

MINUTES
of the 172nd MEETING
of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
Zoom Meeting
September 22, 2022
6:00 p.m.

DEVOTIONS

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley welcomed the Synod Council at 6:04 p.m. and invited Mr. Bert Glenn to lead the Council in devotions.

Mr. Glenn began by sharing that a button was given to him at the Churchwide Assembly this past August. On this button was the number 328. He asked if anyone knew what this meant. He shared that it is the number of times the word “justice” appears in the Bible.

For Mr. Glenn, justice is our calling as people of Jesus. We are called to treat each other fairly and kindly. A mandate to do justice calls us to know the needs of the poor, and to meet them. How do we do this? We focus on what is in front of us. Global concerns are important, and we need to advocate for them, but if we are called to justice, we need to do so first with those in our presence.

Mr. Glenn is recently retired from the Department of Justice, where he was a federal prosecutor. Justice is a key part of his life and livelihood. He worked for justice in his work, but sometimes not in the way people expect. Sometimes the most just thing to do is to charge a person and hold them accountable. But sometimes, there are other issues involved in a case, where the most just action is to let the charges drop away.

He saw justice displayed at the Churchwide Assembly, in the apology to the congregation of Iglesia Luterana Santa María, in the Apology to Indigenous Peoples, and in the Church’s commitment to stand against racism.

There is another button he has found helpful. It says, “Justice not Revenge.” Justice is what we as people of faith are to be about. Mr. Glenn concluded his remarks with Micah 6:8, “What does the Lord require of you? To seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.”

CALL TO ORDER

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley called the 172nd meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 6:18 p.m. The Reverend Karl M. Richard, Secretary, confirmed a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the 171st Meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council were approved as presented.

The Minutes of the 34th Annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod were included in the packet of materials. As there was not significant time to review them, approval of these Minutes is deferred until the December meeting of the Synod Council.

SETTING THE AGENDA

The agenda for the 172nd meeting of the Synod Council was approved as presented.

MISSION MOMENT

The Mission Moment for this meeting was the sharing of reflections on the August 2022 Churchwide Assembly in Columbus, Ohio. Several members of the Synod Council had attended, some as voting members, one as a visitor. It seemed good to Vice President Beasley that the remainder of the Synod Council hear the insights of the Assembly from their colleagues.

Mr. Glenn – was very pleased with the Assembly. There were four things that stood out for him:

1. The worship services were well done and elaborate. They were held in a huge hall, with many musicians, many pastors, and much technology. They were very impressive and moving.
2. The Apology to the congregation of Iglesia Luterana Santa María. Bishop Eaton's words were powerful, and the reception of her words by the congregation was gracious.
3. It was wonderful to spend time with, and get to know better, the other members of our Synod's "delegation."
4. Perhaps one of the best lines spoken at the Assembly was by our new Vice President, Imran Siddiqui. He originally came from a Muslim background, and in trying to describe his family's Muslim connection, he described them as "Christmas and Easter" Muslims. That seemed like a good way to make the comparison.

Pastor Julie DeWerth – The worship was extraordinary. The opportunity to build relationships, both with members of our Synod, but also with others from across the Church, was significant. The chance to see people she had not seen for a long time was wonderful and life-giving. The consideration of our own Vice President, Tracey A. Beasley, for the position of Vice President of the ELCA, was powerful. Tracey made us so proud!

Pastor Joey Klinger – was very glad to go, as he had never attended a Churchwide Assembly before. In looking at the advance paperwork it did not seem as though there would be much of interest to this Assembly; nothing seemed particularly important or unusual. But then he arrived, and he was amazed at how much was discussed, and even more so, how much was put into action. It will be interesting to see how much is implemented in the next three years. There are issues of a possible new constitution, concerns of pay equity, and provisions for "bound conscience" with regard to LGBTQIA+ persons, as well as many other issues, that were discussed and charged for action.

Ms. Sandra Zimmerman – could not be at this meeting, but submitted the following reflection via email:

Thinking back on my experience I have found many things to be thankful for:

First, being chosen to attend.

Second, I appreciated being able to drive rather than fly since we are still in a global pandemic.

Third, getting to know some of the other delegates from our synod and breaking bread with them at lunch every day.

Fourth, having access to a motorized scooter helped with my mobility. I also learned that the scooter can be similar to being in a wheelchair – because you are not in people's normal line of

vision, you cease to exist. This helped me to become more aware of others with disabilities and to be considerate of them on my journey through life.

Fifth, getting stuck in the elevator at the Hilton for over an hour and learning how kind the staff can be. While I waited, they offered to bring me water, lunch and checked continuously to make sure I was okay.

Sixth, I enjoyed attending the various worship services, each with their own unique styles of preaching and music. I was struck by how many practices and languages from other cultures were included. I was especially delighted to hear the drums from the American Indian and Alaskan Native People.

Seventh, I'm thankful for the declarations to the American Indian and Alaskan Native People, Jewish Community, and Muslim Community.

Eighth, I am grateful that the memorials on diversity and the LGBTQIA communities were included, and that we are moving forward to being a better and more inclusive church.

Ninth, regarding the various issues and conversations surrounding the removal of Pastor Rabell-Gonzalez: I am hopeful that with the apology given to the congregants of Misión Latina Luterana at Churchwide, they can now begin the healing process denied to them previously and that moving forward we can be more open, honest, and accountable in our conversations within our church (the ELCA).

While I have many things to be thankful for from my time at Churchwide, I know that our work is never finished. If we are all created in God's image, how can we not love our brothers and sisters as ourselves? Even as we strive to be better sisters and brothers in Christ, we still do not always live by a Theology of the Cross in our actions. Martin Luther taught us to "call a thing what it is", and in doing so, we must continue to call out racism, discrimination, and intolerance.

During Bishop Davenport's sermon, she gave us a call to action, reminding us that words are not enough. We must be the ones to help bring about the changes we want to see for the future of the ELCA. I am grateful for her leadership, and have faith that with her leading us, we will continue to work to see real and meaningful changes in the future of the church.

Pastor Serena Sellers –went as a visitor with her husband, Pastor Ray Miller. She noted that, as a visitor, she did not have to attend anything, but wanted to attend everything. She is proud to be from Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, proud of our Vice President, and proud of our Bishop.

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley – is so excited about what we have in SEPA Synod. We are family. Not every Synod has this feeling. Some Synods have Vice Presidents and Bishops that do not get along. People comment on our closeness. They see the love we have for each other as a Synod. The most powerful thing about the Assembly for her was the laying on of hands during the process for the election of the Vice President of the Church. She is still in the trenches, and she is not going anywhere.

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

Bishop Davenport reflected on Vice President Beasley's remarks on the Assembly, sharing that she hopes people saw us as ones who live out our baptismal covenant.

Bishop noted that her report was before the Synod Council. She took some time to share some of the items that are on her heart and mind in these days. In particular, she noted the need for prayer in these days. She noted the multiple pandemics we face: covid, monkey pox,

violence, hatred, racism, war in Ukraine and in Sudan, each of which is pandemic in its scope and impact.

Bishop asked for prayer for the Executive Committee, noting that we do not do this work alone. We need to support and encourage each other in dealing with “what is.”

She asks for prayer for the Staff, and in particular, with thanksgiving for Pr. Bob Fisher, returning from sabbatical, for Pr. Karen Sease, going on maternity leave, and for Ms. Cynta Outterbridge, as her child is ill at this time.

Bishop Davenport noted that October is pastor appreciation month. She will be sending out a letter to our congregations encouraging them to do something special for their ministers – a card, an extra Sunday off, or any expression of support. As they try to lead during the multiple pandemics we face, a word of encouragement can be powerful. Depression is real, the sense of trauma is real, and anything we can do to support our rostered ministers is helpful.

Muhlenberg Board

Bishop serves on this board, and is on the Committee on Student Life. This team is working on issues of diversity, equity, and belonging. She noted a difference between “inclusion” and “belonging.” “Inclusion” is inviting people other than you to the dance. “Belonging” is asking them to dance.

Religious Leaders Council

All our interfaith partners are experiencing a decline in members returning to the buildings. Deep discussion on how we lower pastoral expectations on members returning and how to work on increasing the number of volunteers to handle the basics of moving ministry forward.

Bishop’s Activities

Bishop Davenport was excited to share that there have been five ordinations since our last meeting. In the midst of the struggles the church is facing, it is good to see new leadership being called forth and sent out to serve.

In addition to the many pastoral contacts reflected in her report, Bishop wanted the Synod Council to know that a Council member, Ms. Cynthia Moultrie, had a fire in her condo. She is fine, and all steps are being taken for the restoration of her home at this time, but please keep her in your prayers at this time.

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Vice President Beasley noted that the Council has the minutes from the meeting of the Executive Committee.

Synod Council Committees

The Vice President brought before the Council the proposed assignments for the various Synod Council Committees. The process we follow has the Bishop and the Vice President make the proposed assignments, and the Synod Council affirm the committees as configured. The chairperson of each committee is a member of the Council. Membership on several of the committees may include people not on Synod Council. Ms. Beasley thanked those who have served as chairs, and those who have been tapped as new chairpersons of the various committees. After the Council had reviewed the proposed assignments, the following resolution was presented by Secretary Richard:

S.C.22.09.27. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council affirms the Committee assignments as proposed by the Bishop and Vice President.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Urban Ministry Task Force

Vice President Beasley noted that the pandemic has been difficult for the Church. This has made constructing the Urban Ministry team challenging. Many people are overwhelmed, and do not want to take on one more responsibility. We are still looking for one more member, a man 40 years or younger, to serve. Yet, we are grateful to have the following persons who have agreed to be a part of this team.

Ex- officio members:

Rev. Reginia Goodrich, Dean

Rev. Bryan Penman, Co-Director for Evangelical Mission

Lay Leadership:

Karen Paulus

Cynthia London

Maureen Tang

Cliff Hayman

Rostered Leadership:

Rev. Derrick Jackson

Rev. Gwen Johnson Bond

Rev. Lyzette Rios

Rev. Steve Keiser (Retired)

Resource People:

Rev. Paul Hagedorn

Rev. Carlton Rogers

Rev. Sandra Brown

Rev. Jesse Brown

Rev. Cornelius Eaddy

Gunter Wesch (financial person subcommittee if needed)

Rev. Kari Hart

Vice President Beasley gave a brief description of each of the proposed members, and why they were approached to be a part of this team. As the formation of this task force was a charge to the Synod Council from the Synod Assembly, the following resolution was put before the Council:

S.C.22.09.28. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council appoints these persons as members of the Urban Ministry Task Force.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Churchwide Assembly

Ms. Beasley noted that in the Synod Council materials is a summary of the highlights from the Churchwide Assembly. Please be sure to share these highlights with your congregations.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Actions on the Roster

Request to move to Retired Roster:

S.C.22.09.29. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve moving Pastor Arlene Greenwald to the retired roster effective April 21, 2021.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Renewal Request of Invitation to UCC Minister to Serve ELCA Congregation in SEPA Synod:

S.C.22.09.30. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve renewal of entry rite, Invitation to Extended Service, for the **Rev. Dr. Karyn L. Wiseman** at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Huntingdon Valley, PA beginning October 1, 2022 until September 30, 2023.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Renewal - Call to Specialized Ministry:

S.C.22.09.31. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend a one-year renewable call to Specialized Ministry to the **Rev. Sabrina LaBelle** beginning August 1, 2022 to July 31, 2023.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Call to Interim Ministry:

S.C.22.09.32. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the **Rev. Heidi M. Rodrick-Schnaath** to interim ministry at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd (Coatesville) beginning August 1, 2022 and extending until a pastor is called by the congregation or until Pastor Rodrick-Schnaath resigns this call, whichever comes first.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

Ms. Janet Neff, Treasurer, began by expressing her thanks to Bishop Davenport for all the support given to the Neff family in this time when they have experienced the death of several family members, and during Ms. Neff's own health struggles. She then shared the following regarding the finances of the Synod.

- The global economy is taking its toll on the markets, and our investments have also been hit hard by this current trend. While we are experiencing challenges with inflation, the Synod is no worse off than any other organization.
- Mission Support is down, but this is common during the summer months.
- We are now in our offices, and so our rent to the Seminary has resumed. We have also settled all past accounts owed between the Synod and the Seminary from our previous rental arrangement.

In response to queries she has received regarding the budgeting for the Director of Evangelical Mission positions, which are shared staffing with the ELCA, Ms. Neff pointed out

that the ELCA is giving the pay for the positions to the congregations of our Directors for Evangelical Mission, which are then paying it to the DEMs.

Overall, our balance sheet is still strong, and we are in a good financial position at this time.

Mr. Roland Thompson raised a question about on-line giving, and whether or not it is suppressing giving to the Synod. Often on these giving links there are fewer options for where to designate your gift, and this may be part of why we are receiving fewer offerings.

Pr. Karen Sease, Assistant to the Bishop for Vocations and Advancement, noted that we have congregations that fund Mission Support in numerous ways. Some do this on-line, some do this by check. Some give a firm number of support, and others give a “guesstimate” of what they will give. Over the summer she checked on congregations that are \$3,000 behind in their stated support to the Synod. Some of them were not sure where to send their support, some were just behind, and some were having financial struggles. The good news is that none of these congregations are behind because they are discontented with the Synod.

Bishop Davenport thanked Pr. Sease for these contacts. In these calls we discovered that with respect to a congregation that had not given anything for 5 years, there had been a change in financial leadership, and the new person did not know that the money designated for Partnership Support was supposed to come to the Synod.

Picking up on Mr. Thompson’s comment regarding on-line giving, Pr. Julie DeWerth noted that what they miss most in her congregation from on-line platforms are the “extra” envelopes, and the offerings received through them. While each offering may be small, for Christmas, Lent, Food Bank, or whatever, each of them is an addition to people’s regular giving, and that adds up.

Pr. Serena Sellers shared her experience that most online sites will allow you to set up a few extra funds, but not as many as we have in our boxes. Maybe the platforms that provide for on-line giving could be made aware of the need for more options.

Mr. Everett Wick noted that in his congregation the move has been to include most of these smaller “pockets” into a consolidated budget. Each of these items are important to fund, so the congregation has taken the position to fund them all from the regular budget, decreasing the need for special offerings and appeals.

REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Mr. Glenn noted that the Committee reviewed the most recent statements available, and found no issues with the reports.

Special Funds

With regard to the various pockets of money the Synod has, the Finance Committee feels it is important to be clear who has the authority to disburse these monies, and by what process. Among the funds we have are the Fund for Mission, the St. Petri-Hope Fund, the Fisher Trust, and the relatively newly received trust from the former Grace, Norristown. Some of these Funds have clearer parameters than others. The money of the Grace, Norristown Trust is the one in greatest need of clarification.

Seminary Debt Relief

The Finance Committee is adjusting the timing of the relief process. Requests will be received in January, with recommendations for awards made prior to the Synod Assembly in early May.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Nominating Committee

Pr. Joey Klinger shared there is no formal report at this time, but the process of identifying needs, and drafting a letter to the Synod regarding such openings, has begun.

There were no other committee reports at this time.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

Meeting closed with prayer by Pr. Marie Sager at 7:57 p.m.

The next meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council will be December 8, 2022, 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, December 8, 2022