

**MINUTES
of the 160th MEETING
of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
Zoom Meeting
April 28, 2020**

CALL TO ORDER

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley called the 160th meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 4:07 p.m.

The Reverend Dwight Mason began the meeting with prayer.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the 159th meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council were approved as presented.

ACTIONS ON THE ROSTER

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

Call to Interim Ministry

S.C.20.04.01. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the Rev. Gwendolyn King to interim ministry at St. Stephen's in Feasterville, PA beginning January 6, 2020, and extending until a pastor is called by the congregation or until Pastor King resigns this call, whichever comes first.

Renewal - Call to Specialized Ministry

S.C.20.04.02. 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, 2020 to May 14, 2021.

Renewal - Call to Unusual Circumstances

S.C.20.04.03. 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, 2020.

On Leave from Call Requests:

S.C.20.04.04. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend on leave from call status to the Rev. David Maddox, II, third year, effective January 1, 2020

S.C.20.04.05. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend on leave from call status to the Rev. Phillip Waselik, third year, effective March 31, 2020

S.C.20.04.06. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend on leave from call status to Deacon Ethyl Geist, third year, effective April 1, 2020

S.C.20.04.07. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend on leave from call status to the Rev. Nancy brown, third year, effective April 8, 2020

S.C.20.04.08. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend on leave from call status to Deacon Suzanne Rigg, sixth year, effective May 31, 2020

S.C.20.04.09. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend on leave from call status to the Rev. Donna Wright, second year, effective July 2, 2020

S.C.20.04.10. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend on leave from call status to the Rev. Dr. Anita Baly, third year, effective July 23, 2020

Request to Move from Active Roster to Retired Roster

S.C.20.04.11. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grants the Rev. Paul Townsend retirement status, effective July 1, 2020

No Action Required

Invitation Ended with U.C.C. minister to serve an ELCA congregation

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council at its September 19, 2019, meeting renewed an invitation to the Rev. Suzanne Marie Spaulding, a U.C.C minister, to serve as part-time pastor at St. Luke's in Ferndale, PA beginning September 1, 2019 to August 31, 2020. On December 24, 2019, Pastor Spaulding ended her ministry with St. Luke's to accept a U.C.C. full time call.

Deaths

The Rev. Charles H. Eiss, Jr., which occurred March 1, 2020

The Rev. Cindy Ray, notified April 3, 2020

PRESENTATION OF THE AUDIT AND THE REPORT OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

Mr. Phil Tackett cited the constitution as to the parameters of the Audit Committee's responsibilities. Mr. Tackett noted the Committee's responsibility began with the signing of the contract with the auditors, and concludes for the year with the SC reception of this report.

Mr. Tackett offered the following observations:

Congregational contributions declined by 4.5%, or \$81,651

Two concerns from last year have been resolved.

1. Liquidity and available cash reserves for general operations, which had been a concern last year, is no longer an issue this year.
2. Last year we had identified that we hold an item of real estate on our books, but we did not know the identity of that holding. We now know that is a property the synod purchased on Tioga Street, which houses the mission site of New Creation. The value listed in our financial statement is \$110,000. The current assessment is \$300,000. We may need to investigate whether we should alter the amount listed in our reports.

The Auditors identified two areas that warrant attention. The first needs to be corrected, and the second is a suggestion.

1. We need to adjust the way in which we assign and track interest from two different trusts to ensure it is properly accounted for in our financial statements. This issue has been resolved.
2. A suggestion of how we use our Endowment Fund. We may wish to set a policy that will enable the synod to use between 2% and 7% of the market value of the Fund for our general expenses. Without such a policy the synod may only use the interest and the dividends of the Fund. Setting such a percentage allows this Fund to be an ongoing source of revenue, in the understanding that over time the Fund will outperform the amount withdrawn.

Vice President Beasley asked for questions. Hearing none, Mr. Tackett put forth the following motion to receive the audit:

S.C.20.04.12. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council receives the Audit and the Report of the Audit Committee for submission to the Synod Assembly.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Ms. Janet Huber Neff began by asking members of the Synod Council how their congregations are doing in terms of offerings and financial security in light of the coronavirus.

Secretary Richard noted that so far St. Matthew, Springfield, was holding on fairly well. Though there has been a decrease in offerings, there has also been a decrease in expenses, including a scaling back on some personnel as well as savings on materials and utilities. He noted that online giving using Tithe.ly has increased significantly.

The Reverend Joey Klinger has sent a Pastoral letter to his congregation, Redemption, NE Philadelphia, with a stamped envelope to facilitate offerings. The response has been good. They also received an unexpected gift from an estate whose funeral he had performed last year.

Ms. Neff also asked if any congregations had been applying for funds from the federal Payroll Protection Program.

Some congregations had, some had not.

Treasurer Neff then shared the following regarding the status of the synod. March receipts were good. Preliminary response for April is down \$60,000.

The basic expenses of the synod – payroll, stipends for the Deans, utilities, and licenses – amount to approximately \$70,000 per month. This does not leave room for support of agencies we help to sponsor, nor does it include our rent to Seminary. We need an additional \$14,000 for these expenses.

In this time we also want to be able to offer as much assistance as possible to the congregations of our synod, particularly those that work with our most vulnerable communities. There is some money from the sale of the former St. Petri-Hope that may be able to help congregations in NE Philadelphia.

We currently have cash on hand of about \$350,000, which can keep us going for about three months.

We are prioritizing our expenses according to our values and needs. We will run decisions past the Executive Committee as needs arise.

For general information, Ms. Neff shared that under the recently passed CARES Act, Church employees can apply for unemployment; this is not usual, as churches do not generally pay into unemployment insurance.

Ms. Doreen Kinzler asked what might be available to assist Feast of Justice, as this ministry is providing food for significantly more families in the midst of this pandemic. From whom might they request assistance for this ministry?

Bishop Davenport assured Ms. Kinzler that the synod is working on a few things to help Feast of Justice, because we know how significant this ministry is in this region.

PROPOSAL TO CANCEL MAY MEETING OF THE SYNOD ASSEMBLY

Secretary Richard stated the intention of the Executive Committee that we cancel the May 2020 meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly.

Reasons for this intention were recounted:

- Governor Wolf has placed Pennsylvania under a state ordered shut-down of non-essential businesses, and has limited gatherings to no more than 10 people.
- Franconia Mennonite Church, our host site, is following this guideline, and will not host any events until the virus has passed, and the Governor and health department have given clearance to meet. Franconia Mennonite is also not considering rescheduling any events until it is clear that the threat of this pandemic is gone.
- We need to be concerned first and foremost with the safety of our people, and of the people of the broader communities in which we serve. Therefore it does not make sense for us to expose each other to possible harm from the coronavirus

Concerns of cancelling the assembly:

An in-depth conversation ensued, covering the following topics and responses:

Must we have an Assembly?

The Model Constitution, By-laws, and Continuing Resolutions for Synods call for a triennial meeting of the synod. The Constitution, By-laws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod call for an annual assembly.

According to PA State Law (15 Pa. C.S. § 5755(a)), one is supposed to have an annual meeting if the by-laws call for one, however a “failure to hold the annual meeting at the designated time does not “work a dissolution” or “affect otherwise valid corporate acts.”” In other words, if we do not hold the annual assembly, we still exist and function legally as an organization.

What happens to Synod Council seats whose terms are set to expire at the end of the Assembly?

According to PA statute 15 Pa. C.S. § 5724(a), “[e]ach director of a nonprofit corporation shall hold office until the expiration of the term for which the director was selected *and until a successor has been selected and qualified* or until the director's earlier death, resignation or removal.” (emphasis added). So until the election of successors, the current council members continue to serve, unless they choose to resign the position.

Should we plan to have an Assembly in the autumn? Would this be a possibility?

This is problematic for many reasons, including:

- We cannot know at this time what the status of the pandemic will be in the fall.
- As noted, Franconia Mennonite Church will not consider rescheduling until the pandemic has passed, and planning an alternate location often takes a year to arrange.
- The economic toll this crisis is taking on many of our congregations may make it impossible for them to afford an Assembly in the autumn, especially if we will come together the following May for our regularly scheduled meeting of the synod.

What about a “virtual Assembly?” Is this permissible or possible?

While permissible, it is difficult to arrange. All voting members will need to be able to fully participate in the discussion and voting, and have equal access to the technology employed. As we have had many of our voting members unable to use the Assembly App since they don't have smart phones, the ability to ensure all will have equal access to a virtual assembly poses both logistical and financial impediments to this arrangement.

What is on the Agenda that absolutely has to happen this year?

Nothing on the agenda needs to happen this year. Among the actions before the Assembly are elections to Synod Council and Synod Committees, the receipt of the Audit Report, the adoption of the budget, and updates to the Constitution, By-laws and Continuing Resolutions. As stated above, the elections can be postponed. The Audit Report can be received at the next Assembly. The budget can also be adopted next May, even as it will be in the midst of the fiscal year for which it has been prepared. The Synod Council, as the legislative body of the synod between assemblies, is authorized to oversee expenditures in line with the priorities of the Assembly (†S10.02., S.15.13.). And the changes to the constitution are also able to wait, as they are

essentially “housecleaning” items to bring us in conformity with the changes made at the 2019 Churchwide Assembly, but not significant changes to the way in which we operate as an organization.

What are other synods doing in light of the virus?

The advice from the ELCA church office is if you do not have to meet this year, such as for the election of a Bishop, and if you are able to postpone or cancel your meeting, it would be good to do so. Consult your constitution and your synod’s attorney to determine what is permissible in your state.

Most synods that do not have an election for a bishop have followed this advice, and have decided to cancel their assemblies for 2020.

As discussion came to a close, the following resolution was placed before the Council:
S.C.20.04.13. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT, in light of Governor Wolf’s orders closing public gatherings because of the corona virus pandemic, and in conformity with the practice of most synods in the ELCA, the SEPA Synod Council approves the cancellation of the May 2020 meeting of the Synod Assembly.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution

Secretary Richard will work with Pastor Robert Fisher, Assistant to the Bishop for Communications and Mission Interpretation, to convey this action to the synod, the reasons behind this decision, and our intention not to meet in Assembly until next May. This communication will happen in the next two days, as the Assembly was scheduled for this upcoming weekend.

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Vice President Beasley thanked the Synod Council for its engagement in this issue. She asked the council members whose terms would end this year to prayerfully consider continuing in their respective positions until next year, and to let her or Secretary Richard know their decision by May 5th, if possible.

Vice President Beasley thanked Secretary Richard for the work he and Synod Attorney John Gordon did to research the issues regarding the Synod Assembly, and what options there are for cancelling or holding it. She also noted the many conversations held with the Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, the Secretary of the ELCA, regarding many questions surrounding the work of the Synod if we do not hold the Assembly.

Vice President Beasley suggested that each member of the Council pick a person you can email perhaps once a week, or call or text. This can be a huge help in your congregations. We need to lift up each other on this board as well. Reach out to your pastor, or a pastor in your Conference to offer encouragement and help as they may need it. Reach out to neighboring congregations, particularly those in transition. She expressed her great appreciation for this board, and what we do together.

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

Bishop Davenport reminded us that as we go through this health crisis, “We are sheltered in place and sheltered in God!”

The Bishop and the Staff continue to be active in the work of the synod. Among the many ways they continue to serve the work of the church include:

Ministries:

The Office of the Bishop is checking in to see how we are connecting with our various ministries – congregations, food ministries, outreach efforts, etc.

We are working through call processes remotely, and with an eye to appropriate social distancing.

Our Executive Committee is working on grant applications for funding to ensure our vital ministries can continue, particularly those which work with people on the margins of society.

Meetings:

Invitations to attend events and meetings have not stopped, but have been moved to virtual gatherings:

Bishop is continuing to meet with black clergy

Dr. Flippin and Bishop Davenport meet with faithful innovation teams across the ELCA. She is still attending meetings of the Muhlenberg College board.

Making Connections:

Bishop Davenport has been in contact with Bishop Stephen Munga, and his wife, Dr. Annette Munga, of the Northeast Diocese of Tanzania to offer prayer and words of support.

She has been working to keep in touch with all the rostered ministers in our synod.

The Staff has created several videos with words of encouragement

Bishop has made 86 personal calls of encouragement to Rostered Ministers.

Re-opening:

Our area of Pennsylvania will be returning to our new “abnormal” in stages: red, yellow, green, according to the process set by Governor Wolf.

The make-up of our five county region is unique. We have different levels of density and risk in different areas of our synod. Rather than promoting a “one size fits all” program for our synod, we can provide questions to consider as each site takes the process of re-opening seriously in its own context. We will all need to listen to our governor, the CDC, be practical, and use science and common sense.

Some of the items congregations will need to talk through:

- How do we care for vulnerable people among us?
- Many of our members are 60 and older.
- Consideration of all the particulars of re-opening needs to be shaped in each local context.
- Perhaps Conferences can work together to determine what we will do in this region.
- The need for physical distancing will last long beyond the time we are “able” to return.

- Our priority is the health and safety of the members of our congregations, AND the people in our surrounding communities.

We need to pray for the Wisdom of Solomon, and a good dose of Common Sense.

Bishop Davenport opened the floor for questions.

Pastor Serena Sellers asked, "What in particular do you need us to pray for you?"

Bishop Davenport responded "Sabbath." We all need to be sure to take some down time. And pray for the care of our Rostered Ministers.

She added that it is also important that we, who are gainfully employed, do what we can to assist others. We can be a blessing to others who are not as secure as we are. So pray for a spirit of generosity to be among us.

Pastor Gwendolyn King shared that, as one who received one of the personal notes from the Bishop, "you have no idea how much that meant, so thank you."

Mr. Bill Graham conveyed the same sense of gratitude for the note he had received.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Henry Geyer asked if we should reach out specifically to those who were in nomination to thank them for being willing to serve.

Ms. Beasley suggested we wait until we know who is willing to continue serving on the Council. We may need to tap some of these people to fill open seats.

Meeting adjourned with prayer by Bishop Davenport at 6:00 p.m.

The next meeting of the SEPA Synod Council will be June 18, 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 June 18, 2020