

MINUTES
of the 186th MEETING
of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
United Lutheran Seminary
April 10, 2025
6:00 p.m.

DEVOTIONS

Vice President Tracey A. Beasey brought words of welcome to the Synod Council at 6:00 p.m. The Rev. Dr. Guy Erwin, President of the United Lutheran Seminary, led the Council in devotions.

CALL TO ORDER

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley called the 186th meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 6:10 p.m. The Rev. Karl M. Richard, Secretary, confirmed a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the 185th Meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council (February 13, 2025) were approved as presented.

SETTING THE AGENDA

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

MISSION MOMENT

Dr. Erwin shared a “State of the Seminary” update with the Synod Council. The Seminary is having a good year. Concerns of student debt and other issues are being considered to make a seminary education possible for as many as may feel called to the ministry. Enrollment is on target with expectations. The number of people in candidacy is quite low, but United Lutheran Seminary has been receiving a significant number of those entering the process. ULS is still a strong option for those considering the ministry, with seventy students enrolled. This is in stark comparison to Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, which has only one ELCA student enrolled.

There are currently two faculty searches underway: one for a professor of Old Testament, one for a professor of Theology.

2026 marks the 250th anniversary of the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg. As this is now a united seminary, the work of the Philadelphia Seminary will also be honored as part of the celebration in this anniversary year.

PROPOSED AGENDA FOR THE 2025 SYNOD ASSEMBLY

Ms. Carrie Schwab, special events coordination for the Synod, reviewed the proposed agenda for the 37th Annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. She noted that there is much

to be excited about, as we return to “normal” after covid, and after the Bishop Election last year. Within the Assembly we will have the opportunity to highlight many of our ministries by means of Ministry Spotlights. In response to a question about the election of the next Vice President of the Synod, it was noted that this is not an ecclesiastical process, but as this is the highest elected lay position in the Synod, it seemed good to add a time for each person who may be nominated for the position to have three (3) minutes to address the Assembly prior to the vote for this office. When asked if she had any concerns regarding the agenda, Ms. Schwab shared her only concern is that we need to be finished and out of the space by 4:00 p.m., as Trinity, Lansdale, our host site, has a worship service at that time.

As there were no objections to the agenda, it will be presented to the Synod Assembly for adoption.

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

New Staff

Bishop Bryan Penman noted that new staff continues to be onboarded. Since our last meeting, the Rev. Paula Lebo has begun her work as Assistant to the Bishop for Mission Interpretation; The Rev. Linda Manson has begun service as the Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity, and Belonging, as well as co-Director for Evangelical Mission alongside the Rev. Dr. Moses Suah Dennis; the Rev. Erika Wesch will soon begin her work as the Assistant to the Bishop for Formation, working the process for those in candidacy for rostered ministry in the ELCA. There is still work to be done before we bring on an Assistant for Youth and Young Adult Ministry, as what this role will entail is still being envisioned.

All hands are on deck as preparations continue for the Bishop Penman’s first Synod Assembly as Bishop.

Churchwide Assembly, July 28 – August 1, 2025

Several Key issues will be coming before the Assembly this summer:

- + We will be electing a Presiding Bishop
- + We will be electing the Secretary of the ELCA
- + We will be voting on Social Statements and Revisions of Social Statements
- + We will be hearing updates and voting on recommended actions from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC).
- + We will appoint various members to committees and agencies throughout the country.

Bear Creek Camp and Philly Connect

Bear Creek camp is an outdoor ministry we share with the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod. Summer Camp and Outdoor Ministry is a great feeder system for rostered ministers, as campers lead to counselors, and counselors lead to pastors and deacons.

Philly Connect is a program that has been a primary driver in getting youth from the urban congregations to attend camp over the summer. This program had its origins at Bear Creek Camp through a Lilly grant which has since expired. Bear Creek Camp has been working to cover this cost since the end of the grant. This program will become a program of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. This will allow for more complete funding of camperships from our Fund for Mission, where the resources of the Camp have been strained. Ongoing conversations will be held with the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, as there is a desire to have a similar outreach to the youth in the cities of Allentown and Reading. There is a mutual desire

to increase the ways we can partner to make it possible for all urban youth to learn and experience God's love, and God's creation.

Ordinations and Installations

Bishop Penman rejoiced at the number of ordinations and installations that have taken place lately. Many congregations are calling rostered leaders in various configurations of service. Still, there are twenty-five (25) congregations in our Synod which are still in need of pastoral leadership.

ELCA Conference of Bishops

The conference of Bishops has begun an initiative called "Pray without Ceasing," through which the Confessing Church will stand against hate and oppression. Congregations can sign up to be partners in prayer and in advocacy for those who are most vulnerable. Of particular concern are those in the transgender community, as they are highly likely to experience emotional and physical harm, and trans youth have alarmingly high rates of suicide.

Celebration of Vice President Beasley

There will be a celebration of the ministry of our Vice President, Tracey A. Beasley, on Sunday, June 8th, at Reformation, Mount Airy, as she concludes her final term as our Vice President. There will be a worship service and a dinner to thank God for her ministry among us. All are welcome to attend. Reservations are needed, particularly for the dinner.

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Vice President Beasley thanked all who have served on Synod Council and whose terms end with this year's Assembly.

- + Pr. Gwendolyn King is completing her second term and is no longer eligible to serve.
- + Ms. Emily Valentine is completing her term as Young Adult Representative, and "aging out" of this position, therefore she is also no longer eligible to continue to serve.
- + Ms. Dorothy Wilson is concluding her first term and chooses not to stand for election to a second.
- + The Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia has completed an unexpired term and is choosing to stand for election for a first term.

Thank you, class of 2025!

Care of Creation Grant Form

Vice President Beasley then put before the Synod Council the Care of Creation Ministry Team's proposed application for microgrants to assist congregations in their environmental impact efforts.

There are up to ten (10) microgrants of up to \$1,000 each available.

Dr. Marcia Borass asked if these will be ongoing grants, or if this is all there will be.

Dr. John Connors, who sits on both Synod Council and the Care of Creation Ministry Team, noted that this money is from the Edmonds Estate, and so this grant program will be limited to \$10,000 in total.

With no further questions, the following resolution was placed before the Synod Council:

S.C.25.04.08. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod approve the Care of Creation Ministry Microgrant Application.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Dr. Connors asked that it be noted that he abstained from this vote.

The Vice President then placed before the Council a resolution to revise the policy on what is done with the proceeds from the sale of the property of a former congregation of the Synod. The current policy follows. The proposed addition with whereas clauses is at the end of the policy:

**Policy for the Disbursement of Funds from the Sale
of the Property of a Closed Congregation**

RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council establishes as the policy of this synod that, when this synod sells the property of a closed congregation, fifteen percent of the net proceeds of that property shall be placed in the synod's operating account;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, after fifteen percent of the net proceeds of that property has been deducted for the synod's operating account, an amount equal to the synod's expenses related to the properties the synod has under management shall be deducted from the balance to reimburse the synod for those expenses;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, after an amount equal to the synod's expenses related to the properties the synod has under management have been deducted, the remaining balance of proceeds shall be placed in the synod's Fund for Mission.

Revised by Synod Council September 25, 2014

WHEREAS there is an increasing number of congregations with cemeteries experiencing Holy Closure, and

WHEREAS the state requires perpetual care of cemeteries be maintained, and

WHEREAS there is not always sufficient money to provide for such care set aside in a perpetual care fund by the former congregation,

The Synod Executive Committee proposes the following amendment to the Policy:

S.C.25.04.09. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod approve the following as a fourth RESOLVED to the Policy for the Disbursement of Funds from the Sale of Closed Congregations:

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, if the former congregation had as part of its property assets a cemetery, this process will be altered in the following manner:

- After the sale of the property, an amount sufficient to provide for the perpetual care of the cemetery shall be taken from the net proceeds of the sale, and be either added to any existing perpetual care fund for said cemetery, or used to create a fund for said cemetery, to comply with state law regarding the care of cemeteries;
- After this amount has been deducted from the net proceeds of the sale, fifteen percent of the remainder of the proceeds will be placed in the synod's operating account;
- After fifteen percent of the net proceeds of that property has been deducted for the synod's operating account, an amount equal to the synod's expenses related to the properties the synod has under management shall be deducted from the balance to reimburse the synod for those expenses;
- And after an amount equal to the synod's expenses related to the properties the synod has under management have been deducted, the remaining balance of proceeds shall be placed in the synod's Fund for Mission.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Actions on the Roster

Renewal – Calls to Specialized Ministry:

S.C.25.04.10. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend a renewable call to Specialized Ministry to the Rev. Margaret J. Ainslie as Director of Pastoral Care at Doylestown Hospital (Doylestown, PA) beginning February 27, 2025, to February 26, 2026. This call requires an annual report to and meeting with the synodical bishop for the length of this call.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

S.C.25.04.11. 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, 2025 to May 31, 2026. Renewable on an annual basis.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Request to Move from Active Roster to On Leave from Call

S.C.25.04.12. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant “On Leave from Call” status to the Rev. Stacey-Kyle Rea, 1st year, effective May 1, 2025.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Request to Move from Active Roster to On Leave from Call - Disability

S.C.25.04.13. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant “On Leave from Call” for disability status to the Rev. Lisa Jester effective December 1, 2024.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Requests to Move from Active Roster to Retired Roster

S.C.25.04.14. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant retired status to the Rev. Nancy M. Raabe effective July 1, 2025.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

S.C.25.04.15. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant retired status to the Rev. Wayne R. Shelor effective May 1, 2025.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Alternate Voting Member to Churchwide Assembly

Ms. Jessmy Trochez, elected to attend the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly as “additional Person of Color or whose Primary Language is other than English” is not able to attend. Upon the recommendation of the Bishop and the Executive Committee,

S.C.25.04.16. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council appoints Mr. Craig McJett as alternate Voting Member to the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly as a Person of Color or Primary Language other than English.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Treasurer Janet Neff presented her report to the Synod Council.

Statement of Financial Position Highlights as of 1/31/2025 and 1/31/2024

	1/31/25	1/31/24
Total Cash & Investments	\$ 18,413,573	\$12,068,926
Total Assets	\$ 22,337,569	\$15,859,964
Total Liabilities	\$ 191,226	\$ 235,326
Total Net Assets	\$ 22,146,343	\$ 15,624,638
Unrestricted	\$ 15,539,313	\$10,367,555
With donor restrictions	\$ 6,607,030	\$ 5,257,083

Statement of Activities

Revenue

as of 1/31/25

	2024 Actual	2024 Forecast	2026 Budget
Mission Support	\$1,521,842	\$1,500,000	\$1,600,000
Other Contributions	\$2,212,673	\$ 435,847	\$ 506,686
Registration Fees	\$ 94,372	\$ 102,799	\$ 114,256
Investment Income	\$2,764,214	\$ 767,836	\$1,218,630
Beneficial interest in Trust	\$ 170,753	\$ 60,000	\$ 60,000
Proceeds from property	<u>\$ 3,269,268</u>	<u>\$2,050,000</u>	<u>\$ 700,000</u>
Total Revenue	\$ 9,801,256	\$4,916,482	\$4,199,572

Statement of Activities

Expenses

As of 1/31/25

	2024 Actual	2024 Forecast	2026 Budget
Operating Expense	\$1,804,789	\$1,834,901	\$2,257,645
ELCA Proportionate (50%)	\$ 760,921	\$ 750,000	\$ 800,000
Property Management	\$ 207,916	\$ 120,000	\$ 25,000
Distributions to other agencies	\$ 91,000	\$ 93,000	\$ 98,725
Remit to designated agency	\$ 31,427	\$ 12,500	\$ 12,540
Grants to Organizations	<u>\$ 378,238</u>	<u>\$ 248,487</u>	<u>\$ 178,460</u>
Total Expenses	\$3,274,291	\$3,058,887	\$3,372,370

Treasurer Neff provided some highlights on the past year and the proposed budget:

- We are above expectations in Mission Support. We base our forecast on the previous year's actuals.
- Investment income has been up, but we are reducing the forecast because of the uncertainty in the current administration.
- Proceeds from properties were high because we sold several properties. This past year we sold the properties of the former St. Paul Lansdowne, and St. Paul's Norristown, which will be the last of our current properties under management. We have kept a number in that line of the budget as we do not know what might occur in the future.

- Budget for 2026 shows an increase in staffing costs because we have added staff, but we are also using money from our Lilly grants to cover a good portion of this expense.
- Cost for Property management is lower as we have no closures currently on the horizon.

Ms. Pia Graham, Chair of the Finance Committee, reviewed the meeting of the Finance Committee, and the decisions of the Fund for Mission Trustees, which were included in the reports to the Synod Council. She also shared that there will be a Zoom meeting to present the budget to the voting members of the Synod Assembly to allow more time to answer questions in detail.

S.C.25.04.17. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves the proposed budget for 2026 (fiscal year ending 1/31/2027) for presentation to the Synod Assembly for adoption.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Audit Committee

Senior Accountant Martin Schwab presented the results of the audit for the fiscal year ending 1/31/2025. The Audit was in the packet of materials for the Synod Council. Mr. Craig McJett, the Rev. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath, and Vice President Beasley are on the Audit Committee. There have been no changes to the draft that has been presented. The opinion did not change, and there are no concerns with the financial status or methods of the Synod.

S.C.25.04.18. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves the Audit Report for 2024 (fiscal year ending 1/31/2025) for presentation to the Synod Assembly for its acceptance.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Nominating Committee

Ms. Emily Valentine, Chair of the Nominating Committee, made the following update to the Synod Council:

As of this meeting, the Nominating Committee has at least one person in nomination for each open position except for “Upper Montgomery Conference Representative – Lay Man.”

We have only one nominee for Vice President at this time. There have been five (5) people who have had conversations with Vice President Beasley, but as of this meeting they have either decided not to stand for election, or have not felt they have had sufficient time to discern if this is an area to which they feel called to serve. It is possible to have nominations from the floor, so some of these potential candidates may still come forward at the Assembly.

Constitution Committee

Ms. Dorothy Wilson, Chair of the Constitution Committee, brought forward two congregational constitutions for ratification by the Synod Council, those for Advent, Richboro, and St. John, Ridge Valley (Sellersville). They were both considered in the same resolution:

S.C.25.04.19. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves the revised constitutions of Advent, Richboro, and St. John, Ridge Valley (Sellersville).

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

OLD BUSINESS

Secretary Richard reminded the members of Synod Council whose terms are not ending with the upcoming Assembly that they continue on their respective committees until new assignments are made by the bishop and the next Vice President. Those whose terms are ending, if chairs of committees, will have successors chosen as soon as possible.

NEW BUSINESS

Vice President Beasley took a moment of personal privilege at this, her last meeting with the Synod Council.

She said that it has been a blast to serve as Vice President. She has served as 12 years as Vice President, and still longer with her previous years on Synod Council. She has served with 2 treasurers, 2 secretaries, and 4 bishops. She has seen a lot, learned a lot, and been put out front a lot, all for the sake of the Kingdom.

Be loving and kind to the new Vice President, whomever he, she, or they may be.

Vice President Beasley will be around and is willing to be a resource to her successor, but she will not get in the way of the next Vice President.

There is still so much to do for this Synod and the Kingdom. Be in prayer. Don't give up. God has got a plan for this denomination and the Kingdom.

The Synod Council thanked Vice President Beasley with an extended standing ovation.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

The meeting was adjourned at 7:44 p.m. with prayer by the Rev. Linda Manson.

The next meeting of the Synod Council is scheduled for June 26, 2025, and will be held via Zoom.

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

Approved by Synod Council, June 26, 2025