

**MINUTES**  
**of the 190<sup>th</sup> MEETING**  
**of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL**  
**of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**  
**Zoom Meeting**  
**February 19, 2026**  
**6:00 p.m.**

**WELCOME AND DEVOTIONS**

Vice President Cheryl Lafferty welcomed the Synod Council at 6:01 p.m. and invited Ms. Irene Rajarigam to lead the Council in devotions. Ms. Rajarigam reflected on Black History Month, and the contributions and struggles of the Black community. Citing Genesis 1:28, that we are all created in the image of God, she called for us to engage in efforts of anti-racism, as racism is in opposition to this teaching of Scripture.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Vice President Lafferty called the 190<sup>th</sup> meeting the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 6:11 p.m. The Reverend Karl Richard, Secretary, confirmed a quorum was present.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The Minutes of the 189<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council (December 11, 2025) were approved as presented.

**SETTING THE AGENDA**

Vice President Lafferty presented the agenda to the Synod Council. The agenda was adopted as presented.

**MISSION MOMENT – The Vitality Team**

The Rev. Bradley Gow, chair of the Synod Vitality Team, shared about the work of this team. The Vitality Team has conversations with congregations across the synod to help them determine what a vital mission and ministry is. The members of the team walk with congregations and their leaders as together they engage in a process of discernment. They do not enter with a plan or a blueprint, as each setting is unique, and each congregation needs to determine for itself what they are able and willing to pursue as their ministry. The goal is to find a way to supply life to our congregations and provide help to the places we serve. Part of the discernment for congregations is to determine if they are at a point for transformation, partnership, or resurrection. The Rev. Linda Manson, co-Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging, has created a “Holy Conversations” booklet for congregations to use as they make that determination. These discussions are about discernment, and not about assigning blame or shame. It is not a process to discover what a congregation has done “wrong.” This is a conversation about determining how a congregation might best move forward.

Congregations interested in entering such a time of discernment should reach out to Pr. Gow or Pr. Manson. The member, or members, of the Team that are chosen to work with that congregation will walk alongside them until they come to some sense of direction. After a

congregation has determined which path to take, the process may be handed over to members of other teams, depending on what the needs of the congregation are for the next step of their journey.

As the Synod website is updated, more information will be placed on the resources tab for the work of Vitality. This will hopefully include the Holy Conversations booklet.

## **REPORT OF THE BISHOP**

Bishop Penman referenced his report from the packet of materials for the meeting. Following are some of the items he highlighted.

### **Trip to the Holy Land**

Bishop Penman shared reflections of his trip to the Holy Land for the installation of the Rev. Dr. Imad Haddad as the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. He was able to see the Holy Land from the Palestinian perspective. Palestinians use the word “genocide” to describe what is happening by Israel, because what is happening to the Palestinians is worse than any previous genocides. Bishop Penman shared that people ask Palestinians when they became Christian. The answer is over 2,000 years ago, as Palestinians were among the first to follow Jesus. Bishop Penman also learned that the Lutheran Church is the primary source of educators in Palestine. While there he was moved by a painting he saw, depicting Jesus washing feet, with Pilate washing his hands.

### **ELCA Youth Gathering**

The theme for the ELCA Youth Gathering has been set as “Imagine This”. This is an important conversation, and one that is being held Churchwide. How can we live with and care for our neighbors?

### **Standing with Minneapolis**

Many in the ELCA have been standing with the people of Minneapolis in this time of ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) activity. We have not had the same concerns in Philadelphia yet, but we will. It is not a matter of “if,” but “when.” ICE has purchased a warehouse outside of Reading for a detention center. Can we see the image of the holy in the other? If not, we have a lot of work to do, and we need to start there.

### **Synod Assembly**

The Synod Assembly will be held Friday, May 29<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 PM through Saturday, May 30<sup>th</sup>, at 5:30 PM, at Trinity, Lansdale. The Assembly will conclude with a joint worship service with Trinity, Lansdale, our host congregation. Muhlenberg College is still under consideration for the Synod Assembly in 2027.

## **VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT**

### **Updates on the Vice President’s activities**

Vice President Lafferty is beginning to travel across the synod to meet and bring greetings to congregations.

She shared that she attended the Children in Worship program coordinated by the Rev. Annemarie Cook, Assistant to the Bishop for the Faith Alive initiative. She felt it was a wonderful event.

The Vice President also attended the Stewardship Extravaganza, a joint program of the Northeastern and Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. She found this also to be a very worthwhile program.

In addition to each of these events, Vice President Lafferty also joined the meeting of ELCA Synod Vice Presidents. At this gathering there was an update on the concerns being faced by the people in Minneapolis.

#### **Updates on Task Forces**

- + The Compensation Task Force is empaneled and will be meeting soon.
- + A resolution to empanel a Synod Authorized Minister Task Force is being revised. It will be presented to the Synod Council for consideration when it is completed.
- + The Childcare Task Force will be sharing their work under “Old Business”

#### **REPORT OF THE SECRETARY**

##### **Actions on Roster**

##### ***Invitations to Full Communion Partners to Serve ELCA Congregations in SEPA Synod***

**S.C.26.02.01. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve entry rite renewal, Invitation to Extended Service, for the Rev. Karen Nelson at Trinity (Fairview Village), effective April 21, 2026, until April 20, 2027. This invitation is eligible for renewal by Synod Council.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution.**

**S.C.26.02.02. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve entry rite, Invitation to Extended Service, for the Rev. Dr. Anthony Scott at Reformation Lutheran (Mt. Airy), Philadelphia, PA beginning May 30, 2026, until May 29, 2027. This invitation is renewable annually by Synod Council.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution.**

##### ***Call to Specialized Ministry***

**S.C.26.02.03. 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, 2026, to February 26, 2027. 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.**

##### ***Request to Move from Active Roster to On Leave from Call***

**S.C.26.02.04. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant “On Leave from Call” status to the Rev. Dr. Norbert Hahn, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, effective August 7, 2025.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution.**

**S.C.26.02.05. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant “On Leave from Call” status to the Rev. Gwendolyn King, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, effective February 1, 2026.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution.**

***Request to move from the Active Roster to the Retired Roster***

**S.C.26.02.06. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant retired status to the Rev. Scott Staub effective January 1, 2026.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution.**

**Information Only – No Action Required**

***Transfers***

The Rev. Lamont A. Wells from Metropolitan Chicago Synod, May 12, 2025

The Rev. John Heidgerd to Metropolitan New York Synod, June 16, 2025

The Rev. Pastor McIver Mullins from Southeaster Iowa Synod, August 1, 2025

The Rev. Nathan Krause to Northeastern Ohio Synod, August 1, 2025

The Rev. G. Stanley Steele to Delaware-Maryland Synod, September 25, 2025

**Reception of the Property of a Former Congregation**

Trinity Lutheran Church, Fort Washington, has completed the process of Holy Closure, and held its final service on February 15, 2026. In our inter-dependent relationship as the ELCA, when a congregation closes, its assets and liabilities revert to the Synod. As Synod Council we need to formally acknowledge reception of these properties so that we may sell them if that is the most appropriate course of action. To that end, I put forward the following resolutions:

**S.C.26.02.07. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council** acknowledges with sadness the action of Trinity Lutheran Church, Fort Washington, to close, effective February 15, 2026, on which date the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod received the property of Trinity, Fort Washington, in accordance with the Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, specifically 9.71.b., +S13.23., and \*C7.01.; and, on this date, June 27, 2024, authorizes the Bishop of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, or the Bishop’s representative(s), to sell the property on behalf of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution.**

**Amendments to KenCrest Bylaws**

We have been informed of the desire of KenCrest, a ministry affiliated with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, to amend its bylaws to more easily fulfill their commitment to ELCA representation on their Board of Directors. The amended constitution and the rationale for this proposed change are included in the packet of materials for the February 2026, Synod Council meeting.

On their behalf, Secretary Richard made the following motion:

**S.C.26.02.08. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council** approves the change in the KenCrest bylaws Section 6.2. (b) as follows: ~~At least one third (1/3) of the Board must be members of congregations of the ELCA;~~ At least three members of the Board must be members of congregations of the ELCA;

The Synod Council adopted the resolution with 2 “nay” votes

**REPORT OF THE TREASURER**

Ms. Janet A. Neff, Treasurer, presented the following statistics with the Synod Council:

**Statement of Financial Position  
Highlights as of 1/31/2025 and 12/31/2024**

	1/31/25	12/31/25
Total Cash & Investments	\$ 18,413,573	\$ 21,148,772
Total Assets	\$ 22,337,569	\$ 25,086,566
Total Liabilities	\$ 191,226	\$ 201,020
Total Net Assets	\$ 22,146,343	\$ 24,885,547
Unrestricted	\$ 15,539,313	\$ 18,497,317
With donor restrictions	\$ 6,607,030	\$ 6,388,230

**Statement of Activities**

**Revenue  
as of 12/31/25**

	2025 Actual	2025 Forecast	2026 Budget
Mission Support	\$ 1,355,318	\$ 1,388,765	\$ 1,600,000
Other Contributions	\$ 493,541	\$ 441,392	\$ 498,686
Registration Fees	\$ 93,337	\$ 107,006	\$ 114,256
Investment Income	\$ 2,038,760	\$ 1,015,584	\$ 1,226,630
Beneficial interest in Trust	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 60,000
Proceeds from property	<u>\$ 1,975,326</u>	<u>\$ 1,910,000</u>	<u>\$ 700,000</u>
Total Revenue	\$ 5,986,283	\$ 4,862,747	\$ 4,199,572

**Statement of Activities**

**Expenses  
As of 12/31/25**

	2025 Actual	2025 Forecast	2026 Budget
Operating Expense	\$ 1,817,354	\$ 2,095,415	\$ 2,193,776
ELCA Proportionate (50%)	\$ 677,659	\$ 694,382	\$ 800,000
Property Management	\$ 304,317	\$ 148,250	\$ 84,000
Distributions to other agencies	\$ 95,938	\$ 91,165	\$ 98,725
Remit to designated agency	\$ 13,279	\$ 11,495	\$ 12,540
Grants to Organizations	<u>\$ 351,891</u>	<u>\$ 93,099</u>	<u>\$ 153,460</u>
Total Expenses	\$ 3,260,439	\$ 3,133,806	\$ 3,342,501

Ms. Neff then shared the following to go along with the statistics.

**Balance Sheet**

We have very few liabilities. That which is outstanding is current bills and our partnership support for the ELCA.

**Income**

Mission support is down. We will need to evaluate if we need to revise our budget for the coming year. If actual receipts are \$1.3 million, and we budgeted \$1.6 million, is this still

realistic? Ms. Neff also reviewed the process for the disbursement of proceeds from sale of properties of former congregations.

### **Expenses**

Operating expenses are lower than we expected. This is because some salaries were not effective for the entire year, and there are some programs which did not occur. The ELCA proportionate share is lower because what we have received in partnership support is lower, but it still reflects 50% of what we received.

### **FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Ms. Pia Graham, Chair of the Finance Committee, submitted the report of the Committee. She also shared the Fund for Mission Trustees minutes.

Treasurer Neff and Senior Accountant Martin Schwab provided the statements to the Committee. All were reviewed and the Committee concurs with the assessment of the Treasurer.

Ms. Graham reminded the Council that the fiscal year for the Synod runs to January 31<sup>st</sup>, and so these numbers are not the “year-end” numbers that will be presented to the Synod Assembly. Congregations often submit year-end partnership support that arrives in January, and there is a hope that we will regain some of the deficit we see in our projected gifts from congregations.

The Fund for Mission balance is a little over \$12.5 million. The amount to be distributed as part of the 2027 – 2028 budget has been determined so that number can be used for the budgeting process.

The budget for the Fiscal year ending January 31, 2028, is being completed, and will come to the Synod Council at the April meeting for discussion and endorsement prior to presentation to the Synod Assembly.

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

#### **Investment Committee**

Dr. Marcia Boraas, Chair of the Investment Committee, noted that the concern regarding the money which had been in the Mission Investment Fund raised at the last Synod Council meeting has been addressed, and \$300,000 has been sent back to the Mission Investment Fund.

The return rate on the full portfolio is 16.7%, which is very strong.

To cover maintenance expenses, \$25,000 was disbursed from the cemetery perpetual care funds.

#### **Nominating Committee**

The Rev. Dr. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath noted that most of the slots for the Assembly have at least one nominee.

We have six Synod Council openings, all terms expiring in 2029.

- + For the 2 Clergy seats on Synod Council, Pr. Schnaath is willing to stand for re-election, and Pr. Tim Ness of St. Paul, Ardmore, has also been placed in nomination.
- + Dr. John Connors is standing for a second term as Lay Man representative for Lower Bucks Conference, and Dr. Marcia Boraas is standing for re-election as Lay Woman representative for Lower Montgomery Conference.
- + Mr. Tony Scheivert is not standing for re-election, and so we need a nominee for Chester Conference representative, Lay Man.

We need people for both the Consultation Committee and the Committee on Discipline, each for a six-year term expiring in 2032.

For the Consultation Committee there are two lay nominees,

- + one man, Carl Rietz from Redeemer, Jamison, and
- + one woman, Holly Host from St. Mark, Conshohocken

We still need two clergy nominees

For the Committee on Discipline we have one clergy nominee,

- + the Rev. Jenn Casey.

We still need a second clergy person, and one lay man and one lay woman.

Connections are still being made, but any help Synod Council members can provide encouraging people to submit nominations, or making suggestions as to who might be approached, is appreciated.

Dr. Rodrick-Schnaath noted that this is not a very diverse group. Please consider who we might find that may reflect underrepresented groups for our Synod leadership.

Secretary Richard **moved that we extend the deadline for nominations to March 15<sup>th</sup>.**

Following a second, **the Synod Council approved the motion.**

#### **Constitution Committee**

Dr. Connors, chair of the Constitution Committee, noted that there has been a flurry of activity by congregations as we come to annual meeting time. The Committee is working to get members assigned to each of these congregations to assist them in this process.

There are no constitutions ready for ratification at this time.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

Dr. Sherrell Mickens, Synod Council member to the Child Care Task Force, shared a PowerPoint presentation on the work of the Task Force to this point.

Members of the Task Force, in addition to Dr. Mickens, include Deacon Ali Clark, Mr. Andrew Bruno, Pr. Axel Kaegler, Ms. Becca Shelor, Ms. Catherine Carmen, Ms. Laura Steiner, and Ms. Lisa Hand.

The Task Force is proposing that the Synod offer childcare, on a trial basis, at three (3) Synod Events, after which the team will reconvene to discuss whether this is a service which can be provided safely and affordably in an ongoing capacity.

The Task Force is also recommending provision of care for a maximum of 12 children on a “first come, first served,” basis.

State ratios of staff to children for various age groups were researched, and a determination was made that we have should have a ratio of 1 adult to every 3 children. This is the state ratio for babysitting services.

Th Task Force also feels we need to have an incident report form whenever any concern happens. Consent forms will also be required.

The number of children served may change depending on the space we have available for childcare. Square footage needs to be determined before we post how many children can be received.

Staff requirements will include background checks – state criminal and sexual abuse checks, which are free, and an FBI criminal check, which has a fee associated with it. The Task Force recommends the Synod reimburse this cost.

Dr. Mickens suggested we have 2 to 8 lead staff members that have all three abuse checks, and who know both infant and child CPR. There will also need to be consideration for security, child proofing of spaces used, and emergency plans.

Supplies may include changing tables, pack and plays, and transport “vehicles” to move 12 children safely and quickly in case of fire or other emergencies.

Consideration should be given as to what training we may need to have for those who are providing the childcare for each event. Would it work to have a lead person and some volunteers to serve under them?

Registration fees would also need to be considered to cover the cost. The cost may depend on whether the childcare team is comprised of volunteers or paid staff.

Dr. Rodrick-Schnaath asked if there is an age limit that is being proposed.  
Dr. Mickens – infant to 12 years old, with a maximum number of 12 children.

Bishop Penman asked about the ratios per room.

Dr. Mickens said we should have one adult for every three children. This is more than some age groups require, but it covers the ratio for the youngest who may be receiving care.

Secretary Richard asked if the Task Force is continuing its work to determine more definitively what the staffing expectations should be, particularly in terms of paid versus volunteer staffing, and training requirements. He also asked if there was going to be further delineation of the supplies needed, costs for them, the storage of such items, etc. He is more comfortable voting on a package that has actual numbers associated with the program rather than a more nebulous “cover the costs” provision.

Dr. Mickens was not sure what the “end time” for this Task Force was, and whether this report was the end of its service.

Bishop Penman noted that the Task Force will continue until the updates to the Synod policies for childcare protection have been completed.

Secretary Richard made the following resolution:

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council** receives with thanks the preliminary report of the Child Care Task Force,  
**AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves the offering of childcare at the 2026 Synod Assembly, and at 2 other Synod events, yet to be determined, as a pilot program while the task force continues their work of revising the**

Synod Child Care Policies, and further clarifying and delineating expectations and expenses for staffing and materials needed for the provision of childcare at Synod events.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution.**

**NEW BUSINESS**

None

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

None

The meeting was adjourned with prayer by Dr. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath at 8:20 PM.

The next meeting of the Synod Council is scheduled for April 9, 2026, at 5:30 PM, and will be held in person at Good Shepherd, King of Prussia, and with Zoom available for those who may need it.

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

*Approved by Synod Council, April 9, 2026*