and did not properly consider the reaction of the wider church and society given the current interpretation of a politically polarizing word like “sanctuary”; and

WHEREAS, it should be the position of the church to welcome all opinions and concerns and not take on a political agenda that estranges people within the church and impacts how those outside the church perceive the church; be it

RESOLVED, that St. John’s Lutheran Church in Richlandown, PA memorializes the SEPA Synod Council and Churchwide Council to promote the removal of the label “sanctuary” from the resolution adopted in the 2019 Churchwide Assembly at the next Churchwide Assembly in 2022 and replace this word with a less politically incendiary statement such as “universally welcoming”; and

Work to actively petition all members of Congress, through advocacy programs like AMMPARO and LIRS, to work together to effect changes to the current immigration laws so that migrants and U.S. citizens alike are ensured safety and security; and, until such time as the “sanctuary” statement can be changed,

Make available educational resources that target congregations and create an informational campaign that targets the national public by the spring of 2020 about what the ELCA is doing to address the migrant crisis; and

Make available discussion resources for congregations by the spring of 2020 to deliberate with the national church about what the word “sanctuary” means; and, using the results of these discussions,

Create a publicity campaign for the wider public by the fall/winter of 2020 that clarifies what “sanctuary” is and isn’t for the ELCA.

Vice President Beasley called on the Reverend Tyler Rasmussen to bring background information to the Synod Council, as he was a part of conversations with St. John’s council.

Pastor Rasmussen shared that the congregation council is afraid of how the use of “sanctuary” will be heard in the broader community. They are concerned that this will give “bad actors” in the immigrant community permission to violate the law, and they are concerned that this will give bad actors on the extreme right the idea that we are breaking the law for illegal immigrants, and will empower them in their threats to harm immigrants. Pastor Rasmussen and Pastor Kat Steinly, who serves at St. John’s, worked with the congregation council to find a measured way for them to address their issues that was proactive, and let them feel heard in the midst of their concerns.

A wide and varied discussion ensued regarding how the Synod Council should respond.

Secretary Richard shared several items related to the resolution.

It is appropriate for their congregation council to speak to the Synod Council, and for them to request that the Synod Council address the Church Council. Councils speak to councils, and assemblies speak to assemblies. However, we cannot, as councils, override the action of an Assembly. Therefore our passing this on to the Church Council will not yield a change in language that the Churchwide Assembly adopted.

Many of the actions that St. John's is requesting are a part of the resolution adopted at the Churchwide Assembly, particularly empowering AMMPARO and LIRS to work for the advancement in the immigration issues before the country, the need to clarify the meaning of "sanctuary," and the dissemination of educational materials on the issues of sanctuary, immigration, and the need for us to stand with migrants and those in need.

Secretary Richard suggested we draft two letters; one to St. John's, Richlandtown, to let them know we have received their resolution, have discussed it, and are passing it on to the Church Council, clarifying that we cannot effect the change requested at a council level, and a second to the Church Council, including the resolution from St. John's, recognizing that the Church Council cannot change the wording, but encouraging the Church Council to expedite the work on the definition of sanctuary and the dissemination of educational materials called for in the resolution from the Churchwide Assembly, noting that St. John's is not the only congregation concerned about this choice of language, and seeking clarification and assistance in applying the spirit of the "sanctuary church" resolution.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Secretary Richard referenced his written report, which contains the changes to the Synod constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions adopted at the 2019 Churchwide Assembly. The required provisions have been incorporated, needing no action by the Synod Council or Synod Assembly, but taking affect as soon as posted. The other provisions are items that will need to be adopted by the Synod Assembly, as they pertain to sections that are not required provisions of the constitution, but contain language that needs to be incorporated to keep consistent across the entire document. There will also be some other changes to incorporate the new language and understandings in portions of our SEPA constitution that are not part of the Model constitution for Synods, but have grown out of our local context.

The bulk of the changes deal with two topics. One is the change in designation of deacons from "lay" to "clergy," and representational principles of assemblies and committees based on this change. The second is a change in language from "male" and "female" to "man" and "woman," and percentages from 50 / 50 to at least 45%. This is an attempt to make room for those who do not identify as "male" or "female", and to allow flexibility in the numbers needed to make a legal gathering.

There will be a delay for all of this to be incorporated, as there is language in the constitution and the by-laws that will need to be altered by the next Churchwide Assembly to fully change the designation of deacons as clergy. This will leave an awkward period of time for deacons and their ability to serve in certain positions, as we need to formally change the language of the constitution before we can nominate deacons for these positions.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

Ms. Janet Neff, treasurer, referenced her written report. She made the following comments regarding our position as we approach the end of the year: Partnership support is down, but we anticipate that increasing as we come to Christmas and the end of the year. Congregations often send in more of their pledge with the end of year income. In the meantime, we are in good financial shape because we were able to sell some of the properties we hold under management.

We continue to try to encourage partnership support by showing this money is not about what the Synod needs to receive, but how this money makes a difference as it supports the work of our congregations and the ministries of our Synod.

Ms. Neff asked if there were any questions.

The Reverend Gwendolyn King asked about numbers in the Temporarily Restricted funds, particularly an entry of monies received for Racial Justice.

Ms. Neff explained that this is money that people have given personally toward this concern. This is separate from, and in addition to, the money budgeted for the Anti-racism Team.

Pr. King shared that she did not want the Synod Council to think that the Anti-racism Team was overspending their budgeted amount.

REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Mr. Glenn, chair of the Finance Committee, echoed what Ms. Neff had shared that we have gained resources from the sale of properties under management. However, he emphasized that this is not a guaranteed source of income, nor an ongoing source. We still need to support the work of our Synod through our congregations' Partnership Support.

The Finance Committee reviewed the financial reports, and all seems in order.

The Committee also reviewed the allocation of assets from the sale of properties, and can assure the Council that they are being distributed properly, including the portion that goes to the Fund for Mission.

The Committee is working on a form for seminary graduates to use to apply for monies to assist with their student loan debt. This is in line with the budgeting decision made at the Synod Assembly to reduce the amount going to the seminary in order to provide help to those who graduated seminary prior to the recent decision to offer free tuition to all incoming students.

MISSION MOMENT

Vice President Beasley welcomed Dr. Martin Otto Zimmann, Director of Church Relations, Adjunct Faculty for Church and Society, and Executive Director of the Stewardship Life Institute to bring the Mission Moment.

Dr. Zimmann started his remarks by thanking Pr. King for the work of mentorship, pastoral care, and spiritual support she provides for the students of ULS, Philadelphia Campus.

He then shared an "End of Year Update" describing aspects of the Seminaries work in 2019. Dr. Zimmann thanked SEPA Synod for its ongoing support of the Seminary, noting that the money we give goes to daily operations, not to scholarships. "This is what helps to keep the lights on."

All degree seeking students, regardless of denomination, are now receiving full tuition scholarships. As a result, many fewer students are needing to obtain federal loans to cover their debts.

The Seminary is working hard to pay off the Brossman Center on the Philadelphia Campus, and the Seminary Ridge Museum on the Gettysburg Campus.

The Seminary community is grateful for the work of Interim President Dr. Richard Green, who left the position at the end of November. While he is missed, the community is happy for him that he is able to join his wife in Arizona to enjoy their time together in retirement.

The goal is to have the presidential search completed, and a new president in place, by the fall of 2020.

Bishop Davenport thanked Dr. Zimmann for his, and the Seminary's, partnership, hospitality, and the dinner we are soon to receive.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Forward Together in Faith

A written report had been submitted. Grant funds will be distributed in January.

Constitution Committee

Pr. Tyler Rasmussen, Chair of the Constitution Committee, presented the following resolutions for Council approval.

S.C.19.12.09. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that, pending ratification by the congregation, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the congregation constitution as amended of Trinity, Springfield, Bucks County; St. John's, Sumneytown; and Reformation, Philadelphia

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

S.C.19.12.10. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the congregation articles of incorporation as amended of Trinity, Springfield, Bucks County.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Pr. Rasmussen has recently accepted a call to the Greater Milwaukee Synod. The Synod Council expresses its thanks to Pr. Rasmussen for his service to this Council, and his work as chair of the Constitution Committee. We wish him Godspeed and many years of God's blessing in his new pastorate.

Investment Committee

David Ehret, chair, presented the report.

This year our investments have done exceptionally well, with a return of nearly 20%. Next year we expect to return to a more normal rate of return of 5%.

Total investment portfolio is \$4,518,109.

Administration Committee

The proposed Agenda for the 33rd Annual Synod Assembly was presented for comment and revision. The theme is “Acuity: Seeing Mission Possibilities”.

At the 2:20 presentation of the Report of the Treasurer and Finance Committee, it should be stated that this is where the proposed budget is considered.

Service and Learning opportunities will be a part of the Assembly. We have set an opportunity for people to come and serve. The projects will include filling backpacks for those experiencing homelessness and working on quilts for Lutheran World Relief. This will give even more lay members of our congregations to see, and experience, some of the work of the Synod.

Pr. King asked if there will be any inclusion of the 50/40/10 Anniversary celebration as part of the Assembly.

Bishop Davenport said she expects so, as she has dropped enough hints to that effect.

Vice President Beasley shared that there will be a weekend celebration to commemorate the anniversary. A revival will be held on Friday, October 23, and a breakfast will be held on Saturday, October 24. The event is being coordinated by Pastor Sandra Brown and Pastor Sarah Anderson-Rajarigam.

The Proposed Agenda was adopted with the addition of the consideration of the budget, and some inclusion of the 50/40/10 celebration.

Nominating Committee

The Reverend Lydia Posselt, chair of the Committee, described the open positions for which we need nominees. She noted that we will be staggering the terms on the Consultation Committee. Pr. Posselt asked the members of the Synod Council to distribute the letter, approach potential nominees, and have forms, including a picture, in by February 15th. She encouraged those members of Synod Council who are eligible for re-election to consider allowing their name to be placed in nomination, and submit their paperwork.

The Synod Council expressed their congratulations to Pr. Posselt on her recent marriage.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

Please hold to timelines as we approach the Assembly, and the need for report submissions. The date for submission of reports is March 15th.

Vice President Beasley asked the chairpersons of the committees to include in their reports the date when you met, where you met, if you met remotely, and the date of your next meeting. She also asked that they be sure to sign their reports when they submit them.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

To ensure we have a process to address the concerns of St. John’s, Richlandtown, Pr. King moved that **the Executive Committee draft the letters to the congregation council of St. John’s, and to the Church Council regarding the issue of Sanctuary Church.**

The Synod Council unanimously approved the motion.

Pr. Sellers expressed gratitude to Ms. Doreen Kinzler for providing Christmas cookies to the members of the Synod Council.

Mr. Henry Geyer expressed his appreciation for Mrs. Elise Seyfried's article in the Living Lutheran. It is nice to see a person from our Synod published in the Church's magazine.

The meeting adjourned at 6:16 p.m. with prayer by Dr. Zimmann.

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

Approved by Synod Council February 27, 2020