

MINUTES
of the 166th MEETING
of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
Zoom Meeting
June 17, 2021
6:00 p.m.

DEVOTIONS

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley invited the Reverend Julie DeWerth to lead the Synod Council in devotions. Pr. DeWerth's reflections were on the topic of "Decision Fatigue," a concern felt by many in these days of ongoing pandemic. Making decisions is more difficult as we do so at a distance from each other. The need to make decisions never seems to end. The continual fluctuation in the status of the virus causes us to change decisions almost as soon as we make them. The use of technology has been difficult to learn and implement. At the same time, the use of technology has made it easier to meet remotely and worship in new ways. But this benefit also has a downside: it is increasingly difficult to end the day, and let work and decisions go for the night.

Pr. DeWerth encouraged the members of Synod Council to remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28 – 30: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." She encouraged members to remember we do not do this work alone. We have each other. We have Jesus.

Pr. DeWerth ended the devotions by inviting prayers for the concerns members are carrying in their hearts, and inviting us to leave them with Jesus.

CALL TO ORDER

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley called the 166th meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 6:15 p.m.

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

SEATING OF SYNOD COUNCIL MEMBERS

Two names were brought before the Council to fill open seats. Ms. Gail Penman was presented to fill the seat of Lay Woman at Large, term ending 2022, and Mr. Roland Thompson was presented to fill the seat of Central Philadelphia Conference Representative, Lay Man, term ending 2024.

The Synod Council voted unanimously to seat Ms. Penman and Mr. Thompson, and they were admitted to the Zoom meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Summary of Actions of the 33rd Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod were approved as presented.

The Minutes of the 165th Meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council were presented. The Reverend Gwendolyn King offered the following amendments:

- page 2 – author of the article is Ted Peters
- page 7 – 5th paragraph, add “We consider this to be sacred work.”
- page 7 – 4th bullet point, the ART “reconnected with” Deacon Torres, rather than brought her back
- page 8 – 2nd paragraph, 2nd line, add “and a member of ART” after “served in SEPA Synod”
- page 8 – paragraph re: George Floyd, add “in congregations and among members” following “interest”
- page 9 – 4th paragraph, add “training/” to “education”

The Synod Council approved the minutes as amended.

SETTING THE AGENDA

Vice President Beasley offered two changes to the agenda that had been distributed: a gifts assessment survey and the confidentiality statement will be added to the Vice President and Executive Committee’s Report.

The Synod Council adopted the agenda for the 166th meeting as amended.

MISSION MOMENT

Mr. Collin Grooms, Executive Director of Bear Creek Camp, was the guest for the Mission Moment. He stated that he wanted to share an update on the status of the camp program for this summer, and he will also answer whatever questions members of Synod Council may have regarding the proposal to grant a supplemental right of way to Transcontinental Pipe Line.

Summer Program

Mr. Grooms noted that he began his position at Bear Creek Camp in January of 2020, which means at this point he has been here for 18 months and 0 summers!

The Camp is planning on opening this summer for its youth programs, but it will limit registration to approximately 50% of its capacity. Bear Creek Camp is struggling with the same issues that the congregations of SEPA Synod are: do we enforce mask wearing or not? in what areas might we insist on masks? should there be singing or not? how dense is too dense for camper’s safety? One thing the Camp is blessed to have is a tremendous amount of outdoor space. Still, there are the concerns of sleeping arrangements and eating spaces, and how to keep these areas as safe as possible. Bear Creek has recommitted to its small group focus, and will have 2 leaders for every 10 campers.

The summer staff is composed of 35 of the most outstanding young people. A poll was taken of the Summer Camp leaders as to what is most important for them and the campers. The primary need is building community. Over the past 18 months we have forgotten what it is like to be in a group of more than just a few people. Even a group of 12 to 15 seems huge after such a long time of separation and distancing.

Pastors Erica Wesch and Chris McKinstry came to the Camp to do leadership development with the summer staff. The topic was supposed to be “Lutheran 101,” and a chance to go over key parts of the Book of Concord and the Catechism. The actual discussion never formally got there.

The staff was more interested in talking about issues of diversity, and their comfort level with and in the ELCA. The conversation ventured into racial diversity and the diversity and inclusion of LGBTQ persons. It was a great conversation of how to be welcoming of all who might come to the Camp.

Mr. Bert Glenn asked what a 50% limit means for the camp's capacity.

Mr. Grooms said that 100% capacity would be 220 campers. The camp is limiting enrollment to about 130.

Pipeline

The Synod Council had been provided paperwork describing the proposal to grant an additional right of way to Transcontinental Gas Pipe Line Company, LLC. While the Camp is jointly owned by Northeastern and Southeastern Pennsylvania Synods, the authorization for this action lies with SEPA Synod, as it holds the deed. The resolution before the Council reads:

S.C.21.06.01. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the proposed Supplemental Right of Way Agreement of 2021 between the Eastern Pennsylvania Lutheran Camp Corporation (the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America f/k/a Eastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Lutheran Church in America) and the Transcontinental Gas Pipe Line Company, LLC, and authorizes the following corporate officers to execute the said agreement on behalf of the Synod, as title holder of the land leased to the Camp Corporation, with proceeds to be utilized for the purposes of the Camp Corporation: the Rev. Patricia A. Davenport, Bishop, and the Rev. Karl M. Richard, Secretary, of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

Mr. Collins noted that the Camp has approximately 3,000 acres. The easement is located on the northern portion of the property. We will be giving rights to approximately another 25 feet along an existing pipeline easement.

Mr. Glenn said that it is difficult to tell from the map where the pipeline is relative to where the activities of the Camp occur. Could we get some clarification on this?

Mr. Grooms shared that very little activity happens where the pipeline is. Because a pipeline already exists, and this will be a 25 foot extension of this space, there will be no practical impact on the programming of the Camp.

Mr. Glenn: Is the pipeline above ground or buried?

Mr. Grooms: It is buried. We will not notice it. The companies monitor the pipelines from the air. They are responsible for clean-up if there is a leak.

Mr. Glenn: Is there any concern or opposition from the community?

Mr. Grooms: The community is aware that this is happening, has accepted this. Part of our reality is that if we do not take this opportunity to sell the right of way, the Pipeline company will take it by the power of eminent domain. Because this is going along the path where there is already a line, we are receiving less complaints than we may have if it was a new pathway.

The Reverend John Heidgerd asked what happens if we say “no?”

Mr. Grooms replied that, according to Mr. Blake Marles, attorney for the Camp, we would be pushed to yield the land through eminent domain and would not get nearly as much, if anything, in exchange for the easement.

Mr. Adam Clark asked if there is a written disaster evacuation plan. What if there is a disaster?

Mr. Grooms said we have not received a written plan from the company, but Mr. Marles has said that this is covered as part of the arrangement.

Mr. Clark: with all the hacking that has occurred, what is the worst-case scenario if such an event were to happen?

Mr. Grooms: I do not have an answer to that question. This pipeline is not part of the critical gasoline distribution infrastructure that impacted the Southeast portion of the United States.

The Reverend Serena Sellers: Is there is an existing evacuation plan for fire or other emergencies at the Camp?

Mr. Grooms: There is, and it has been coordinated with the first responders in the area.

Mr. Grooms brought his comments to a close by saying he believes we have negotiated the strongest agreement we can. He added that this easement will not impact the Camp in any appreciable way. Even construction should not be an issue. The construction has not yet begun on the last easement granted, and there is no certainty when construction will begin on this easement. The company is procuring the land for future expansion.

Mr. Richard Daniels asked if the Camp would receive the money now, or only when construction starts.

Mr. Grooms: We will receive the money when we enter the agreement. The Board of Bear Creek Camp is determining how it will be invested.

Mr. Glenn: If they choose not to build, do we need to return the money?

Mr. Grooms: No, the money will be the Camp’s regardless of the pipeline’s construction.

Vice President Beasley thanked Mr. Grooms for his presentation and asked him to remain in the Zoom waiting room while the Synod Council deliberated and voted on the proposal.

Vice President Beasley then asked if there were any further questions from the Council on what had been presented.

Pr. King asked if Bishop Davenport and Secretary Richard had any further comment, as they are in the resolution as signers on this agreement.

Bishop Davenport: You all have asked wonderful questions. Mr. John Gordon, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod’s attorney, and the lawyers for Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod and the Camp who have been involved in this process have done their due diligence. They feel it is fine

to go forward with this arrangement, and that we are covered from exposure. I am comfortable because they are comfortable.

Secretary Richard expressed comfort with the agreement also. This easement will not interfere with the functioning of the Camp. If we do not enter the agreement, we are likely to lose the land through eminent domain. If the easement is granted through eminent domain, we will not get the resources for the Camp. I would prefer to receive the cash for the ministries in exchange for land we will need to yield anyway, rather than not receive the resources for the ministry.

Mr. Everett Wick shared two points. One, there are miles of pipeline across the nation, and the ruptures are few. There is more damage to our environment by burning the gas than there is from problems with the pipelines themselves. Two, when it comes to the benefits of the money received, “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.”

Mr. Clark: I am in favor of the agreement, but I do believe we need an emergency plan if there is anything that goes wrong with the pipeline. With the recent infrastructure hacks, I worry for the kids. I would like an emergency plan for the safety of the children.

Pr. Sellers: I wrestle with the ethical issues regarding using fossil fuels at all. I hope we are moving away from fossil fuels to renewables. If you build a pipeline, you make further capacity for fossil fuels. But since this transition is not going to happen quickly, and we are going to need fossil fuels for now, then it makes sense to build where pipelines already exist rather than cut new lines across undisturbed land. Cutting across fresh geography may also impact our neighbors through eminent domain even more dramatically than this agreement will.

Pr. Heidgerd asked the Secretary, “Do we have any role or responsibility to dictate emergency plans to Bear Creek Camp?”

Secretary Richard: We do not. The only issue before us today is the resolution regarding the right of way.

With no further questions, Vice President Beasley called for the vote.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Mr. Grooms was let back into the meeting and was told the resolution had passed. Mr. Grooms expressed his gratitude to the Synod Council. Vice President Beasley thanked Mr. Grooms for his presence at the meeting and wished him well with the upcoming summer camp season.

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

Bishop Davenport commented that she has been reviewing the biographies of the people serving on this council. She continues to be impressed by the skills and talents represented in this body. The questions asked in the previous conversation show just how good this team is, and she is grateful to all who serve on the Synod Council. She then highlighted some pieces from her written report, including the following:

Synod Assembly

The Synod Assembly went well. This event took a tremendous amount of coordination and investment of time and of resources. Thank you to all who made that happen so well, including staff, Synod Council, and ALL the teams that took a role in particular aspects of this event. Particular thanks are given to Ms. Carrie Schwab, our Assembly Coordinator, who worked to keep all the people and parts connected so well.

Care for Rostered Ministers and Lay Leaders

Please continue to keep our rostered ministers and lay leaders in prayer as we continue through this pandemic. We are not on the other side yet, and the stress on our leaders only continues to grow, even as the pressures and expectations change. We have offered, and Synod Staff have hosted, various opportunities to deal with the stressors of these days. We hosted:

- a meeting with Dr. Tim Babinchak, retired chief of infectious diseases at Thomas Jefferson University, who shared pertinent information in lay terms for how we can move to in-person worship
- a three-part workshop for Rostered Ministers on leading through trauma with “LeaderWise,” and
- a three-session program, “Journey through Grief,” with Ms. Sylvia Havlish of Lutheran Congregational Services, for lay leaders and rostered ministers.

We are looking to host an upcoming program on suicide, which will be available for lay and rostered persons.

This continues to be hard. Be kind to your rostered ministers. Give them time off: an extra day, an extra week. We need to be mindful of all the trauma and all the struggles they are dealing with.

Committee of Deans

The Committee of Deans, the interim pastors, and stated supply preachers of our Synod have been working to keep our congregations covered, engaged, and moving forward in this time of ongoing pandemic.

ADLA

The African Descent Lutheran Association (ADLA) has taken up the task of reviewing the Authentic Diversity Strategy of the ELCA to determine how we might live into this strategy. Included in the conversation is the question of reparations.

Conference of Bishops

Nothing has slowed for the Conference of Bishops or Presiding Bishop Eaton during the pandemic. Topics both ecclesial and political occupy the work of the Conference, as the Church strives to speak a word to the society on issues of climate change, immigration, racism, and economic justice. Within the Church we deal with these issues plus issues of ministry, including how these issues impact our congregations and synods, and how to provide leadership to congregations, including discussion of Synodically Authorized Ministers.

At the most recent meeting of the Conference of Bishops, the Conference zoomed with Bishop Azzar of the Holy Lands to hear what is happening with Israeli-Palestinian tensions, and to offer prayer support during the ongoing upheaval between Israelis and Palestinians.

Bishop noted that our Social Statements are good, but we need also to act.

Region 7

Bishop Davenport said the Region 7 bishops are a good support group for her. She was blessed to be able to attend the installation of Bishop Christopher deForest of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod. Bishop was also a speaker/preacher via video at the New England and Upstate New York Synod Assemblies.

Strategy Towards Authentic Diversity Advisory Team

This team continues to work diligently to move forward in issues of diversity and inclusion in the ELCA. In the midst of this work there continue to be signs of the difficulties facing Black and brown persons in this Church. As an example, the Reverend David Maddox was removed from the Roster of Ministers of the ELCA, as he did not receive a call after 3 years. It is painful that this would happen, that as we say we want to be younger and more diverse, we have a young Black man fall from the roll due to lack of call.

We celebrate that Juneteenth has become a federal holiday, but now let us do the work of Micah 6 – to love mercy, act justly, and walk humbly with God.

Bishop Davenport then opened the floor for comments or questions.

Mr. Everett Wick: Our bishop is a very busy lady, and we should do all we can to support her and be kind to her as well.

Ms. Emily Fowler: Bishop, your motto has been “I show up.” I just want to affirm that you do. You show up. Thank you.

VP Beasley: when did this information on Pr. Maddox get voted on?

Bishop Davenport: It was not. It is ELCA policy that if you do not get a call within 3 years, you fall off the roster unless there is an appeal for an extension.

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Vice President Beasley noted that the Council has the report. She asked if there are any questions. As there were none, she moved on to the Confidentiality agreement. It is the expectation that each member of the Council will fill this out and return it to the Synod’s Director of Operations, Ms. Yvonne Curtis, by the next day.

Also included in the packet of information was a gifts assessment sheet. It is requested that each Council member pick their three preferred committees on which to serve and rank them in order of preference. It is asked that this document be returned to Vice President Beasley via email within the week. These will be used in the assignment process for Synod Council Committees.

Executive Committee

The Vice President then moved to the election of members of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee is comprised of the Bishop, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer, and 3 members of the Synod Council: one lay man, one lay woman, and one clergy person. The Executive Committee generally meets at noon on a Thursday, and has been meeting by Zoom. She began with the position of lay man and asked for nominations.

Ms. Emily Fowler nominated Mr. Everett Wick. Mr. Wick was asked if he would be willing to serve if elected. Mr. Wick replied in the affirmative.

Ms. Doreen Kinzler nominated Mr. Bert Glenn. Mr. Glenn declined the nomination.

With no other nominees, nominations were closed, and Vice President Beasley declared **Mr. Wick elected.**

Vice President Beasley then asked for nominations for the lay woman position.

Mr. Glenn nominated Ms. Cheryl Detweiler. Ms. Detweiler accepted the nomination.

Pr. Sellers nominated Ms. Cynthia Moultrie, who declined the nomination.

With no other nominees, nominations were closed, and Vice President Beasley declared **Ms. Detweiler elected.**

Nominations were then opened for the clergy position.

Ms. Fowler nominated Pr. King. Pr. King accepted the nomination.

Pr. Heidgerd nominated Pr. Joey Klinger. Pr. Klinger accepted the nomination.

Ms. Sandra Zimmerman nominated Pr. Dwight mason, who declined the nomination.

Nominations were then closed. A vote was taken vis Zoom poll, and **Pr. Gwendolyn King was elected.**

Vice President Beasley expressed her gratitude for being re-elected as Synod Vice President. She noted that this is her final term, as the constitution limits the Vice President to 3 consecutive terms. We will need to work to raise up a new person to be the Vice President.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Actions on the Roster

Secretary Richard brought forward the following actions on the Roster.

On Leave from Call Request

S.C.21.06.02. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend on leave from call status to the Rev. Janet Peterman, first year, effective June 19, 2021.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

From his written report, Secretary Richard noted that an electronic vote of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council was held to convey **an Invitation to Extended Service to the Rev. Brendan Galvin to serve at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Doylestown, PA beginning July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022. This invitation is renewable annually by Synod Council.**

The Synod Council voted with 23 yes, 0 no votes, to extend this invitation. The resolution was conveyed to Bishop John Scholl of the United Methodist Church for action at their Annual Conference.

Information not requiring action

Death:

The Reverend Luther M. Johnson, June 7, 2021

Removal from the Roster:

The Reverend David Maddox, effective December 31, 2020

Items from Reference and Counsel not brought before the Synod Assembly

Secretary Richard relayed updated information on two items brought to the Committee on Reference and Counsel, but which were not deemed in order to bring before the Synod Assembly.

One was a proposal to speak out against violence and hatred directed toward Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, which has been growing since the pandemic. The action taken was to refer this to the Anti-Racism Team, and the Team was invited to read statement to the Assembly affirming our standing against such acts of hatred and violence.

The second was a proposal about gun violence, particularly in the City of Philadelphia. The Committee on Reference and Counsel sent the resolution to Synod Council for action. Bishop Davenport, Vice President Beasley, and the Executive Committee have referred the concern to Dr. William Flippin, who has been working on behalf of the Synod on the concerns noted in the proposal through the “Heeding God’s Call” initiative. We have also invited Mr. Thomas Salber, the author of the proposal, to join in the work of Heeding God’s Call.

Pr. King asked if the statement from the Anti-Racism Team, or a summary thereof, would be included in the minutes of the Synod Assembly.

Secretary Richard stated that it would be.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

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

Mission support from congregations is down by about \$10,000, but this is not a huge percentage of our budgeted number. The shortfall is not surprising with the ongoing pandemic, and it may rebound over the remainder of the fiscal year.

We have had good performance in our investments and we have had fewer expenses than we budgeted, and so our current ratios of income and expenses are good.

We have a new permanently restricted fund, which was received from Grace, Norristown as it ended its ministry. The fund was a trust Grace had, which already had a set of restrictions. We receive it with those provisions as a permanently restricted fund. The purpose of the Fund is to aid ministry in Montgomery County.

Vice President Beasley asked if there was a difference in why we are keeping this as a separate fund, rather than placing it in the Fund for Mission.

Mr. Glenn stated that when we receive cash, it is unrestricted and can be used as we choose. Since this was received as a restricted fund, we are obligated to keep it as such, following as best we can the dictates for which it was established.

Mr. Glenn stated that the Finance Committee had met and reviewed the financial statements, and found them to be in good order.

Seminary debt relief was extended to 18 clergy, with the money being sent directly to the lender each person owed.

Mr. Glenn pointed out that the guidelines for the Fund for Mission were enclosed with his report. There has been a thought that the Fund might be used as an endowment, with a limit of 5% of the value of the Fund being set for use. This percentage is already in the documents, and so we do not need to make this change at this time. The Finance Committee will continue to consider if there are any changes that might be good to recommend in the use of these monies, but for now the Finance Committee wants to wait and see how this plays, as the Trustees of the Fund for Mission have recently resumed meetings.

The Trustees did meet recently, for the first time in quite a while. There is approximately \$100,000 available at this time. Dr. Flippin has suggested that some of this money might be used for our African Descent congregations. Pr. Penman, Chair of the Vitality Team, may have ideas for its use in the work of the Vitality Team.

The Synod has been working to renegotiate the rental agreement with the Seminary. In a meeting between Bishop Davenport, President Erwin, and other representatives of the Synod and the school, there has been an agreement to reduce the rent from \$80,000 to \$40,000 per year. Bishop has suggested that we may wish to increase our annual donation to the Seminary in the next fiscal year.

Pr. Heidgerd asked a question about the Fund for Mission. To clarify, it is not an endowment, but it is capped at 5% of the value, unless there is a need?

Mr. Glenn: Yes. We can access more than 5%, but if we choose to do so, Synod Council needs to approve it.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Investment Committee

Mr. Dave Ehret reported on the Investment Committee. The investments are up by approximately 9%. Our total portfolio is just under \$10 million.

The \$161,000 received in trust from the former Grace, Norristown, has been placed in the T. Rowe Price Science and Technology Fund, where we have been getting a good return on investment.

Regarding the use of this restricted trust, the following conversation ensued.

Pr. Sellers: Is there any mechanism by which these trust funds for Montgomery County are released?

Mr. Ehret: Not to my knowledge.

Pr. Sellers: Should this be referred to the Finance Committee to propose parameters?

Mr. Glenn: Pr. Penman of the Vitality Team may be helpful in this regard.

Mr. Wick: We should review what the trust already says about the distribution of these funds. We may wish to consult the Deans of Upper and Lower Montgomery Conferences about its use.

Pr. Heidgerd: We should include the Dean of Upper Bucks in these decisions to distribute the funds as well. There are 3 congregations in Upper Bucks Conference that are in Montgomery County.

Pr. Sellers: It seems that in its role of oversight, the Synod Council ought to provide a plan for the use and oversight of this money so as to minimize competition and conflict between the Conferences.

Secretary Richard agreed with Pr. Sellers that the Synod Council is the body with overall responsibility for the Funds owned by the Synod, and as such, should set and oversee the parameters and distributions of this Fund as well.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business that needed action, but Pr. Serena Sellers asked for, and was granted, a moment of personal privilege. She expressed her sincere thanks that Sanctuary Village was the designated recipient of the Synod Assembly offering this year. The expenses for building materials have gone through the roof during the pandemic, and this money is greatly needed.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Richard Daniels noted his address is incorrect in the Roster. He provided the correct address.

Vice President Beasley shared the good news that Bishop Davenport is being honored by the American Bible Society and Forum Philly. The invitation reads:

*This Juneteenth, **American Bible Society** is teaming up with **Forum Philly** to recognize local heroes of faith who embody the freedom and justice of God's Word. As a person who proclaims the freedom of God's Word in Philadelphia, we would like to honor and recognize you for your impactful ministry.*

Congratulations, Bishop!

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 with reflection and prayer by Dr. Flippin. He noted that this day, June 17, is the commemoration of the Emmanuel 9 where nine people gathered for Bible Study this night six years ago at Mother Emmanuel AME Zion Church in Columbia, SC, and as they closed their eyes in prayer, a Lutheran Christian named Dylan Roof, took their lives. We gather in the midst of this reality. We cry out – have mercy on us. We feel far from you. And distant. But today we also have hope, and the charge to stand for justice and act for change.

The next meeting of the SEPA Synod Council will be September 23, 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, September 23, 2021