

MINUTES
of the 185th MEETING
of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
Zoom Meeting
February 13, 2025
6:00 p.m.

DEVOTIONS

Vice President Tracey A. Beasey brought words of welcome to the Synod Council at 6:06 p.m. The Rev. Heeralal Mukesh Cheedie led the Council in devotions. He engaged in Lectio Divina on Acts 18:1 – 11 with the theme, “How are we called to live our faith in daily life?”

CALL TO ORDER

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley called the 185th meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 6:20 p.m. The Rev. Karl M. Richard, Secretary, confirmed a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the 184th Meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council (December 12, 2024) were approved as presented.

SETTING THE AGENDA

Vice President Beasley presented the agenda to the Synod Council. The agenda was approved as presented.

MISSION MOMENT

Bishop Penman introduced two new members of the Synod Staff and invited them to describe a bit of who they are and how they are serving. The Rev. Annemarie H. Cook is Program Director of our Faith Alive Initiative, the second of our Lilly Grant programs. Pr. Cook is a 2011 graduate of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. “Children in worship” has been a passion of hers throughout her ministry. She worked with the interactive learning center at the ELCA Youth Gathering, where there was a playground for worship, and which reaffirmed in her the need to include children and play in our congregations. She is the product of a congregation that allowed her to explore worship in her own way and grow in her worship life. She feels it is important to determine how we can welcome children now, not how previous generations strove to do so. She looks forward to getting to know the congregations and people of Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. She has come to know every congregation in the New Jersey Synod and looks forward to making those kinds of relationships in this synod. No congregation is the same; worship is contextual. Knowing the congregations and their context will help as she works to assist them with exploring how we make even more room for children in the worship and the faith life of these congregations.

The Rev. Paula Lebo is the new Director of Mission Interpretation. This position is being restructured and reimaged as Pr. Lebo takes on this role. She brings experience in journalism, and has a deep understanding of, and love for, Christ and the Church. Pr. Lebo grew up in the

Allegheny Synod, and like Pr. Cook, is looking forward to getting acquainted with this synod, exploring new and different ways to make the love of God known in Southeastern Pennsylvania.

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

Bishop Penman noted that everything that is happening around the synod is being influenced and shaped by the daily actions of the current administration. It brings its own challenges as funding is being slashed, and untrue statements are being made concerning faith-based agencies, including Lutheran Social Services. As part of how we respond to the changing policies in the country, our synod attorney is holding a session on what to do about immigration.

The bishop noted several items from his written report, including:

- + The first gathering of Council Leaders will be held on February 22nd. This is the first of several gatherings we will offer for congregational officers and leaders. There are plans for a gathering of congregational secretaries and treasurers in the near future.
- + The Synod Assembly this year will be at a different time and place – May 30 and 31 at Trinity, Lansdale. Registration is set to open the third week of February. The deadline for nominations is March 15, 2025. Please be sure to spread the word, as many have not heard about the changes.
- + We have been having a string of ordinations and installations, which is great news for the congregations of our synod. We are blessed to have these new leaders. Two of the upcoming ordinations include Brendan Galvin, who is coming into the ELCA from the United Methodist Church and will serve Gloria Dei in Huntingdon Park, and Ian Clements, who was raised in our synod and will be serving Centennial, Kimberton.
- + The Rev. Linda Manson is being proposed to join the staff as co-Director for Evangelical Mission, joining the Rev. Dr. Moses Suah-Dennis in this work. She will also be coordinating our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives in the synod. This will be structured around the idea of Imago Dei (DEI): we are created in, and called to reflect, the image of God.
- + The Rev. Erica Wesch is poised to join the synod staff, working in the area of Formation of Rostered Ministers (Candidacy). This will allow the Rev. Karen Sease to focus on mobility and transition work in congregations.
- + As far as transition work in congregations is concerned, we are striving to approach this differently than we have in the past. We are asking congregations and deans to create Individualized Transition Plans, similar to a school IEP, recognizing that a “one size fits all” process does not fit all situations.
- + Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa) is hosting a program this Spring on Dietrich Bonhoeffer in conjunction with the Bonhoeffer Symposium. This will be held at the Gettysburg campus of United Lutheran Seminary. Bonhoeffer, and the idea of a faith response to the events of the day, has garnered a great deal of attention from young, non-churched people.
- + At the Churchwide organization, the Rev. Ruben Duran, who, among other areas, served as the Director of New Congregational Starts for the ELCA, retired at the end of January. He was instrumental in establishing at least 17 multi-cultural ministries in our Church. We are grateful for his ministry and advocacy within the Church, and in the world.

Bishop Penman then engaged in conversation with the Synod Council on various items of interest to the members.

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Vice President Beasley noted the report of the Executive Committee was in the Council's packet of materials. She asked for any questions or comments.

The Vice President shared that she continues to visit congregations in our synod. Most recently she has visited Trinity, Germantown, a Strategic Ministry congregation.

She also noted that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. service was moved because of the weather, but there was still a large enough attendance on the re-scheduled day that they ran out of bulletins. The choir from Faith-Immanuel in East Lansdowne offered special music as part of the commemorative worship service.

The process for distribution of Urban Ministry grants was shared with the Council as information.

People to serve as members for the Synod's Care for Creation Team were presented by Bishop Penman and Vice President Beasley:

S.C.25.02.01. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod approves the appointment of the following people to the Care for Creation Team: Dr. Joy Baxter, St. Paul, Ardmore, co-chair; Mr. Ken Anderson, Evangelical, Durham, co-chair, the Rev. Thomas Lang, St. Andrew, Perkasio; Dr. John Connors, God's Love, Newtown; Mr. Zenas Savage, Emmanuel, Pottstown; Ms. Aimee Hillegas, St. John, Phoenixville; Ms. Janet Bishoff, St. Paul, Glenside; Ms. Brooke Alderfer, St. Peter, North Wales; Mr. Bert Glenn, St. John, Melrose Park; Ms. Elizabeth Beck, Christ Ascension, Philadelphia; and Mr. Richard Hollenbach, Faith, Montgomery.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution, with Dr. Connors abstaining.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Actions on the Roster

Calls to Synod Staff:

S.C.25.02.02. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the Rev. Linda Manson as Co-Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging beginning March 1, 2025. This position is co-terminus with the synodical bishop.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

S.C.25.02.03. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the Rev. Erika Wesch as Assistant to the Bishop for Formation beginning March 15, 2025. This position is co-terminus with the synodical bishop.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Invitation to Full Communion Partners to Serve ELCA Congregations in SEPA Synod:
S.C.25.02.04. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves entry rite renewal, Invitation to Extended Service, for the Rev. Karen Nelson at Trinity (Fairview Village), beginning April 21, 2025, until April 20, 2026. This invitation is eligible for renewal annually by Synod Council.
The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Request to Move from Active Roster to On Leave from Call
S.C.25.02.05. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant “On Leave from Call” status to the Rev. Gwendolyn King, 1st year, effective February 1, 2025.
The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Information not requiring action

Deaths

The Rev. Ray Nyce – December 23, 2024
Mrs. Anne Marie Heidgerd – February 1, 2025 (wife of Pr. John Heidgerd; not for Bulletin of Reports)

2025 Housing Allowances for Rostered Ministers on Synod Staff

WHEREAS, Internal Revenue Code Section 107, as well as the associated Regulations and Revenue Rulings, provide that a portion of a minister’s remuneration, designated as rental/housing allowance by the employing church or other qualifying organization, is excludable from the minister’s gross income under Section 107 of the code; and
WHEREAS, The Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is a qualifying organization, and
WHEREAS, of the compensation paid by SEPA Synod to ministers listed below in the calendar year 2025 the amount stated in each instance is designated as a rental/housing allowance in accordance with the provisions of section 107 of the Internal Revenue Code.

Clergy Name/ Housing Allowance Amount for 2025

Pastor Linda Manson - \$40,700
Pastor Erika Wesch - \$17,830.00

S.C.25.02.06. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the 2025 housing allowance for Pastor Linda Manson and Pastor Erika Wesch, and
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the recipients be reminded that the amounts so designated as rental/housing allowance are excludable from the gross income of the respective recipients only to the extent that said amounts are used to rent or provide a home. Further the amount eligible for the Section 107 exclusion may not exceed the fair rental value of the minister’s home (including furnishings and appurtenances) plus the cost of utilities. To the extent a greater amount is designated as rental/housing allowance, the designation will be ineffectual with respect to such amount.
The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Mr. Martin Schwab, synod Senior Accountant, presented on behalf of Treasurer Janet Neff, who was unable to attend this meeting.

Statement of Financial Position

	12/31/24	1/31/24
Total Cash & Investments	\$18,131,427	\$12,068,926
Total Assets	\$21,921,652	\$15,859,964
Total Liabilities	\$ 278,518	\$ 235,326
Total Net Assets	\$21,643,134	\$15,624,638
Unrestricted	\$14,977,083	\$10,367,555
With donor restrictions	\$ 6,666,051	\$ 5,257,083

Statement of Activities

Revenue

as of 12/31/24

	Actual	Forecast	2025 Budget
Mission Support	\$1,388,765	\$1,374,063	\$1,500,000
Other Contributions	\$1,953,516	\$ 386,361	\$ 421,817
Registration Fees	\$ 94,372	\$ 87,020	\$ 113,799
Investment Income	\$2,216,586	\$ 679,964	\$ 800,273
Beneficial Interest in Trust	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 60,000
Proceeds from Property	<u>\$3,251,238</u>	<u>\$2,050,000</u>	<u>\$1,000,000</u>
Total Revenue	\$8,904,477	\$4,577,407	\$3,895,899

Statement of Activities

Expenses

as of 12/31/24

	Actual	Forecast	2025 Budget
Operating Expenses	\$1,594,532	\$1,667,941	\$1,941,169
ELCA Proportionate Share (50%)	\$ 694,383	\$ 687,030	\$ 750,000
Property Management	\$ 161,300	\$ 114,000	\$ 61,203
Distributions to Other Agencies	\$ 86,000	\$ 87,417	\$ 93,000
Remit to Designated Agency	\$ 26,242	\$ 11,458	\$ 12,500
Grants to Organizations	<u>\$ 323,524</u>	<u>\$ 184,113</u>	<u>\$ 230,837</u>
Total Expenses	\$2,885,981	\$2,751,959	\$3,088,708

In summary, Mr. Schwab noted as of December 31st we have total assets of just under 22 million dollars and liabilities of \$278,000. Therefore, our current ratios are in good order.

Mr. Craig McJett asked what was included in the “property management” line of the report. Mr. Schwab stated that it includes all the costs we have for maintaining the properties of former congregations until they are either sold or repurposed for different ministries.

REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Ms. Pia Graham, chair of the finance committee, made the report.

- + The Committee reviewed the financial statements and found no concerns with them as presented.
- + Mission Support is \$1,000 higher than forecast.
- + The All Saints Appeal is on target for what was forecasted.
- + The Committee reviewed the receipts from the sales of the properties of what had been Bethany in Roxborough, and Trinity in South Philadelphia.

Fund for Mission

As the Finance Chair is also a member of the Fund for Mission Trustees, and takes those minutes, Ms. Graham also reported on the latest actions in the Fund for Mission. Five percent (5%) of the Fund is available each year for mission work in our synod. As of December 31, 2024, that number was \$479,867. Of that total \$175,708 has been designated for use, and \$304,159 is still available for this year.

Dr. Marcia Borass asked how requests for money from the Fund for Mission come to the Trustees.

Ms. Graham stated that such requests are made through, and with the assistance of, the Directors for Evangelical Mission.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Investment Committee

Pr. John Heidgerd, chairperson, presented the Committee's proposed firm to manage our investments. This proposal was presented first to the Executive Committee, which supports the recommendation.

Eight firms were invited to make a proposal to be the Investment Manager for the synod. Three declined to bid; five agreed to submit a proposal. One of those five, Thrivent Financial, was removed from consideration because of the limits of the investment options they could offer. The remaining four were given due consideration. These firms were BLBB Advisors, Bryn Mawr Trust, Everence, and Girard/Univest. Of these, Girard/Univest was determined by the Investment Committee to be the best choice for the synod, for the following reasons.

Girard/Univest is

- Tied to large super-regional bank that operates primarily in Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod
- Low management cost
- Significant institutional customer base
- Offered to help draft investment policy "pro-bono"
- Committed to supporting its communities.
- Good DEI program and representation.

The Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia asked if the Committee had considered the ELCA Mission Investment Fund as a possible management firm.

Pr. Heidgerd said they had, but the Mission Investment Fund does not offer the wide range of investment vehicles we have been using and will need; in fact, they offer fewer than Thrivent Financial does. And beyond that, until quite recently the Mission Investment Fund was not open

to managing Investment Funds such as we have. The track record that Girard/Univest brings is more substantial and inspires more confidence in the Committee.

The Rev. Gwendolyn King asked if Girard/Univest is strong in non-profit institutions.

Pr. Heidgerd replied that they are, and this was part of the reason for the Committee's recommendation.

Pr. King further asked about the diversity of this firm, and how the Investment Committee evaluated this factor.

Pr. Heidgerd stated that the firm had shared the names and representation of the people on their staff who would be working with our accounts. They showed more diversity than the other firms under consideration. This is not to say they exhibit significant diversity, but their policies state they are committed to diversity, and they do have more diversity than the other firms.

With no further questions, the following resolution was placed before the Synod Council:
S.C.25.02.07. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod approve the engagement of Girard Univest as managers for our Investment Portfolio.
The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Nominating Committee

Ms. Emily Valentine, chairperson, noted that nominations are coming in, but there remain seats for which there are only one, or no nominee. She asked the Synod Council to continue to seek qualified candidates to serve in the open positions for Synod Council and as Vice President. The deadline for nominations is March 15, 2025.

Constitution Committee

Ms. Dorothy Wilson, chairperson, shared that the constitutions for Redeemer, Pendell and St. Paul, Telford have been reviewed by the committee and are ready for ratification by the Synod Council.

S.C.25.02.08. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves the revised constitutions of Redeemer, Pendell, and St. Paul, Telford.
The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

OLD BUSINESS – none

NEW BUSINESS – none

UNFINISHED BUSINESS – none

The meeting was adjourned at 7:54 p.m. with prayer by the Rev. Dr. Moses Suah-Dennis. The next meeting of the Synod Council will be held April 10, 2025, at the United Lutheran Seminary, Philadelphia Campus.

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

Approved by Synod Council, April 10, 2025