

**Report of the Synod Council to the Thirty-eighth Annual Assembly of the Southeastern
Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, May 29 & 30, 2026**

Included:

1. Minutes of the 186th Meeting of the Synod Council of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, April 10, 2025
- Approved by the Synod Council June 26, 2025 *page 2*
2. Minutes of the 187th Meeting of the Synod Council of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, June 26, 2025
- Approved by the Synod Council September 18, 2025 *page 9*
3. Minutes of the Proceedings of the Thirty-seventh Annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Ponder Anew, May 30 & 31, 2025
- Approved by the Synod Council December 11, 2025 *page 16*
4. Minutes of the 188th Meeting of the Synod Council of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, September 18, 2025
- Approved by the Synod Council December 11, 2025 *page 44*
5. Minutes of the 189th Meeting of the Synod Council of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, December 11, 2025
- Approved by the Synod Council February 19, 2026 *page 53*
6. Minutes of the 190th Meeting of the Synod Council of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, February 19, 2026
- Approved by the Synod Council April 9, 2026 *page 65*

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 Boraas 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

**MINUTES
of the 187th MEETING
of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
Zoom Meeting
June 26, 2025
6:00 p.m.**

WELCOME AND DEVOTIONS

Vice President Tracey A. Beasey brought words of welcome to the Synod Council at 6:00 p.m. She noted that Vice President-elect Cheryl Lafferty is present and is being granted voice at this meeting. The Rev. Paula Lebo, Assistant to the Bishop for Mission Interpretation, led the Council in devotions. Her reflection was based on Psalm 119:33-40

CALL TO ORDER

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley called the 187th meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 6:18 p.m. The Rev. Karl M. Richard, Secretary, confirmed a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the 186th Meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council (April 10, 2025) were approved.

The Minutes of the 2025 Synod Assembly will come before the Synod Council in September.

SETTING THE AGENDA

Vice President Beasley presented the agenda to the Synod Council.

The agenda was approved.

MISSION MOMENT

Synod Assembly

The members of the Synod Council were invited to share their impressions of the Synod Assembly. Among the comments were the following.

- + The Rev. Jonathan Steiner felt the Ministry Spotlights were well presented and powerful.
- + The Rev. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath asked if we needed as much time for the meals as was allotted.
- + Vice President Beasley had heard from some that the dinner on Friday was not necessary.
- + Dr. Sherrell Mickens noted her appreciation for the time during lunch, as it allowed for the holding of a seminar.
- + Deacon Kathie Afflerbach heard that many were happy with the setting. It was easily accessible, and there was plenty of room. They wondered why we had not held the Assembly there before.
- + Janet Neff asked what might happen if we had more people; would Trinity be able to accommodate a larger number?
- + Pr. Steiner shared that the capacity on the sanctuary is 800, so that would not be an issue.
- + Dr. Mickens: It was good to have a shorter walk to lunch and the mission center than was the case at Franconia.
- + Dr. John Connors asked if the mission center presenters felt as though this was a good space, or was being in the lunch area too much of a distraction.
- + V.P. Beasley shared that most of the Mission Center folk found the area to be an advantage, as people did not have to find a different space for the Mission Center, and everyone came for the meals.
- + Dr. Marcia Boraas shared that Bishop Penman's address on Friday was one of the best and most hopeful presentations she has heard.

Vice President-elect

Vice President Beasley thanked the Synod Council for their reflections. She then asked Vice President-elect Lafferty to share whatever she might wish to share with the Synod Council.

Ms. Lafferty was born and raised in Northeast Philadelphia. She still lives within a mile of where she was born. She has been married for twelve years; they have no children.

She has a passion for Christ and the Church. She had worked in archaeology for a while, then earned a Master of Divinity degree. She has been in ministry in both the ELCA and the Presbyterian Church, was a cofounder of Rhawnhurst Turning Point (an education ministry in the Northeast) and has been active in leadership at Redemption Lutheran in Northeast Philadelphia. She is currently the Senior Program Director at Philadelphia Academies, Inc.

Outside of her passion for the Church, she runs triathlons, crochets, and listens to books on tape. Vice President-elect Lafferty is excited to get to know the Council and the congregations of the Synod over the next months and years.

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

New Staff

Bishop Penman introduced the Rev. Erika Wesch as the new part-time Assistant to the Bishop. She will be overseeing the Candidacy process, which had previously been part of the portfolio of the Rev. Karen Sease. Bishop Penman shared that this will be the last addition to the Staff for some time. There is still a desire to fill the position of Assistant to the Bishop for Youth and Young Adult ministry.

Change is Coming

There has been a tremendous turnover in the leadership of the greater Church. Twenty-two synods held elections for bishop this year, with seventeen new bishops elected. In our Synod we have elected a new Vice President, and at the Churchwide level we will elect a new Presiding Bishop and a new Secretary for the Church.

Restructuring in progress

Bishop Penman is still working on an organizational chart for the Synod. Vice President-elect Lafferty will have a key role in this process. The needs of congregations are shifting, and we need to shift how we are structured to meet the needs of the church in this day. We are seeing the end of the institutional church that says you can have your own full-time ministry forever and always.

Thank You and Celebration

Bishop Penman thanked all who worked so diligently to make the Synod Assembly, "Ponder Anew," a success. He expressed thanks to the entire staff, and particularly Ms. Carrie Schwab, the Synod's Events coordinator.

He also gave thanks for the twelve years of service Ms. Tracey A. Beasley gave to the Synod as our Vice President, not counting her previous years of service on the Synod Council and many other ways in which she has been a leader in Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. A celebration in her honor was held at Reformation, Mt. Airy, where there was much rejoicing.

Events Attended

Bp. Penman has attended several events since the last meeting of the Synod Council, including participation in LAMPA's Advocacy Day at the Capitol, the Organizing for Mission Network Training in New Orleans, and the SEPA Pride Worship.

Two events that did not take place were the Congregational Secretaries and Congregational Treasurers gatherings. Low registration numbers made it impractical to hold these events. The plan is to offer some version of each event in the future.

Story Telling Project Grant

This third application for a Lilly Grant was not successful, but Bishop Penman plans to build a network of story tellers and story collectors to aid in our proclamation of the Gospel.

Bishop's Convocation

Plans are underway for this annual event of fellowship and learning for our rostered ministers. The program will be led by the Organizing for Mission Network (OMN), a network of faith leaders organizing in the ELCA around Spiritual community organizing.

Bishop Penman opened the floor for questions or comments.

Dr. Mickens expressed disappointment that the Secretary and Treasurers gatherings were canceled. She suggested that even when enrolment is low, it may be good to hold these events anyway. Many of our congregations need help, and whatever chance we have to assist them can be worthwhile.

Bp. Penman said we will revisit this and perhaps include these sections as a track when we have our annual congregational council leaders meeting.

Mr. Craig McJett asked how many people from our Synod attended the LAMPA Advocacy Day. Bp. Penman said that it was around twenty, so we had a strong showing.

Mr. McJett then asked how many legislators received our people.

Bp. Penman did not have an exact number, but he was certain that it was more than we have had in the past. The event had been moved up this year to ensure that it was held while the legislature was in session. This has not been the case every year.

Bishop also commented that the process for updating the recommended compensation guidelines for the coming year is underway. The goal is to approve such changes before congregations begin their budgeting process. There is a need to revamp the entire document, as it is based on congregations offering full-time calls, which is increasingly not the case.

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Vice President Beasley noted that the minutes of the Executive Committee were in the packet of materials and asked if there were any questions regarding them.

She then noted two forms for the members of the Council to complete.

1. The Confidentiality Report, which needs to be filled out each year.

2. The Committee Preference form, indicating the areas in which the members would like to serve.

These choices are used as the Bishop and Vice President make recommendations for the make-up of the various committees of the Synod Council.

Vice President Beasley then brought forward a resolution on grants for Renewable Energy to be distributed by the Care of Creation Ministry Team. The Grant Application was in the packet of materials for this meeting.

S.C.25.06.20. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod approves the Care of Creation Ministry Team Renewable Energy Grant application as presented.

Pr. Rodrick-Schnaath asked if we had not already approved this application at a previous meeting. Dr. Connors, member of the Care of Creation Ministry Team, noted that we approved a different form for micro-grants to congregations. This is second grant form for a different purpose, and from a separate funding source.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

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

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Affirmation of Email Vote

Secretary Richard asked for affirmation of the results of the June 14, 2025, email vote appointing Mr. Kenneth Anderson as an alternate voting member to the Churchwide Assembly.

S.C.25.06.21. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod affirms the appointment of Mr. Kenneth Anderson to be a lay voting member to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly from Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

The results were 19 yes, 0 no.

The Synod Council affirmed this vote.

Reception of the Property of a Closed Congregation

S.C.25.06.22. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council acknowledges with sadness the action of Community of Love Lutheran Church, Oxford, PA, to close, effective May 4, 2025, on which date the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod received the property of Community of Love Lutheran Church, Oxford, 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 26, 2025, 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.

Actions on the Roster

Invitation to Full Communion Partners to Serve ELCA Congregations in SEPA Synod:

S.C.25.06.23. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves entry rite, Invitation to Extended Service, to the Rev. Teresa A. McNamara as Interim Pastor at The Lutheran Church of the Holy Communion, Philadelphia, PA beginning July 15, 2025, for 5 years at $\frac{3}{4}$ time. This Invitation to Extended Service requires an annual report to the synodical bishop for the full length of service. Extended service is eligible for renewal annually by Synod Council.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Request to Move from Active Roster to On Leave from Call

S.C.25.06.24. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant “On Leave from Call” status to the Rev. George R. Steele, 1st year, effective May 1, 2025.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

S.C.25.06.25. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant “On Leave from Call” status to the Rev. W. Roger Randolph, III, 1st year, effective June 1, 2025.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Request to Move from Active Roster to On Leave from Call, graduate study

S.C.25.06.26. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant “On Leave from Call” status to the Rev. Daniel Smith, 1st year study leave, effective August 15, 2025.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Dr. Mickens asked that it be noted that she abstained from this vote.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

Treasurer Janet Neff presented her report to the Synod Council.

**Statement of Financial Position
Highlights as of 1/31/2025 and 4/30/2024**

	1/31/25	4/30/25
Total Cash & Investments	\$ 18,413,573	\$ 17,634,851
Total Assets	\$ 22,337,569	\$ 21,565,539
Total Liabilities	\$ 191,226	\$ 135,601
Total Net Assets	\$ 22,146,343	\$ 21,429,938
Unrestricted	\$ 15,539,313	\$ 14,860,760
With donor restrictions	\$ 6,607,030	\$ 6,569,178

Statement of Activities

Revenue

as of 4/30/25

	2025 Actual	2025 Forecast	2026 Budget
Mission Support	\$ 378,515	\$ 392,825	\$ 1,600,000
Other Contributions	\$ 117,643	\$ 129,285	\$ 498,686
Registration Fees	\$ 57,926	\$ 27,564	\$ 114,256
Investment Income	\$(1,038,253)	\$ 291,887	\$ 1,226,630

Beneficial interest in Trust	\$ 0	\$ 15,000	\$ 60,000
Proceeds from property	\$ 601,119	\$ 477,500	\$ 700,000
Total Revenue	\$ 116,950	\$ 1,334,062	\$ 4,199,572

Statement of Activities

Expenses

As of 4/30/25

	2025 Actual	2025 Forecast	2026 Budget
Operating Expense	\$ 488,527	\$ 578,549	\$ 2,257,645
ELCA Proportionate (50%)	\$ 189,258	\$ 196,413	\$ 800,000
Property Management	\$ 54,094	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000
Distributions to other agencies	\$ 23,750	\$ 24,681	\$ 98,725
Remit to designated agency	\$ 1,750	\$ 3,135	\$ 12,540
Grants to Organizations	\$ 81,486	\$ 44,891	\$ 178,460
Total Expenses	\$ 838,864	\$ 872,688	\$ 3,372,370

Treasurer Neff shared the following:

- + Investments are down, but that is due to the turbulence in the market.
- + Liabilities –We only owe current payables from this past month.
- + Net assets – Mission support is lower than forecast. We do want to see which congregations are down, and if there is any way to encourage their support. There are many that are in transition, and that often impacts congregational giving.
- + Registration Fees are up due to the Synod Assembly
- + “Proceeds from property” were from the sale of the former St. Paul, Lansdowne. The net amount received will be distributed as per our formula. 15% to the unrestricted (general) portion of the budget, then we reimburse the costs of properties under management, with the remainder going to the Fund for Mission.

Treasurer Neff had a meeting with the Investment Advisor from Girard. The Investment Committee will be meeting by Zoom next week to discuss what they plan to do.

REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Ms. Pia Graham, chair of the Finance Committee, noted the committee met on June 11 by Zoom. They reviewed the financial statements that were distributed in the packet of materials and found all to be in order.

A review of the balances of the various designated and donor restricted assets shows the Synod has \$12,217,571 in designated fund assets and \$3,029,192 in donor restricted assets. Monies are being disbursed from the two Lilly grants (\$34,936 from Love Revolution and \$21,950 from Faith Alive), primarily for hiring and getting programs started.

The Committee also reviewed the Fund for Mission minutes, and saw what disbursements were approved by the Trustees.

The Finance Committee will meet again in September prior to the Synod Council meeting.

OLD BUSINESS - none

NEW BUSINESS

Thank You

Vice President Beasley expressed her thanks for the farewell celebration held for her, and for the many years she has been able to serve in leadership in our synod. She noted that her term has come to an end, and she will not be getting in the way of our new Vice President. However, she is available to Ms. Lafferty for any insight or advice that may be helpful.

Election of Executive Committee

Vice President Beasley described the work of the Executive Committee in preparation for election of members to this Committee. The Executive Committee is comprised of the four officers of the Synod, the Bishop, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer, and three other members elected from the Synod Council. These three are a clergy, a lay man, and a lay woman. She noted with thanks the people who served on the Executive Committee this past year: Deacon Kathie Afflerbach, Dr. John Connors, and Ms. Pia Graham.

V. P. Beasley began by asking for nominations for the clergy seat. Placed in nomination were Pastor Jonothan Steiner and Deacon Kathie Afflerbach. Deacon Afflerbach was **elected**.

She then asked for nominations for a lay man to serve. Dr. John Connors was nominated. As there were no other nominees, Dr. Connors was declared **elected**.

Finally, nominations were opened for a lay woman to serve. Ms. Pia Graham was nominated. Dr. Marcia Boraas was nominated but declined. With no other nominations, Ms. Graham was declared **elected**.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS – none

The meeting was adjourned at 7:56 p.m. with prayer by Vice President-elect Cheryl Lafferty. The next meeting of the Synod Council is scheduled for September 18, 2025, and will be held at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Doylestown.

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

Approved by Synod Council, September 18, 2025

MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE THIRTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA *Ponder Anew* May 30 & 31, 2025

FIRST SESSION – Friday morning, May 30th

The 37th Annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod began with Morning Prayer at 9:30 a.m., led by Pr. Linda Manson, Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion,

and Belonging, and co-Director of Evangelical Mission, and the Rev. Karl M. Richard, pastor of St. Matthew Lutheran, Springfield, and Secretary of the Synod.

ORDER FOR THE OPENING OF THE ASSEMBLY

At 9:55 a.m. Bishop Bryan J. Penman and Vice President Tracey A. Beasley led the Order for the Opening of the 37th annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

GREETING AND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Rev. Fritz Fowler, lead pastor of our host site, Trinity Lutheran, greeted the Synod Assembly, and acknowledged that we are gathering on the land of the Leni Lenape people, who have resided here previous to the time Europeans came to this continent, with the hope that we will work for healing and justice for the Indigenous people who first occupied this land.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Bishop Penman welcomed the voting members and visitors present at this Assembly, offering a particular welcome to those for whom this is their first Synod Assembly. He then expressed his thanks to those who have taken leadership roles in coordinating and working this Assembly: Ms. Carrie Schwab, Synod Assembly coordinator; Ms. Cynta Outerbridge, Database manager and Registrar; the Rev. Joseph (Joey) Klinger, parliamentarian; the Rev. Raymond Miller, chair of the Committee on Elections, and the Rev. Rebecca Schanely, former chair of this Committee; the Rev. Jennifer Casey, chair of the Committee on Reference and Counsel; Ms. Emily Valentine, chair of the Nominating Committee; the Rev. Meagan Esterby, chair of the Worship Planning Team.

Bishop Penman welcomed and thanked Mr. Iain Chester, Executive Director for Innovation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, as our churchwide representative, and Deacon Tammy Devine, Principal for Divine Coaching, who will lead the Assembly in Prayer & Ponder Anew spiritual practices.

Bishop expressed his gratitude for the Mission Center partners that are here representing various organizations and social service agencies that can provide ways for congregations to more deeply Love God and Love Neighbor.

He also thanked our host site, Trinity Lutheran, Lansdale, and “All About Catering,” who provided the meals and hospitality breaks during the Assembly. Thank you also to our partner congregations and individuals who contributed to the scholarship fund to ensure all congregations can be represented at this Assembly. These partners include the Lutheran Church of God’s Love (Newtown), St. Stephen’s (Feasterville), St. Paul’s (Exton), Ms. Joy Baxter, Ms. Carol Penjuck, and Ms. Joanne Hajoway.

Bishop Penman then expressed his thanks to the Synod officers and the Synod Council for their service to the Church and the Synod:

Synod Officers:

- + Ms. Tracey A. Beasley, Vice President, Reformation, Philadelphia
- + The Rev. Karl M. Richard, Secretary, St. Matthew, Springfield

- + Ms. Janet Neff, Treasurer, St. Luke, Devon

Members of the Synod Council:

Lay Members:

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| + Dr. Marcia Boraas | St. John, Melrose Park |
| + Dr. John Connors | God's Love, Newtown |
| + Mr. Dennis Faust | St. Luke, Zieglersville |
| + Ms. Pia Graham | St. John, Ridge Valley |
| + Mr. Craig McJett | Trinity, Philadelphia |
| + Mr. Tony Scheivert | Good Shepherd, Coatesville |
| + Ms. Emily Valentine | Atonement, Philadelphia |
| + Ms. Dorothy Wilson | Faith, Philadelphia |

Clergy Members:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| + Deacon Katie Afflerbach | St. John, Spinnerstown |
| + Rev. Heeralal Mukesh Cheedie | Redeemer, Penndel |
| + Rev. John Heidgerd | Emmanuel, Souderton |
| + Rev. Gwendolyn King | Trinity, Havertown |
| + Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia | Upper Dublin, Ambler |
| + Rev. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath | St. Mark's, Conshohocken |

In addition to these servants, the Synod is served by a host of teams, committees and task forces. Bishop Penman invited all who serve on one of the following teams to stand to be recognized.

- + Candidacy Committee
- + Interim Pastors
- + Bridge and Supply Pastors
- + Generosity Team
- + Communications Team
- + Transitional Development Ministry Team, and
- + Vitality Team
- + Gather Philly
- + Inclusive Communities
- + Youth and Young Adult Ministry events
- + Anti-Racism Team
- + Urban Ministry Task Force
- + Care of Creation
- + Our Lilly Grants teams for Love Revolution & Faith Alive
- + Forward Together in Faith Grant Team
- + Urban Ministry Grant Team

- + Synod Hunger Ministry Team

Particular thanks were expressed to the outgoing chair of the Candidacy Committee, the Rev. Paul Neff, and the incoming chair, Ms. Lisa Pressley, and the Rev. Rebecca Schanely, previous chair of the Committee on Elections, and the new chair, the Rev. Raymond Miller.

Bishop Penman recognized the Committee of Deans for the many hours they spend caring for clergy and congregations, and guiding congregations that are in transition through the process of calling another rostered minister:

- + The Rev. Julie DeWerth, Lower Montgomery Conference
- + The Rev. Nathan Krause, Lower Bucks Conference
- + The Rev. Noah Hepler, Central Philadelphia Conference
- + The Rev. Christopher Franz, Chester Conference
- + The Rev. Marie Sager, Delaware Conference
- + The Rev. Daniel Eisenberg, newly elected, Northeast/Northwest Philadelphia Conference, and former dean, the Rev. Joey Klinger.
- + The Rev. Bill Coleman, newly elected, Upper Bucks Conference, and former dean, the Rev. Erika Wesch, who now serves as assistant to the bishop for formation.
- + The Rev. Matthew Finney, newly elected, Upper Montgomery Conference, former dean the Rev. Christopher McKinstry

Thanks were extended to the Rev. Marcia Bell, who served many years as the Director for Mobility, and the Rev. Wayne Shelor, who had served as the Director of Interim Ministry. Both of these areas have been placed in the portfolio of the Rev. Karen Sease, the Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations.

WELCOME TO NEW ROSTERED MINISTERS

Bishop Penman invited those Rostered Ministers who are new to Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod since last Assembly to come forward and state their name, and where they are serving. These new ministers include:

- + The Rev. Annemarie Hartner Cook – Program Director, Faith Alive Initiative:
Nurturing Children Through Worship and Prayer
- + The Rev. Ian Clements – newly ordained pastor, called to Centennial, Kimberton
- + The Rev. Kevin Compton – pastor at St. Paul, Red Hill
- + The Rev. Carl Filer – pastor at Emmanuel, Pottstown
- + The Rev. Paula Lebo – Assistant to the Bishop for Mission Interpretation
- + The Rev. Paisley LeRoy – pastor at St. Peter, Chester Springs
- + The Rev. Linda Manson – Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
and Belonging, and co-Director for Evangelical Mission
- + The Rev. Taylor Walker – pastor at Zion, Spring City

- + The Rev. Lamont A. Wells – Exec. Dir. Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities
- + The Rev. Leah Woehr-Grande – lead pastor at Grace, Royersford

REPORT OF THE REGISTRAR

Ms. Cynta Outterbridge, Registrar, was brought forward to bring the Report of the Registrar and certify a quorum.

Total number of Voting Members: 435

Total number of Voting Members registered and in attendance as of this report: 330

Number of Voting Members needed for a quorum: 218

Bishop Penman thanked Ms. Outterbridge and **declared a quorum is present.**

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

The Rev. Karl M. Richard, Secretary, noted that the proposed program for the Assembly had been posted on MinistryLink as a part of *The Bulletin of Reports*. He moved its adoption.

The Assembly adopted the program as presented.

He then presented as information the Rules of Procedure as printed in *The Bulletin of Reports*. Secretary Richard highlighted the limitations on submissions to Reference and Counsel, and the process for nominating persons from the floor to the various tickets before the Assembly.

By common consent, the Assembly approved the following rule: "The Synod Assembly shall limit each speaker from the floor to two minutes, alternating *for* and *against* whenever possible, and allowing someone who has not spoken on a particular issue from the floor to speak before someone speaks a second or additional time."

The secretary encouraged the voting members to clearly identify themselves by their full name and congregation when addressing the Assembly so that we can correctly record who is offering amendments or motions.

Secretary Richard reported that the Synod Council approved the minutes of the 36th annual assembly on September 19, 2024. They are available in the Bulletin of Reports, Section 6, Report of Synod Council, pages SC – 7 to SC – 49.

Secretary Richard reminded the Assembly that all times are approximate, as things sometimes move more, or less swiftly than the time originally allotted, and that it is the responsibility of each voting member to be present for each part of the Assembly so they can vote, act, or contribute as necessary or appropriate.

He presented as information the reports of the various committees, task forces, organizations, and institutions of the Synod.

REPORT FROM THE ELCA CHURCHWIDE OFFICE

Mr. Iain Chester, Executive Director, Innovation, ELCA, was invited to present the report from the Churchwide Organization. Mr. Chester has served with the ELCA Churchwide Organization over the past nine years in a variety of roles, including as Manager for Network Engagement with ELCA World Hunger. During his time with ELCA World Hunger, he worked with a

network of over 2,500 congregational leaders across the ELCA working toward a just world where all are fed.

N.B. – videos of this, and all presentations made to the Assembly, are available on the synod website ministrylink.org, and on YouTube.

Mr. Chester brought greetings from Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, the Church Council, and the whole of the Churchwide Organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. “God’s Love Made Real.” Bishop Eaton has called the Church to consider how we can do just that. It is accomplished in many ways, some grand and noticeable, but often in small ways by people we may never know, but who reach out and offer support in time of need.

As part of the presentation of the Report from the Churchwide Office, Mr. Chester noted the reality that “God’s Love Made Real” comes to pass by means of the financial offerings we make to the Church. The money we place in the offering plate in our local congregations gets shared with Synod to support ministry in the region. And a portion of the money shared with the Synod goes on to support the work of the Churchwide organization, making it possible for us to assist people around the world whom we will never know, but who need to see God’s love made real. In the past year, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod shared \$759,617 in Mission Support with the Churchwide organization.

The money sent to the Churchwide organization supports new Mission Starts, missionaries around the world, Companion Synod relationships. It enables our Ecumenical Relationships, allows us to draft new Social Statements and create worship resources, and supports our work for advocacy and racial justice. Other ways in which God’s love is made real through the offerings of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod to the ELCA include:

ELCA World Hunger Appeal

Having been in existence for 50 years, the World Hunger Appeal is active in 62 countries around the world, including the United States of America. Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod gave \$275,000 to this work in the past year.

Lutheran Disaster Response

LDR responds to crises following natural disasters and in the midst of human conflicts in 53 countries, including the United States of America. Gifts from Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod to the Churchwide organization make this work possible.

Representation at the Churchwide level

God’s love is also made real in the way in which people show up to serve. There are many people from Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod who serve in the agencies and units of the ELCA. Among them are:

Mr. Emmanuel Alves – ELCA Committee on Appeals

The Rev. Sarah Anderson – the ELCA Nominating Committee

Ms. Tracey A. Beasley – Church Council, and ELCA Executive Committee

Ms. Thelma Jacks – Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church

The Rev. Gwendolyn King – Church Council, and Co-Chair of the Committee on Reference and Counsel for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.
Mr. Frank Roth – Portio Benefits Board

2025 Churchwide Assembly

The triennial assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will be held in Phoenix, AZ, from July 28 through August 2. The theme of the Assembly “Church for the Life of the World.” This year marks the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, where the Nicene Creed was formulated, and this theme was inspired this Nicene Creed’s confession that we look for “the life of the world to come.”

Social Statement

Among the topics to be discussed will be the proposed Social Statement on Faith and Civic Life, which was requested by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly in Milwaukee, WI. This statement offers ways for how we can be church together, for the sake of the world.

Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church

The Assembly will receive recommendations from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church. This Commission was established at the direction of the 2022 Churchwide Assembly, with the recognition of the need to restructure our Church considering declines in membership and resources, and with a particular charge to work on dismantling racism in our denomination. Some of the recommendations have been enacted by Church Council. Others will need the assent of the Assembly. There are other aspects of this commission’s work that are not yet complete and will need to be addressed as we continue to move forward, discerning how God is calling us to be the Church in the different cultural landscape we face today.

Election of Secretary and Presiding Bishop

There will also be an election of a new Secretary for our Church, and for a new Presiding Bishop. Both Bishop Eaton and Secretary Sue Rothmeyer’s terms end this year, and neither is seeking another term. Several potential candidates for each of these offices have been pre-identified, and their biographies are available to read prior to the Assembly.

In addition to the provisions to come from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, there will also be many other constitutional provisions to come before the Assembly for consideration and approval. There will also be other items placed before the voting members to determine what we as a Church will do. Many of these proposals deal with how we can stand with the poor and the marginalized. We are living in a time of strife and struggle, of hurt and pain.

This is a time of divisiveness, anger, and fear. It is a time of great suffering in our world. Mr. Chester encouraged the attendees of the Synod Assembly to explore the ELCA Resources for Advocacy and Engagement to see how their congregations can become involved in the work of restoration and justice in their communities, being Church, for the Life of the World.

Mr. Chester showed the attendees a video from Bishop Eaton. He concluded by thanking the members of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod for all the ways in which they are helping to show God’s Love Made Real.

Mr. Chester concluded by sharing thoughts he had regarding our theme, “Ponder Anew.” These are two words that are not common in everyday speech. But he was considering how these words work to the idea of innovation. As opposed to “Ponder Anew” which are not common words, innovation is so common it has become a buzzword. It conveys something that is moving us forward. The word anew is perhaps the simplest definition of innovation, in that it simply means “in a new way.” In his work with innovation, he strives to help people dream and grow, putting into practice ideas that can become the creative future. He posed two questions to the Assembly:

What does it mean to Ponder? and
Who will we ponder with?

REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Bishop Penman called on Ms. Emily Valentine, Chair of the Nominating Committee, to bring the report of the Committee before the Assembly.

Ms. Valentine noted the following as she made her report.

1. Nominations from the floor shall be made at the time of the first report of the Nominating Committee during the first business session of the Synod Assembly for all positions to be elected at this assembly.
2. The 2019 Churchwide Assembly changed the definition of “Clergy” to include both Ministers of Word and Sacrament (pastors) and Ministers of Word and Service (deacons). Therefore, Ministers of Word and Service (deacons) are now eligible to be nominated for Ticket 2. Deacons are no longer eligible for lay positions.
3. Again, a reminder that a person nominated from the floor must immediately present to the Assembly office a copy of the nominee’s biographical information, and a picture of the nominee. These nomination forms are available from the Assembly pages.

This year we will be electing a Vice President of the Synod, as well as people to serve on the Synod Council. The Vice President of the synod is one of the lay voting members of the Churchwide Assembly. Therefore, whoever is elected as our vice president will be attending the Churchwide Assembly as a voting member from this synod. If the person elected is unable to attend, an alternate lay voting member will be selected to fill this seat.

The Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod state that when there is no incumbent, the Nominating Committee shall nominate at least two persons for vice president. Over the past 6 months the Committee has had the position of vice president posted for members of the Synod to submit potential nominees. The Committee has also intentionally sought out persons to stand in nomination for this office. There have been direct conversations with our current vice president with five people. At the time of the deadline for the nominating process, only one of these felt comfortable having their name placed before the Assembly. Some determined they would not seek this office. Others were still discerning but were not comfortable making a final decision prior to the deadline for the Bulletin of Reports. Naturally, the Nominating Committee cannot put in nomination any who have not

agreed to serve. There is the ability to receive nominations from the floor, at which time any of those who had been in conversation with the current vice president, or any others who may feel a leading to this position, may be placed in nomination. With this in mind, we consider:

TICKET 1: SYNOD VICE PRESIDENT (1 lay person to be elected to a term ending 2029)

NAME	CONGREGATION
Ms. Cheryl Lafferty	Redemption, Philadelphia

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #1 closed and further declared **Ms. Cheryl Lafferty elected.**

TICKET 2: SYNOD COUNCIL, CLERGY (Two rostered ministers to be elected for terms ending 2028)

NAME	CONGREGATION
The Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia	Upper Dublin, Ambler
The Rev. Jonathan Steiner	Trinity, Lansdale

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #2 closed and further declared **the Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia and the Rev. Jonathan Steiner elected.**

TICKET 3: SYNOD COUNCIL, DELAWARE CONFERENCE REPRESENTATIVE, LAY WOMAN (One lay woman to be elected for a term ending 2028)

NAME	CONGREGATION
Ms. Lisa Fortwangler	St. John, Folcroft
Dr. Sherrell Mickens	Christ, Upper Darby

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #3 closed.

TICKET 4: SYNOD COUNCIL, Northeast/Northwest Philadelphia CONFERENCE REPRESENTATIVE, LAY WOMAN (One lay woman to be elected for a term ending 2028)

NAME	CONGREGATION
Ms. Mari-Beth Fetsick	Faith, Philadelphia

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #4 closed and further declared **Ms. Mari-Beth Fetsick elected.**

TICKET 5: SYNOD COUNCIL, UPPER MONTGOMERY CONFERENCE REPRESENTATIVE, LAY MAN (One lay man to be elected for a term ending 2028)

NAME	CONGREGATION
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There are no nominations from the Committee.

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

Pr. Karen Sease placed in nomination

Mr. Phillip Richard	Grace Pottstown
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As there were no FURTHER nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #5 closed and further declared **Mr. Phillip Richard elected.**

TICKET 6: SYNOD COUNCIL, LAY YOUNG ADULT REPRESENTATIVE (One lay person to be elected for a term ending 2028)

A person of any gender identity may be nominated for this seat.

The term “young adult” means a voting member of a congregation who is between the ages of 18 and 30 at the time of election or appointment for service.

NAME

CONGREGATION

Ms. Syndey Geyer

St. Andrew, Perkasio

Ms. Irene Rajarigam

Grace, Drexel Hill

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #6 closed.

TICKET 7: SYNOD COUNCIL, YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE (One lay person to be elected for a term ending 2027)

A person of any gender identity may be nominated for this seat.

The term “youth” means a voting member of a congregation who has not reached the age of 18 at the time of election or appointment for service.

NAME

CONGREGATION

Mr. Bennaiah Bennie

Faith-Immanuel, East Lansdowne

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop penman declared Ticket #7 closed and further declared **Mr. Bennaiah Bennie elected.**

Bishop Penman thanked Ms. Valentine for her report.

Address by the Vice President-elect

Bishop Penman called upon Vice President-elect Cheryl-Ann Lafferty to make a few remarks to the Assembly. She shared that she has been a life-long Philadelphian, and a life-long Lutheran. She never thought that she would be standing here as the Vice President of the Synod, but God did what God does. When approached about standing for this position, Ms. Lafferty was not certain that this was the role she should assume. But she felt God nudging and pushing her. Ms. Lafferty spoke with Vice President Beasley about the actual responsibilities of this role, and Vice President Beasley was very generous with her time and her insights. After prayerful discernment, she allowed her name to be placed in nomination.

Through her many life experiences, both in the church and in the “secular” world, the Vice President-elect has gained skills and abilities for leadership with a heart for justice. She has learned to get things done, while taking care not to lose God’s desire in the process. She is both excited and humbled to be elected to this office, and she looks forward to where God will lead us as we serve together.

MISSION SPOTLIGHTS

Throughout the Assembly various ministries on our territory were highlighted. At this time there were video presentations on the efforts of the Care of Creation Ministry Team, and the work of Lutheran Settlement House, one of our Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations.

PONDER ANEW SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Bishop Penman invited Deacon Tammy Devine to come forward. Deacon Devine is the Principal for Devine Coaching, is passionate about walking with God's people. Devine collaborates with thought leaders to facilitate personal and communal growth toward living and leading well through coaching. Devine is credentialed as a PCC Coach, certified as an End of Life Coach and serves the ELCA as Coordinator of Generosity Ministries, is the Principal for Devine Coaching, coaches with Clergy Life Coaching, Life of Faith Initiative. Devine is the facilitator of Segment 2 Stewardship and Discipleship coaching. She previously served as the ELCA Wellness Manager with Portico Benefit Services.

Deacon Devine led the Assembly in a time of intentional spiritual reflection prior to the recess for lunch. During lunch there were two workshops offered; one by Mr. Chester on Innovation; one by Deacon Devine on Spiritual Practices.
The Assembly stood in recess until 2:10 p.m.

SECOND SESSION – Friday afternoon, May 30th

Bishop Penman called the Assembly back to order following lunch and the workshops.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON REFERENCE AND COUNSEL

Bishop Penman called on the Rev. Jennifer Casey, pastor of Holy Trinity, Wallingford, and chair of the Committee on Reference and Counsel, to make the report.

Pr. Casey noted that one resolution was submitted to the Committee prior to the April 30 deadline. No late submissions were received. The submission made was a resolution regarding the provision of childcare at Synod Assembly and other Synod events. The resolution received asked the Synod to provide childcare at the Assembly and other Synod Events. The Committee on Reference and Counsel is placing before the Assembly a substitute resolution in place of the original proposal, calling for the creation of a task force to make appropriate recommendations on this issue for the next Assembly. While the entire substitute resolution is printed here, Pr. Casey only read the "Be it Resolved" clauses to the Assembly, as they are the portion the voting members of the Assembly will be debating and on which they might vote.

Resolution on Establishing a Task Force for Childcare

WHEREAS Jesus said, "Let the children come to me," and calls us to welcome children and those who care for them into all spaces and places in the church, and

WHEREAS we, in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, work to welcome people at all stages of life and remove any barriers to their full participation in the life of the church, and

WHEREAS participation in synod events is often limited to those, clergy and lay, who have no need of childcare or those with access to childcare, and

WHEREAS this means that the voices of those who are in the midst of raising children are absent from conversations and the gifts of people called to parenting are kept from sharing them with the whole church, and

WHEREAS, providing care for the children of participants in synod events would make these events more accessible to parents of young children,

SA25.05.01. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod values parents with young children and recognizes the very real struggles regarding participation

in Synod Assembly and other synod events alongside their responsibility for caring for their children, and be it further

RESOLVED that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod affirms the intersectionality of the vocations of parenting and church life by explicitly welcoming children who need to attend synod events under the care of their parents, and be it further

RESOLVED that the Synod Council establish a task force of not more than 9 persons, at least 3 of whom shall be parents of young children, to develop guidelines for synodical event childcare, in alignment with Pennsylvania state law and SEPA child protection policies, with the intent that such childcare be available by the 2026 Synod Assembly, and be it further

RESOLVED that a report from the task force be made to Synod Council by its February meeting for Council to determine whether the logistical supports are in place for childcare to be viable by the 2026 assembly, and be it further

RESOLVED that all ministries and congregations of this synod be encouraged to find ways that they can support those in their own communities who need childcare to live out their call from God in service to the church and our world.

The Committee on Reference and Counsel Recommends adoption.

Following a second to the Committee's resolution, Bishop Penman invited Pr. Casey to speak to this resolution.

Pr. Casey stated that the Committee on Reference and Council affirms the value and importance of the submitted resolution. However, given the timeframe, there was not sufficient time to gather the necessary logistical information to make an informed recommendation regarding childcare.

While Reference and Counsel recognizes the recommendation to form a task force may appear to be dismissive of the original resolution, this is not the intent. Rather, the formation of the task force will give adequate time, within the deadlines set forth in the resolution, to develop a well-informed recommendation to Synod Council.

It is important to Reference and Counsel that at least one-third of the task force members shall be parents, to ensure their voices are not only heard, but intentionally valued and incorporated throughout the process.

Bishop opened the floor for discussion.

Ms. Meg Hazel, Holy Trinity Wallingford, asked if there is any word on cost, and particularly insurance costs, related to this resolution.

Pr. Casey: The issue of cost is why we put forward this substitute resolution because that is a critical item to know. There was not time in our review period to gain that information. We have since learned that the insurance costs are negligible. Other issues are still unclear.

The Rev. Serena Sellers, St. Mark Pennsburg, shared that her daughters, who are now 31 and 32, would be so pleased that this is being taken up, as they had to attend many synod meetings in their day.

The Rev. Dr. Alina Gayeuski, Reformation Media and drafter of the original resolution, spoke in favor of this substitute resolution. While she is a person without children, she sees the need from others who are parents of small children. She quoted from a study the ELCA engaged in partnership with the Barna Foundation and Fuller Seminary that states that teenagers, young adults, and families with young children need to be more highly prioritized. Providing childcare at the Assembly is the bare minimum we could do to embody this priority.

The Rev. Eileen Ruppel-Doan, Reformation Media, also spoke in favor. As part of a clergy couple which has a child, she has asked each year if childcare might be available, and each year she has been told no. While this may not affect many, it affects a significant number of people, and if we want younger people to be involved, they often have children. While it may not be your children, we have a responsibility to each other as the Church.

The Rev. Russ Crouthamel, St. John, Phoenixville, also spoke in favor. How often do we ask for families with young children to be part of our fellowship? And if we do not recognize the need for them to balance the care for their children with their participation, we do not make it easy for them to be a full part of our congregations.

The Rev. Lizette Rios-Sanchez, Nueva Creacion, Philadelphia, also spoke in favor of resolution. She says she knows of the need to provide help to people so they can participate. She said that there is a risk when dealing with young children. We do need to be aware of the cost and the need for training, but it is an important issue to address.

The Rev. Brandy Hebert, God's Love, Newtown, spoke in favor of the resolution, but raised a concern regarding timing that the substitute resolution before the house means that there will not be childcare in place for the November Bishop's Convocation, or for some of our younger clergy who participate in First Call Theological Education. She encourages the Synod to see what resources might be available to offer those people so they may be able to procure childcare on their own in order to attend these events.

The Rev. John Heidgerd, Emmanuel, Souderton, moved to call the question. Following a second, the Assembly voted to close debate and move to the vote on the resolution before the house.

The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution, 289 yes, 5 no.

Bishop Penman thanked Pr. Casey for the report, and the Committee on Reference and Counsel for its faithful work.

MISSION SPOTLIGHTS

The afternoon session began with three Mission Spotlights.

- + The Rev. Mark Sing-Heuer presented on behalf of the Generosity Team what it is to Ponder Anew how we can be generous in the use of our resources, and how we can encourage our siblings in Christ to share generously of all they have as well.
- + Vicar SaraJean Grainson and the members of the recently closed ministry of Community of Love in Oxford asked us to Ponder Anew what it is to be a vibrant ministry. They

have closed as a worshipping community but are transitioning to being a Synod Authorized Outreach Ministry. Their “Share the Love Family Boutique” will remain open as a ministry to the people of the area, where they can shop for clothes without cost, avoiding the need to choose between food or clothing.

- + The Rev. Paula Lebo, Assistant to the Bishop, asked the Assembly to Ponder Anew how we can share the timeless story of Jesus Christ in a new time and era. We all have stories of faith, and we need to learn to tell these stories so others may learn of the love of God in Christ. How can we share these stories in a public way so that many may hear?

AUDIT REPORT

Ms. Janet Huber Neff of St. Luke’s, Devon, Treasurer of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, presented the Audit Report for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2025.

Treasurer Neff directed the voting members to the audit section in the Bulletin of Reports. She stated she will not be going over every line but will present a summary of the report. If there are other questions she will address them after her presentation.

Ms. Neff began with the Statement of Financial Position for the past fiscal year. She noted that this is a snapshot of where we stood on January 31, 2025.

Audit Report Details Statement of Financial Position Highlights as of 01/31/2025 and 01/31/2024

	2025	2024
Total Cash and 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

Our total assets are more than \$22 million, where our total liabilities are just over \$191,000. The liabilities are essentially our accounts payable for the month, and so we are in tremendous financial shape. The assets include both our cash and investments in the amount of \$18.4 million, and our other assets of real estate, trusts, and capitalized leases that make up the remainder of the \$22.3 million we have in total assets. \$15.5 million of these assets are unrestricted, and \$6.6 million have restrictions set by the donor. These monies are in the Fund for Mission, Forward Together in Faith, St. Petri-Hope accounts, and in our cemetery funds for perpetual care of those cemeteries of which we received custody when congregations closed their ministry. The source of the great increase from 2024 to 2025 is primarily the two Lilly Grants we have received, one for the Love Revolution, and the other for the Faith Alive initiative.

Audit Report Details Statement of Activities Revenue

	02/01/24 – 01/31/25	02/01/23 – 01/31/24
Mission Support	\$1,521,842	\$1,501,378
Other Contributions	\$2,336,422	\$1,667,396
Registration Fees	\$ 90,159	\$ 58,558
Investment Income	\$2,770,886	\$1,622,431
Beneficial Interest in Trust	\$ 165,491	\$ 114,664
Proceeds from Property Sale	<u>\$2,909,194</u>	<u>\$ 100,000</u>
Total Revenue	\$9,793,993	\$5,064,427

A piece of good news is that our Mission Support from congregations actually increased this year, by \$20,000. Many thanks to all who made contributions, both personally and through their congregations. While this increase is helpful, expenses continue to climb each year, and so Treasurer Neff encouraged the voting members to see what their congregation gave last year and challenged each congregation to increase their support of the Synod by one percentage point of their congregational income.

We have also received significant gains in our investments this year, and we received proceeds from the sale of the property of two former congregations, Trinity, South Philadelphia, and Bethany, Roxborough.

Our revenues reflect an increase in income of over \$4 million; \$1 million from the Lilly grants, nearly \$1 million from investment income, and \$2.9 million from the sale of properties.

Audit Report Details Statement of Activities

	02/01/24 – 01/31/25	02/01/23 – 01/31/24
Expenses		
Operating Expenses	\$1,937,827	\$1,668,159
ELCA Proportionate Share (50%)	\$ 760,921	\$ 750,689
Property Management	\$ 246,227	\$ 184,035
Distributions to other Agencies	\$ 91,000	\$ 91,517
Remit to Designated Agency	\$ 31,427	\$ 21,190
Grants to Organizations	<u>\$ 204,889</u>	<u>\$ 202,092</u>
Total Expenses	\$3,272,291	\$2,917,682

As the income was up for the past fiscal year, so were the expenses.

Operating expenses include salaries, benefits, supplies, travel, Deans, office expenses, and events.

Property management includes expenses to care for the properties of former congregations: the former Bethany, Roxborough, Trinity, South Philadelphia, St. Paul's, East Norriton, and St. Paul's, Lansdowne. It also covers perpetual care of four cemeteries: St. James Chalfont, St. John, Quakertown, Trinity, South Philadelphia, and St. Michael, Germantown.

Distributions to other agencies include Muhlenberg College, United Lutheran Seminary, Campus Ministry, Bear Creek Camp, Lutheran Advocacy, and Lutheran Congregational Services.

Grants we make to other organizations include: assistance with seminary loan debt, Forward Together in Faith grants, and Blessed to be a Blessing grants. There are also grants awarded through the Fund for Mission. 5% of the total Fund for Mission balance is eligible to be used for mission. A portion of that goes to the "Mission" portion of our budget; the remainder is available

for projects proposed through the Vitality Team and the co-Directors for Evangelical Mission and approved by the Fund for Mission Trustees. As of January 31st, 2025, we allocated \$197,279 to the Mission budget, and we distributed \$156,000 from the Fund for Mission, and \$17,268 from the St. Petri-Hope fund for churches and other ministries. These disbursements assisted mission congregations, and eleven “settled” congregations and ministries.

I now present the Audit Opinion from Tait, Weller as follows:

“We have audited the accompanying financial statements of Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (the “Synod”) which comprise the statement of financial position as of January 31, 2025, and the related statements of activities and cash flows for the year then ended, and the related notes to the financial statements.

In our opinion, the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Synod as of January 31, 2025, and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.”

Treasurer Neff then put before the Assembly the following resolution:

SA25.05.02. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly receives the Audit reports for the Fiscal Year ending January 31, 2025.

Bishop Penman asked for questions from the floor of the Assembly.

Having none, the vote was taken.

The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution.

PRESENTATION OF THE BUDGET

Bishop Penman then called on Ms. Pia Graham, member of St. John, Ridge Valley, and chair of the Synod Finance Committee, to present the proposed budget for the fiscal year ending January 31st, 2027.

Ms. Graham directed the voting members to the proposed budget in the Bulletin of Reports. She shared the overview in the following tables:

Because of the timing of when the Assembly meets, we present a budget for a year into the future. This budget is for the fiscal year beginning February 1, 2026, ending January 31, 2027.

	2026 Budget Income	
	2024 Audit	2026 Budget
Mission Support	\$1,521,842	\$1,600,000
Other Contributions	\$2,336,422	\$ 513,686
Registration Fees	\$ 90,159	\$ 99,256
Investment Income	\$2,770,886	\$1,226,630
Beneficial Interest in Trusts	\$ 165,491	\$ 60,000
Proceeds from Property Sale	<u>\$2,909,184</u>	<u>\$ 700,000</u>
Total Revenues	\$9,793,993	\$4,199,572

Ms. Graham noted that the finance committee strives to be conservative in its estimations. Still, with the increase in Mission Support this past year we are hoping to receive \$1.6 million in the next year.

In Other Income, the amount is lower, as we do not anticipate receiving any grants like we did this past year from the Lilly Foundation.

Registration fees are projected to rise as we have more in-person events each year.

As the markets are in a volatile state, we are anticipating lower returns on our investments.

We project fewer property sales in the coming year than we had in the past, and so that number is also projected to be lower.

2026 Budget Expenses		
	2024 Audit	2026 Budget
Operating Expenses	\$1,937,827	\$2,193,776
ELCA Proportionate Share (50%)	\$ 760,921	\$ 800,000
Property Management	\$ 246,227	\$ 84,000
Distributions to other Agencies	\$ 91,000	\$ 98,725
Remit to Designated Agency	\$ 31,427	\$ 12,540
Grants to Organizations	<u>\$ 204,889</u>	<u>\$ 153,460</u>
Total Expenses	\$3,272,291	\$3,342,501

Expenses are higher as we are in the office more, and inflation is also having its effects.

We continue to have costs related to managing the properties in our care until they are either sold or repurposed for new ministries. As we have fewer properties, we anticipate fewer expenses.

We anticipate our distributions to other agencies to increase in the next fiscal year.

Overall, our anticipated expenses for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2027, are slightly higher than the past fiscal year.

Ms. Graham, on behalf of the Synod Council, placed the following resolution before the Assembly:

SA25.05.03. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly adopts the budget for the coming year, Fiscal Year ending January 31, 2027.

Bishop Penman asked if there were any questions concerning the proposed budget.

Pr. John Heidgerd, Emmanuel, Souderton, noted that multi-year grants must be recorded in the year they are received, even as expenses related to those grants continue to extend for several years after receipt of the funds. He asked how this is reflected in the budget that has been proposed.

Ms. Neff: We recorded as income the \$1 million dollars we received for each of the Lilly Grants, and that is why right now we show a revenue of \$9 million. Over the next five years, if we spend \$200,000 or \$250,000, it will look like we are running a deficit. That is true, but we need to remember that we received this large sum now, and we have it available to draw from to accomplish the purpose of the grant proposals. So, while it will look as though we are overspending, it is because of the way in which we need to record the numbers by accounting principles.

The Rev. Tim Johansen, Temple, Havertown, rose to speak against the budget proposal. If we have received over \$2 million in revenues from the sale of properties, why is the projected amount of grants to organizations decreasing in the coming year? Pr. Johansen works on the Forward Together in Faith Team and has seen the impact these grants can have for a congregation and its ministries, and it seems that when we are encouraging people to Ponder Anew and innovate, that number should go up, not down.

Ms. Neff: To clarify, the Grants to Organizations are not grants to congregations, they are grants to other organizations that we support. Grants for congregations are run through the Vitality Team and are funded by the resources of the Fund for Mission and Forward Together in Faith. The decrease in this line is not a cut to congregations or ministries of Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

With no other questions raised, Bishop Penman called for the vote.

The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution.

Bishop Penman expressed his thanks to Ms. Graham, Treasurer Neff, the Finance Committee, and Mr. Martin Schwab, the Synod's Senior Accountant for their faithful work.

He also was pleased to reiterate that for the first time in several years Mission Support has gone up in this Synod. Many thanks to all the congregations who have faithfully sent in their offerings so the work of the Church in this Synod and beyond can continue. His goal is that we grow to 100% congregational participation in Mission Support. "You can give at least a dollar."

Congregational support has increased across the Synod, but Central Conference has increased its support by 10%, and Lower Montgomery has increased by 17%. This makes an impact on how we can resource our ministry in the Synod and around the Church. And over the past five years the Synod has increased its support to congregations by 300%. We are growing in the ways we are walking together to share the gospel.

FIRST REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS

Bishop Penman recognized the Rev. Raymond Miller, pastor of St. Peter, Hilltown, and chair of the Committee on Elections, to bring forth the first balloting.

Pr. Miller called for balloting on **TICKET 6: SYNOD COUNCIL, LAY YOUNG ADULT REPRESENTATIVE.**

The Assembly will vote on one of the two nominees:

Ms. Syndey Geyer

St. Andrew, Perkasio

Ms. Irene Rajarigam

Grace, Drexel Hill

Ballots were distributed, and following the vote, were collected for tabulation.

MISSION SPOTLIGHTS

Two ministries were highlighted at this time.

- + A video was shown on the work of the Love Revolution, one of the two Lilly Grant initiatives our Synod has been awarded.

- + Pr. Thomas Natalini described the work of the new mission venture, the Mindfulness + Church.

RECOGNITION OF ANNIVERSARIES

Recognition of Congregational Anniversaries

Congregations celebrating significant anniversaries were recognized, with members of these congregations present invited forward to be recognized and have a photograph taken to mark this occasion.

325 years	New Hanover Evangelical Lutheran Church, Gilbertsville
175 years	St. Mark Lutheran Church, Philadelphia
175 years	St. Peter Lutheran Church, Riegelsville
150 years	Lutheran Church of the Holy Communion, Philadelphia
75 years	Reformation Evangelical Lutheran Church, Media
50 years	Family of God Lutheran Church, Buckingham

PONDER ANEW SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Deacon Tammy Devine was invited forward to lead the Assembly through another intentional prayer practice.

REPORT OF BALLOTING FOR TICKET 6

Prior to dinner, Bishop Penman announced the results of the balloting for Ticket 6, which he received from Pr. Raymond Miller, chair of the Committee on Elections.

TICKET 6: Synod Council, Lay Young Adult Representative (One to be elected)

Total Votes Cast: 284

Total Legal Votes Cast: 284

Total Illegal Votes Cast: 0

Number of Votes Needed for Election (Majority of Total Legal Votes Cast): 143

Ms. Irene Rajarigam, 148

Ms. Syndey Geyer, 129

Bishop Penman declared Ms. Irene Rajarigam **ELECTED**

The Assembly stood in recess for dinner until 7:00 p.m.

THIRD SESSION – Friday evening, May 30th

Bishop Penman called the Assembly back to order following dinner.

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley introduced Bishop Penman and invited him to make his inaugural Bishop's Address to the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly.

BISHOP BRYAN J. PENMAN'S ADDRESS TO THE ASSEMBLY

We gather under the theme "Ponder Anew," from the line from a familiar hymn. "Ponder Anew what the Almighty can do, if with his love he befriend thee." This is a sacred invitation, which is both urgent, and holy. What is God doing now? What might God do through us if we befriend the world with the same fierce, inclusive love that Jesus shown to us?

We are at a crossroad moment. The landscape of the world has changed. We had better ponder anew how we will be the church in this time.

Studies show the attitudes of adults have shifted. Millennials and Gen Z folk are open to spirituality that hasn't been seen in decades. This provides a unique opportunity for us as the Church if we can focus on loving God and loving our neighbor.

We have heard of the “nones” and the “dones” and we had a reality check, recognizing the Church hasn't always looked like Jesus. But many of these folk are open to exploring spirituality and are open to conversation. Pondering anew means we need to remember that God is still acting, and God is still befriending. And to ponder anew, we need to not presume that what was will always be.

The landscape has shifted drastically. We all feel this in our bones. Practicing Christians have dropped from 45% of the U.S. population in 2,000, to 20% in 2023. Weekly attendance is down. Denominational loyalty is fading. If things do not change, some are predicting the end of the mainline church by 2040.

But spirituality is NOT in decline. According to Barna, 188 million U.S. adults say they are spiritually open. That is one in every three adults looking for meaning, peace, purpose, and belonging. And this is exactly what the Church offers. The landscape has not gone barren; just wild. We need to learn to cultivate it differently. The good news is there is such openness. And this is particularly true about Gen Z, who are those in their 20s.

This is not a crisis. It is an invitation.

Our challenge is that we as the Church are seen as lacking. People do not ask about the ELCA within the whole; they judge on what they see of all Christians. Five impressions people have about the Church include:

1. Irrelevance, hypocrisy, and moral failure – we do not look a lot like Jesus.
2. God is missing in the Church – people are striving to find God in their own way.
3. Legitimate doubt is prohibited – for too long the Church has said it must be right, it must be known, and here are the answers, so people do not feel they can have honest conversations.
4. They're not learning about God. People cannot understand what the pastor is saying, or what the children are learning.
5. They're not finding community.

People leave because they find judgment and hypocrisy. They love Jesus; they struggle with who they see as his followers.

The research names the Church's silence on Christian Nationalism specifically. Our lack of speaking out on the rise of Christian Nationalism and stating that this is not Jesus, is something these people are looking for.

Can we become a Church that reflects Jesus more authentically?

We are not called to defend institutional survival; we are called to ponder anew and respond to this moment with humility, flexibility, and courage.

The “spirituality open” are not strange to us. They are our neighbors and our family. And they want to talk about faith. Of those who are non-Christian, 46% are open, and hold a positive view of Jesus, but not of the church. Many just want someone to walk with them without judgment. They want peace, healing, that doubts are welcome, and that hope is possible.

If we want people to meet Jesus, they must encounter him through us; through our love, our humility, our listening, and our truth-telling.

Four shifts that might help us ponder anew and meet these spiritually open people in this moment:

1. Listening is the new evangelism – we need to get off “transmit” and start receiving the stories and needs of our neighbors without judgement.
2. Peace is the new apologetic – this is the reason we exist.
3. Curiosity is a spiritual practice – people are not looking for certainty.
4. Jesus is still the answer – so let’s show them the Jesus who heals, liberates, and loves without condition.

What next steps might we take?

1. Embrace empathy and spiritual back-stories.
2. Create spaces for dialogue, and not just worship service.
3. Offer healing ministries.
4. Train people to listen with curiosity – teach adults and confirmation students to ask better questions and then listen deeply.
5. Invite people to take just one step closer to Jesus and then trust the Spirit to do what the Spirit does.

This is a holy moment for the Church. Not a time to retreat in fear, but a time to move forward in hope. The hymn says, “Ponder anew what they Almighty can do, if with his love he befriend you.” How can you befriend those around you? Can we be a church that welcomes the wounded, embraces the seeker, and reflects the love of Jesus? The harvest is still plentiful. Jesus is still beautiful. And the Spirit is still blowing in this place.

PONDER ANEW SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Deacon Tammy Devine was invited forward to once again lead the Assembly through an intentional prayer practice prior to recessing for the evening.

The Assembly stood in recess until Saturday morning.

FOURTH SESSION – Saturday morning, May 31st

The Assembly gathered for worship at 9:00 a.m., with Bishop Peman preaching and the Rev. Dr. Moses Suah-Dennis, co-Director for Evangelical Mission, presiding.

Thank you to the Synod Worship Team: the Rev. Meagan Esterby, Chairperson, Ms. Carolyn Jackson, the Rev. Joey Klinger, the Rev. Kayla Sadowy, the Rev. Dr. Anthony Scott, Deacon Tom Snyder, the Rev. Kevin Tracey, and those who participated in the worship experience:

Musicians: Band Leader & Pianist: Yosmar Campanile, Percussion: Mark Campanile, Bass: Michael Donnelly, Guitar: Scott Campanile, Vocalist: Laura O’Kane from *St. Timothy’s Aston*
Vocalist: Ms. Cynta Outterbridge, *Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod*

Assistant Minister: Vice President Tracey Beasley, Gospel-bearer: Deacon Dawn Stewart,

Lectors: Bennaiah Bennie, Sadie Hanish, Crucifer: Damar Wilson,

Acolytes, Banner-bearer, Communion Assistants, and Ushers: *SEPA Candidates for Ministry*

Musicians: SEPA Choir (34+ members!) Choir Directors: Ms. Carolyn Jackson and Deacon Tom Snyder, Organist: Emily Brands, Pianist: Rev. Diane Gilbert, Percussion: Ricardo Tucker. Special thanks to Andrea Baxter, director for Worship and Music at our host church, Trinity, Lansdale.

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT, MS. TRACEY A. BEASLEY

Bishop Penman called forward Vice President Beasley, thanking her for her twelve years of service as our Synod's Vice President, her years of service prior to that as a member of the Synod Council, her work at the Churchwide level, and the countless other ways she has been a faithful servant of Jesus and the Lutheran Church for her whole life. Bishop Penman noted that Vice President Beasley's term comes to an end with this Assembly. Bishop Penman then invited Ms. Beasley to offer her final report to the Assembly.

Vice President Beasley began:

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Turn to your neighbor and say, "This is the Day the Lord has Made!"

Vice President Beasley said that she always begins her address with thanks and noted the majority of the people she thanks are volunteers. Vice President is a volunteer position; Synod Council is a volunteer position.

Thank you to all for whom this is your first Synod Assembly.

She then expressed her thanks to all the officers, current members of the Synod Council, previous members of the Synod Council who have served with her over the past twelve years.

Thank you to the Synod Staff, and in particular, thank you to Ms. Yvonne Curtis, for serving alongside her and being such a source of support and strength.

New Synod Council, your first meeting is your orientation next Tuesday, and your first regular meeting will be June 26th. This will be Vice President Beasley's last meeting, as Vice President-elect Lafferty will begin her term on July 1st.

Ms. Beasley shared that it has been an honor to serve for these 12 years in this role. She has served for 4,380+ days, 624 weeks, 60+ council meetings, and 84+ Executive Committee meetings. She served with four bishops: Bishop Roy Almquist, Bishop Claire Burkat, Bishop Patricia Davenport, and now with Bishop Bryan Penman. V.P. Beasley is grateful for what each has brought to Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, and what they taught her as she became the leader she is. There have been good times and bad times, but she has no regrets.

She has also served with two secretaries: the Rev. Raymond Miller and the Rev. Karl Richard, and two treasurers: Mr. Dick Reimet, and Ms. Janet Huber Neff.

Vice President Beasley said that she had intended to end her service as Vice President four years ago, but Bishop Davenport asked, "Why would you do that? You are a gift!" She then prayed on this, seeking out scripture. It came to her mind that in scripture, 12 is a number that stands for perfection, completion, and divine order. She felt God was telling her, "Not eight years, but twelve years. This is my divine order for you." When we pray, we may not always like or appreciate the answer that God gives us. But, when you are in the Kingdom Business, you do what God calls you to do, and so she remained for a third and final term.

One of Vice President's proudest moments in leadership has come in her work on the board of Thrivent, and now as its Chair. Over the last five years she has given a total of \$50,000 for

kingdom work. This money has gone throughout our Synod to our churches and to our social ministry organizations. “I love giving away money for kingdom building! And I thank God for letting me sit at the right table at the right time!” She has eight Action Team cards with her, each worth \$250. If you want one, come talk to her today, or email her, because each of you can get a card!

Over the past twelve years Vice President has worshiped in our congregations, sat in our council meetings, been at anniversary celebrations and pastor’s birthday celebrations, dinner churches, bingo days, bingo nights, and so many other events. She then played a video of many of the events she has been part of in her twelve years, underscored by the song “The Goodness of God,” by CeCe Winans to share how grateful she is to be a part of SEPA Synod.

Vice President Beasley concluded her remarks with some words for Vice President-elect Cheryl-Ann Lafferty. People say you have big shoes to fill. You do not have any shoes to fill, because you have your own feet and you have your own shoes, and all you have to do, is like the song says, “You just put one foot in front of the other, and lead with love,” and you will make God proud, and lead SEPA Synod.

“Until God calls me home to glory, I will continue to be a soldier in the army of the Lord. God bless you.”

The Assembly expressed their deep appreciation to Vice President Beasley with extended applause.

SECOND REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS

Bishop Penman called on the Rev. Raymond Miller, to bring forth the next round of balloting.

Pr. Miller called for balloting on **TICKET 3: Synod Council, Delaware Conference Representative, Lay Woman.** (1 to be elected.)

Pr. Miller asked voting members to please circle on your ballot either:

Ms. Linda Fortwanger, St. John, Folcroft, or

Dr. Sherrell Mickens, Christ, Upper Darby.

While ballots were being distributed, Pr. Miller expressed his thanks to all who allowed their names to go in nomination but were not elected. We are grateful for your willingness to serve, and grateful you were willing to be a part of the election process.

The ballots were collected. The results will be shared when tabulated.

Recognition of Anniversaries of Rostered Ministers

Those rostered ministers who are celebrating their 40th and 25th anniversaries were recognized. Those who were present at the Assembly were called forward for a photograph to mark this occasion.

40th Anniversary Celebrants

The Rev. Wayne Matthias-Long

The Rev. Dyan M. Lawlor

The Rev. Steven G. Jones
The Rev. Kristina V. Ahlman
Deacon Karen Matthias-Long
Deacon Barbara Piston

25th Anniversary Celebrants

The Rev. Karen L. Weber
The Rev. Kay B. Braun
The Rev. Rebecca L. Schanely

50th Anniversary Celebrants

Those celebrating 50 years of ordination were also recognized and given a moment to address the Assembly. Not able to be present were the Rev. Paul Bartlett, and the Rev. Daryl Nelson. Present were:

The Rev. John Hougen

“What an impossible task. We are given 5 minutes of fame to witness to God’s grace. 50 years ago, I was afraid if I became a pastor, would I lose myself?” But he found that ministry did not destroy him; it gave him further clarity of who he is, what he stands for, and where his limitations are. He is grateful for and proud of his international work with the North Eastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, and the founding of SEKUCO (Sebastian Kolowa University College). He is also grateful for his interfaith work, organizing interfaith teams to address the root causes of violence. When asked what his faith is, he answers, “Lutheran. Lutheran Plus.”

The Rev. Dr. Charles Leonard

“I am giving thanks to Almighty God for this day. Greetings to you, and I ask you to give thanks to Almighty God for 5 decades of service.”

Dr. Leonard referenced John 10 where the One the Father has sanctified and sent into the world said, “if you cannot believe what I say, trust me because of my works.” Dr. Leonard wants this to be true for himself as well. May his works say who he is, and what he is about.

God has blessed him in his work in the parish, in mentoring 10 interns in the congregation, and has blessed him to be a part of the journey of many rostered ministers of this synod through his work at the seminary.

He has worked under seven bishops. He has not agreed with them all the time, but he respects them and prays for them. He asks his congregation to pray for and support our bishop. Do not withhold your financial support from the Synod because you want to hurt the bishop; this does not hurt the bishop; it hurts the whole Church.

Dr. Leonard was blessed to serve in the chaplaincy in the military. He attended four Churchwide Assemblies; served four times, two terms each, on Synod Council, and has served in many Churchwide positions and task forces. But the greatest work is working in the parish – shepherding and walking with the people in the pew and caring for the children to ground them in the faith. Working with children, youth, and seniors is what this ministry is about.

“God has been extraordinarily good to me, and I am deeply GRATEFUL, not just thankful, but Grateful to God for the blessings he has given me.”

The Rev. Robert Mitman

“I am just truly a humble parish pastor. My colleagues are scholars and worldwide travelers. I could only dream of the things these folks have done.”

When reflecting on 50 years of ministry, Pastor Mitman quoted Dickens, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

Best – being allowed to be with the people in the worst of times – you aren’t related, but they let you in because they need you.

Worst –the expectations “I want, but you want,” which leads to conflict.

Best – blessed to be at the hospital bed

Worst – being out at all hours at the exclusion of family. Pr. Mitman thought working hard was what you needed to do, but there was a cost.

Best – through word and song and teaching, to teach the name of Jesus. He is our LORD. Jesus is why we are in this business. His love describes what God is like. In the midst of the current shenanigans, what would Jesus say?

Worst – Sunday soccer. And then everything else under the sun.

Pr. Mitman reminded those still active in ministry, “You don’t have to like those who make your life miserable, but you are called to love them.” Fifty years ago, he did not know what ministry would be. God says “Listen. Don’t get all herky-jerky about this. Just listen, and I will tell you where to go.” Serve the Lord with gladness, have a good time if you can, greet people with a smile – it makes them wonder what you are thinking.

“It may be the best of times for you now, or the worst of times, but God calls us to allow Him to pilot us through it all.”

He is grateful for fifty years and prays that we may also be blessed to serve for 50 years and more.

REPORT OF BALLOTING FOR TICKET 3

Bishop Penman read the results for Ticket 3, given to him by Pr. Miller.

Ticket 3: Synod Council, Delaware Conference Representative, Lay Woman
(One to be elected)

Total Votes Cast: 302

Total Legal Votes Cast: 302

Total Illegal Votes Cast: 0

Number of Votes Needed for Election (Majority of Total Legal Votes Cast): 152

Dr. Sherrell Mickens, 202

Ms. Lisa Fortwangler, 98

Bishop declared Dr. Mickens **ELECTED**.

MISSION SPOTLIGHT

Another ministry of our Synod was highlighted at this time:

- + The Rev. Mycah McNett, St. Luke Devon, and Candidate for ordination to Word and Service, Vicar Grace Markas, described the Young Adult Ministry venture “Gather Philadelphia.” This ministry is an opportunity for young adults to gather monthly for

fellowship and service. Anyone 18 to 35, Lutheran or not, “churchy” or not, who is interested in making connections and exploring faith is welcome.

PONDER ANEW SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Deacon Tammy Devine was invited forward to once again lead the Assembly through another spiritual practice prior to recessing lunch and workshops.

The Assembly stood in recess until 2:15 p.m.

FIFTH SESSION – Saturday afternoon, May 31st

Bishop Penman called the Assembly back to order.

MISSION SPOTLIGHTS

- + The Rev. Annemarie Hartner Cook, Assistant to the Bishop and Program Director of “Faith Alive” presented a description of this ministry, the second of our Lilly grant projects. This program is about intentionally and creatively making space for children in worship. We need to welcome children in worship as they are, not as they cannot be. Worship is a collective movement, a collective prayer, among us all. This initiative will look different in each context, but it is about involving all in worship, 3-year-olds, 8-year-olds, teens, and all. What does each person (human) need in order to worship as they are?
- + The Rev. Scott Staub of New Hanover, Gilbertsville, presented how this congregation is finding innovative ways to use space, using their space to meet community needs, and gain resources for ministry at the same time.
- + The Rev. Karen Sease, Assistant to the Bishop, and members of the Transitional Ministry Development Team, described how they are re-thinking the way we approach the process for congregations in pastoral transition. Many statistics were shared, noting that the way we have done transition will not work for the situations we face today. The Team is developing a three-track approach, from which congregations can choose what seems best for them. The tracks are:
 - Transformation, where congregations re-imagine their ministry in its current context,
 - Partnership, where congregations consider how they might work with or combine with another congregation, and
 - Resurrection, where a congregation may determine that their current ministry needs to end in order for new ministry to emerge.

INTRODUCTION OF CANDIDATES FOR ROSTERED MINISTRY

Ms. Lisa Pressley and the Rev. Erika Wesch, Assistant to the Bishop for Formation, presented those candidates for ordination who are assigned to the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

Candidates from our Synod who have been approved for ordination since the 2024 Assembly:

- + Ian Clememnts, approved for ordination to Ministry of Word and Sacrament, and called to Centennial, Kimberton
- + Sister Paula Estornell, approved for ordination to Ministry of Word and Service
- + Brendan Galvin, approved for ordination to Ministry of Word and Sacrament, and called to Gloria Dei, Huntingdon Valley.

Candidates from other synods assigned to SEPA Synod for first call include:

- + Tori Callahan Giger, from the Upper Susquehanna Synod, approved for ordination to Ministry of Word and Sacrament, and called to St. Andrew, Perkasié

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Bishop Penman called upon Pr. Jenn Casey, chair of the Committee on Reference and Counsel, to present a resolution of thanks.

Resolution of Thanks

WHEREAS it is right at all times and in all places to give thanks for God's grace and mercy, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit that bless the people of God to do God's work with our hands;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT at the end of this thirty-seventh meeting of the Assembly, we offer our appreciation and thankful applause;

To our Bishop Bryan Penman for leading us to Ponder Anew what the Almighty can do;

To outgoing Vice President Tracey A. Beasley, for her 12 years of faithful leadership as the chief lay officer of the Synod, chair of the Synod Council, and SEPA representative at numerous ELCA meetings and events. We give thanks for your devotion to God and your encouragement that we are #SEPAstrong;

To our Vice President-elect, Ms. Cheryl Lafferty, and for a new era of lay leadership that you bring to our synod. We give thanks, in advance, for all that God will do through your leadership;

To our Synod Council for their support and guidance for our synod;

To our ELCA representative Mr. Iain Chester for attending and representing the larger church holding our synod in prayer during this assembly;

To Deacon Tammy Devine for keeping us grounded in prayer and spiritual practices;

To our worship leaders for their proclamation of the gospel and to the Reverend Meagan Esterby and members of SEPA's Worship Team for leading our prayers and praise;

To Ms. Emily Valentine and members of the Nominating Committee, and to Reverend Ray Miller and members of the Elections Committee, for their tremendous work; and to all who allowed their names to come forward for discernment and election;

To the officers, staff, and volunteers of the SEPA Synod, especially Ms. Yvonne Curtis, Ms. Cynta Outterbridge, Reverend Paula Lebo and the tech team who worked tirelessly to make this 2025 Assembly a success.

To Ms. Carrie Schwab, Assembly Coordinator, and her exceptional work aligning all of the details of this Assembly;

To Trinity Lutheran Church for their hospitality, particularly Reverend Fritz Fowler, Rev. Jonathan Steiner, Director of Operations Miwa Sperring, Digital Worship Coordinator Linda Graeff, Director of Music and Worship Andrea Baxter, Director of Building and Grounds Moises Santiago, Custodians Yasin Kazimi and Guillermo Martinez, and to the people of Trinity and their council who keep saying yes to hosting synod events and their generosity in sharing these lovely facilities;

To SEPA synod's Women of the ELCA for their sponsorship towards Friday's snack break and hosting our ingathering for Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran Disaster Response;
 To all of the other the representatives of all organizations and agencies of the Southeastern Pennsylvania (SEPA) Synod who are also present here at this Assembly;
 To all participants from the SEPA Synod who offered their energy, skills and time to prepare for, plan, arrange and participate in this Assembly.
 And permit me to extend a personal word of thanks to the Reference and Counsel Team members Reverend Lauren Bruno and Mr. Paul Keener. To the committee's representative from the Bishop's Office, Reverend Karen Sease for her wisdom and unfailing support and to our consultants for their guidance: Reverend Karl Richard, Secretary of the SEPA Synod and Reverend Joey Klinger, Assembly Parliamentarian.

Bishop Penman asked the Assembly to adopt the Resolution by applause.

FINAL REPORT OF THE REGISTRAR

Ms. Cynta Outterbridge was called forward to give the final Report of the Registrar, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

Total number of ministers of word and sacrament under call	131
Total number of retired ministers of word and sacrament voting	29
Total number of ministers of word and service under call	4
Total number of retired ministers of word and service voting	4
Total number of lay voting members certified*, including Council members and Youth/Young Adult	267
TOTAL VOTING MEMBERSHIP	435

*Certified = Any voting member for whom a signed and duly recorded registration form has been received by the Assembly Registrar by the time this report is compiled.

Total number of persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English in the previous total	73
Percent this total is of total voting membership	16.6 %
Number of lay woman voting members	134
Number of lay man voting members	74
Number of Non-Binary voting members	0
Number of Lay Synod Council Members	6
Number of Youth/Young Adult	9

ACTUALLY IN ATTENDANCE

Number of ministers of word and sacrament under call registered*	118
Number of retired ministers of word and sacrament registered*	29
Number of ministers of word and service under call registered*	4
Number of retired ministers of word and service registered	4
Number of lay voting members registered*, including Lay Council members and Youth/Young Adult	212
TOTAL REGISTERED* VOTING MEMBERSHIP	367

*Registered = Any voting member present and accounted for by the Assembly Registrar as being in actual attendance at the Assembly at the time of this report.

Total number of persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English in previous total	72
Percent this total is of total registered voting membership	19.6%
Total number of visitors and guests registered	77

CLOSING OF THE SYNOD ASSEMBLY

Bishop Penman recognized the outgoing members of the Synod Council and installed the newly elected members.

He and Vice President Beasley then led the Order for Closing of the Synod Assembly.

The thirty-seventh annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod adjourned at 4:06 p.m.

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

Approved by Synod Council, September 18, 2025

MINUTES
of the 188th MEETING
of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
St. Paul's Doylestown
September 18, 2025
5:30 p.m.

WELCOME AND DEVOTIONS

Vice President Cheryl Lafferty welcomed the Synod Council, and invited the Reverend Thomas Rusert, pastor of St. Paul's, to share some of the ministry of St. Paul's, and lead the Council in devotions.

Pastor Rusert introduced the staff that was present: the Rev. Dr. Robert Linders, the Rev. Seminarian Mac Mullens, who is being considered for a call at St. Paul's, and Ms. Meg Evans, church administrator, who is considering the candidacy process.

Pastor Rusert shared that St. Paul has a "big, hairy, audacious goal" to share God's love with one million people. They have committed to doing this one encounter at a time, enlisting the efforts of the entire congregation. He noted, "It is not about the counting, but that what you do counts." As a way of measuring their progress, members are encouraged to share, with a few sentences on a card, what encounter they had, and how they took that opportunity to share the love of God with a neighbor. A card from a child said, "Every night my sister and I pick three books to read at bedtime. I let her read one of the books. It made her really happy." A card from an adult read, "One time I was asked to leave a church. I did, and it hurt. Here I found I was welcomed

and embraced, and I found a place to heal.” While it will take several years to meet the goal of one million encounters, the congregation is committed to intentionally reaching out with the love of God in Jesus Christ.

CALL TO ORDER

Vice President Lafferty called the 188th meeting the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 5:53 p.m. The Reverend Karl Richard, Secretary, confirmed a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the 187th Meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council (June 26, 2025) were approved with some spelling corrections.

The Minutes of the 37th Annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod (May 30 and 31, 2025) were approved as presented.

SETTING THE AGENDA

Vice President Lafferty presented the agenda to the Synod Council.

Bishop Penman requested adding to the agenda a discussion of the Childcare Task Force, the creation of a Compensation Guidelines Task Force, and the creation of a Task Force to determine practices and procedures regarding Synod Authorized Ministers.

The agenda was approved with the additions.

MISSION MOMENT

The Reverend Kevin Tracey, co-chair of the Inclusive Communities Committee, presented to the Synod Council the work of this Committee.

The purpose: to support the LGBTQIA+ people in the synod, to assist rostered ministers, lay leaders, programs of the synod, and congregations seeking intentional inclusion, and to offer guidance regarding the expansion of inclusion efforts within the synod.

SEPA Synod is a Reconciling in Christ organization according to Reconciling Works since 1995. The first “In God’s Image” event was held in 2019. In 2022 the Synod Assembly adopted an updated Welcome Statement and formed the Inclusive Communities Committee as an ongoing, supported ministry of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

Upcoming events sponsored or promoted by the Inclusive Communities Committee include:
In God’s Image event, October 4, 2025, at Trinity, Lansdale
Transgender Day of Remembrance, November 20th.

Pr. Daniel Eisenberg (he/him) is the primary contact person for congregations navigating the process of becoming Reconciling in Christ partner congregations.

The Inclusive Communities Committee is growing in social media presence and is continuing to find new and innovative ways to bring the message of inclusion to an ever wider audience.

Bp Penman thanked Pastor Tracey for his presentation and the work of the Committee. He also added that the Welcome Statement now includes a component about racial equity as well as a welcome for the LGBTQ community.

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

Changes in the ELCA

Bishop Penman noted the biggest thing that has happened is change.

Our new Presiding Bishop, Yehiel Curry will be installed on October 4 in Minneapolis. His term begins Oct 1st. Our new Secretary, the Reverend CeCe Mills, begins her term on November 1st.

Two new leaders, both persons of color, will bring change, both by being new to their respective offices, but also by the fact they have a different lived experience.

Bishop highly recommends See Me, Believe Me, by Yolanda Denson-Byers, a Black, Queer, ELCA pastor. It is a book about the experience of black and queer people in the ELCA, and offers action steps of how to be more aware and intentionally inclusive in our relationships with each other.

Things will shift and change, and we will support that work as best we can.

Core Values of the Synod

As we work to effect change, Bishop Penman is also considering how we can settle on our Core Values as a Synod in this time. He is open to ideas, which will be considered as we redefine who we are and what will guide us as we move forward. His initial thoughts include: “We are Lutherans together, Loving God, Loving Neighbor.” Bishop stated that our purpose continues to be “Equipping the people of God for the work of Ministry.”

Other Core value ideas included: “Justice, Healing, and Joy.” These concepts are biblical, practical, and reflect what we are doing.

- + Justice work – feeding ministries, racial justice work
- + Healing – how has the church caused hurt and how can we work to bring healing
- + Joy – Our strength is in the Joy of the Lord

The Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia asked if this is something to be added to our mission statement, or if it might be a yearly focus: one year on Justice, one on Healing, one on Joy.

Bp. Penman shared that his planned theme for this year’s assembly theme will be on Justice. He has been in conversation with Kaitlin Curtice, author of Living Resistance, as a possible keynote speaker.

Vice President Lafferty loves that these are interrelated: e.g., you cannot have healing without justice.

Dr. John Connors noted we will need to teach our congregations how to live into these core values, whatever they are.

Dr. Sherrell Mickens said these particular values resonate, and if others hold them as well, it is less lonely for each individual or congregation.

Mr. Carig Mc Jett expressed his interest in the future of the church as well as what we are currently doing. At the Churchwide Assembly he saw strong youth involvement, and he wonders what we might need to do to get youth involved in SEPA Synod.

Bp. Penman said that “Youth” is on the board at the office, as we continue to determine how we might staff and organize youth ministry in the Synod. He thinks “youth” may fall under the category of healing. In October there will be a gathering of the youth leaders to discuss what is happening, and how they need support going forward. We are also focusing on our Lilly program of children/youth in worship, and how we can reimagine how we support parents of young children. This generation of young people is hungry for conversation on spiritual matters. They want church, but they do not know it.

V.P. Lafferty shared that in her work with young people she finds they are looking for a place where they can do justice work, not just talk about it.

Restructuring Synod-wide Conversations

Bishop Penman also said he is considering how we might restructure the way in which we do the work of ministry in our Synod. Perhaps we can create “tables” where people can come and discuss and plan how we address concerns by networking together. These would be more porous and accessible venues than our formal Synod committees and teams. Perhaps we can ask the teams that exist to find a way to open their work to the broader Synod, so that we can invite others into conversation. The committee or team can do the structural work needed, and then set a table to hold conversations on the topic.

Dr. Connors said the Care of Creation Team would resonate with this concept.

Ms. Pia Graham said we need to find ways to spread the information about such opportunities widely. We have a hard time letting people know what we are doing and inviting them to enter the conversation. We need more than one mode of communication.

The Reverend Jonathan Steiner loves the idea of table, but what is the focus? Do we as Synod Council set a goal for the table? Or do we set a topic for a table? How quickly are we able to make this happen?

Secretary Richard suggested there may be different tables for different reasons. Some may be called to work on a particular goal. Others may be a place for conversation and networking. One may be a table for a conversation on faith. We each have different tables in our lives, and each has a different purpose and feel: a formal Thanksgiving Dinner table is different from a picnic table.

The Rev. Dr. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath commented that we need to explain what we mean by a table. This clarification can include, “Who is welcome to this particular table,” as we make an invitation to those who may most benefit from, or be a benefit to, the table being set.

Synod Assembly

Dr. Connors asked about the listing in Bishop’s written report that the Synod Assembly may be a residential event in 2026. Bp. Penman responded that this is an idea he has been exploring. The site would be Muhlenberg College. This may not be possible for 2026, as there is construction happening on the campus which may not be completed in time, and we may need more lead time to prepare congregations on the value and purpose of an “away,” residential Assembly.

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Vice President Lafferty expressed her gratitude in being elected to this role and thanked the Synod Council for their support as she is still “gaining her feet.” She noted that since the June Synod Council meeting, she has met with the Fund for Mission Trustees, the Executive Committee, and other planning meetings. She is looking forward to visiting congregations, continuing to meet the people of the Synod, and share what we are doing together in ministry for Jesus.

Committee Assignments

Vice President Lafferty noted the proposed assignments for the committees of the Synod Council were in the packet of materials distributed for this meeting. She asked if there were questions or concerns with the proposed assignments. As there were none, Secretary Richard put forth the following resolution:

S.C.25.09.27. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council affirms the appointments of Synod Council Committees as proposed by the Bishop and Vice President.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Compensation Guidelines

The Deans have been discussing the need for revised compensation guidelines, both for newly called ministers, and for assistance to ministers currently under call. Taking into account the discussion from the Dean’s meeting, the Executive Committee adopted the following resolution to present to the Synod Council:

S.C.25.09.28. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve that the 2026 Unadjusted Minimum Compensation for First Call Ministers of Word and Sacrament be \$50,997 for salary, and \$18,000 for Housing Allowance for congregations without a parsonage, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2026 Unadjusted Minimum Compensation for First Call Ministers of Word and Service be \$52,528.

This represents a 3.3% increase over the minimum compensation guidelines for 2025.

A discussion was held regarding housing allowance and why it is available for Ministers of Word and Sacrament (pastors), but not for Ministers of Word and Service (deacons). The reason is based on IRS statutes which allow this benefit for pastors, but not for deacons.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Health Care Recommendation

Portico Benefits has made significant changes to the healthcare options available to rostered ministers. As part of the guidelines for compensation, the Deans have also requested clarification of what to recommend for health care for rostered ministers. Striving to keep rostered ministers covered as closely as possible in the new configuration as they were in the previously recommended Gold+ plan, the Executive Committee adopted the following resolution to present to the Synod Council for consideration:

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council

approve that congregations offer their rostered ministers either the Select Co-pay 2000, or the Select HDHP 2000 with a funded HSA in the amount of \$1,000 for individuals, \$3,000 for families.

The Reverend Karen Sease, Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations, was recognized to give context and clarification to this proposal. Pr. Sease works with the Deans and the mobility process. She explained the general differences between the current plans Portico Benefits offers, and the new plans that are being established for 2026. They are not simply modifications of the previous structure, and so congregations and ministers will need to do their own research to determine which is best for them.

Portico is calling one of the plans its “value” plan, which gives the impression that it would be the best choice. This is not necessarily true. The value plan will save the congregation the most money, but it will shift most of the cost to the rostered minister. The suggestion of the Committee of Deans is close to, but not quite correctly reflected in the proposal from the Executive Committee. To match as closely as possible the benefits of the current Gold+ plan the Synod currently recommends, the Deans proposed either the Select Co-pay 2000 plan, or the *Value HDHP 4000* with an employee contribution to an HSA in the amount of \$1,000 for individuals, \$3,000 for families.

Bishop Penman moved we amend the original resolution to reflect the recommendation of the Committee of Deans. His amendment was approved.

The Synod Council then adopted the amended resolution:

S.C.25.09.29. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council

approve that congregations offer their rostered ministers either the Select Co-pay 2000, or the Value HDHP 4000 with an employee contribution to an HSA in the amount of \$1,000 for individuals, \$3,000 for families.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Updates on the Constitution

Secretary Richard noted that the changes to the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions adopted at the August 2025 Churchwide Assembly are being incorporated into the Synod’s Constitution. The provisions that involve non-required provisions are being reviewed and will be presented to the Synod Council at the December meeting so recommendations may be presented to the Synod as a whole for action at the May 2026 Synod Assembly.

Actions on the Roster

Invitation to Full Communion Partners to Serve ELCA Congregations in SEPA Synod:

S.C.25.09.30. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves entry rite, Invitation to Extended Service, to the Rev. Dr. Karyn Wiseman as Pastor at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, Conshohocken, PA beginning September 15, 2025, for 25 hours per week. This Invitation to Extended Service requires an annual report to the synodical bishop for the full length of service. Extended service is eligible for renewal annually by Synod Council upon recommendation of the Synod Bishop.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution

Request to Move from Active Roster to Retired Roster

S.C.25.09.31. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant retired status to the Rev. Sue Lang effective December 1, 2025.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Information not requiring action

Transfer

The Reverend Nathan Krause to Northeastern Ohio Synod

Death

The Reverend Joyce E. Nelson, August 16, 2025

REPORT OF THE TREASURER AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Ms. Janet A. Neff, Treasurer, was not able to attend. Mr. Martin Schwab, Senior Accountant for SEPA Synod, made the report in her stead.

**Statement of Financial Position
Highlights as of 1/31/2025 and 7/31/2024**

	1/31/25	7/31/25
Total Cash & Investments	\$ 18,413,573	\$ 20,231,967
Total Assets	\$ 22,337,569	\$ 24,157,405
Total Liabilities	\$ 191,226	\$ 147,007
Total Net Assets	\$ 22,146,343	\$ 24,010,398
Unrestricted	\$ 15,539,313	\$ 17,497,559
With donor restrictions	\$ 6,607,030	\$ 6,512,839

Statement of Activities

Revenue

as of 7/31/25

	2025 Actual	2025 Forecast	2026 Budget
Mission Support	\$ 722,388	\$ 713,761	\$ 1,600,000
Other Contributions	\$ 241,304	\$ 271,821	\$ 498,686
Registration Fees	\$ 77,008	\$ 90,756	\$ 114,256
Investment Income	\$ 682,782	\$ 583,775	\$ 1,226,630
Beneficial interest in Trust	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 60,000
Proceeds from property	<u>\$ 1,834,546</u>	<u>\$ 1,746,750</u>	<u>\$ 700,000</u>
Total Revenue	\$ 3,588,028	\$ 3,406,862	\$ 4,199,572

Statement of Activities

Expenses

As of 7/31/25

	2025 Actual	2025 Forecast	2026 Budget
Operating Expense	\$ 975,105	\$ 1,180,566	\$ 2,193,776
ELCA Proportionate (50%)	\$ 361,194	\$ 356,880	\$ 800,000
Property Management	\$ 93,859	\$ 79,500	\$ 84,000

Distributions to other agencies	\$ 52,910	\$ 53,363	\$ 98,725
Remit to designated agency	\$ 8,779	\$ 6,270	\$ 12,540
Grants to Organizations	<u>\$ 209,144</u>	<u>\$ 50,781</u>	<u>\$ 153,460</u>
Total Expenses	\$ 1,700,991	\$ 1,727,360	\$ 3,342,501

Mr. Schwab shared the following to go along with the statistics.

With regard to our Financial Position:

Our cash and investments were \$20,231,000, which is an increase of \$1.8 million from the beginning of the year. This is mainly due to the sale of two properties.

Our liabilities went down by \$45,000 to \$147,000 in July.

Our largest liability at the moment is our mission support to the ELCA.

With regard to our Revenue:

As of July 31st, our mission support from congregations was \$722,000. This was \$9,000 better than the prior year.

Other contributions were \$241,000. This includes All Saints donations, any bequests, trust distributions, ELCA grants, and Fund for Mission donations we've received.

Registration fees of \$77,000 is mostly for the Synod Assembly.

We had investment income of \$683,000. That's about \$100,000 higher than we budgeted, so our investment returns are doing well for the first 6 months of the year.

Proceeds from property sales was \$1.8 million, which was slightly higher than we anticipated.

Total receipts as of July 31st was \$3,588,000, which is about \$100,000 higher than the budget.

With regard to our Expenses:

Our operating expenses are \$975,000.

This includes salaries, benefits, stipends, rent, insurance, travel, database, office expenses for the copier and supplies, internet and phone.

The ELCA received \$361,000. This is 50% of the mission support the city received.

Property expenses were \$94,000. This is for five (5) cemeteries that the Synod is responsible for, and three (3) former church properties under Synod Care.

Distributions to agencies were around \$52,000. This includes Muhlenberg College, United Lutheran Seminary, Campus Ministry at University Lutheran, Bear Creek Camp, and Lutheran Congregational Services.

Remittance to designated agencies was about \$9,000. This is donations we received from congregations that are specified for other agencies. The largest one is for Christ the King Church.

Grants to organizations was \$209,000. The largest grants here are the Fund for Mission Grants that have been approved by the Trustees, as well as some ELCA grants and St Petri-Hope disbursements.

Total expenses of July 31st were just about \$1.7 million.

Ms. Pia Graham, Chair of the Finance Committee, made the following comments on her submitted report:

The Committee met and reviewed all the reports. It is very good news to see that Mission Support is up by the \$9,000 indicated by Mr. Schwab. We continue to try to communicate with congregations to more effectively inspire generous and timely support of the Synod.

The Committee also reviewed the minutes of the Fund for Mission Trustees meeting, which included support of the Share the Love Family Boutique, and support of children to attend Bear Creek Camp, and support of the training event to be held at the Bishop's Convocation.

There are two new members of the Finance Committee, and we are grateful to have them on board.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Reports from committees were received in writing, with no actions required.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Childcare Task Force

The Synod Assembly charged the Synod Council with establishing a Task Force to consider if it is possible to offer childcare at the Synod Assembly and other Synod events. This task force is to be comprised of not more than nine (9) persons, at least three (3) of whom should be parents of young children. Consideration for the task force are state requirements, cost, training, safety, liability, and other issues that may impact the safety of children and the protection of their caregivers for providing such care at Synod events, as well as what type of Synod functions may require childcare or warrant the expense of providing such care.

The task force is charged with determining if childcare is possible for the 2026 Synod Assembly by the February meeting of the Synod Council, and so its empanelment is needed as quickly as possible.

Dr. Sherill Mickens agreed to be the Synod Council representative on this Task Force. Various suggestions of people who would be candidates were made. The Bishop and Vice President will take these into consideration. The process will then follow our process for seating Synod Council committees, where the suggested names will be shared with the Executive Committee for their input, and then shared with the Synod Council for their action. In light of the timing, the Synod Council will be asked to vote by email for the suggested members of the Task Force. Further suggestions of qualified people should be submitted to Bishop Penman and Vice President Lafferty by September 26th.

Synod Authorized Minister Task Force

Bishop Penman discussed his desire to have a task force to consider how we might make use of Synod Authorized Ministers. Recognizing that, expectations around SAMs are not very specific yet, because it is such a new position and such a new terminology, he would like to create a task force to clarify what criteria we expect for SAMs, how they're credentialed, and then also how they're held accountable, and what kind of support and oversight that they have.

The Rev. Dr. Nelson Reivera-Garcia was selected to be the Synod Council Representative on this task force. The Reverend Erica Wesch will serve as Synod Staff person on this team.

Much discussion ensued over names of other possible members, and over what the responsibilities and parameters of this task force will be. As it will be more effective to pick the proper configuration of people when the work of the task force is more fully prescribed, Bishop Penman will work on defining the purpose, scope, and timeline for this team, with the hope of having this ready for the December meeting of the Synod Council, with an eye to empaneling this task force at that time.

Task Force on Compensation Guidelines

Bishop Penman spoke of his concerns with our current process for setting compensation guidelines for rostered ministers of the Synod. There are several aspects of this concern, including how is an increase determined, and by what time so congregations can plan their budgets; the process of how we account for the increase for settled ministers, taking into account length of service and other learned knowledge over time; and in particular, the balance of equitable compensation based on cost of living for different regions in the Synod. Bishop expressed particular concern of the metric of housing values based on Zillow, both because Zillow is not fully reliable, and because, depending on the timing of housing booms, one may have an over or under inflated cost of living based on an accident of timing that may adversely impact either the minister or the congregation over a long period of time.

Bishop Penman asked for the following resolution to be considered:

S.C.25.09.32. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council empanels a Compensation Guidelines Task Force to review and revise the guidelines for the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, with their proposal to be presented to the Synod Council by its September, 2026 meeting.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Deacon Katie Afflerbach will serve as the Synod Council representative on this task force. Pr. Karen Sease will serve as the Synod Staff person. Other names will be considered and suggested to the Synod Council to fill out the rest of this task force at a future time.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:09 p.m. with prayer by Bishop Penman.

The next meeting of the Synod Council is scheduled for December 11, 2025, and will be held via Zoom.

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

Approved by Synod Council, December 11, 2025

MINUTES of the 189th MEETING

**of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

**Zoom Meeting
December 11, 2025
6:00 p.m.**

WELCOME AND DEVOTIONS

Vice President Cheryl Lafferty welcomed the Synod Council at 6:01 p.m. and invited the Reverend Jonathan Steiner to lead the Council in devotions. Pr. Steiner led reflections on the first chapter of Ruth, in which he pointed out that Ruth was a Moabite, an “outsider,” and yet she becomes the grandmother of David, and an ancestor of Jesus. Outsiders are not to be outside for us. As God’s family, we are called to welcome all.

CALL TO ORDER

Vice President Lafferty called the 189th meeting the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 6:10 p.m. The Reverend Karl Richard, Secretary, confirmed a quorum was present.

APPOINTMENT OF NEW SYNOD COUNCIL MEMBER

Vice President Lafferty placed the name of the Reverend Gwendolyn Johnson-Bond before the Synod Council for appointment to the open clergy seat, term ending May 2026. The Synod Council unanimously approved this appointment, and Pr. Johnson-Bond was admitted to the Zoom meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the 188th Meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council (September 18, 2025) were approved as presented.

SETTING THE AGENDA

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

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

Bishop Penman noted that it has been a busy fall. He is looking forward to a little down time for the holiday. He was pleased to share that there has been a luncheon held to recognize the diligent and faithful service of our Synod Staff.

Events coming in the New Year:

- + January 24 – Stewardship Extravaganza, a joint program with Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, which will be held at Trinity, Lansdale
- + February 21 – Council Leaders gathering
- + February 4 – First Faith Alive Learning Lab – 35 are already registered. We WANT KIDS to come! The program will consider how we use music in worship in ways that welcome and involve children.
- + March 20 – Tuscarora Lutheran Youth Retreat

Lilly Grant Initiatives

The Love Revolution “Proclaim” Retreat went well. We are looking toward the next wave of cohort congregations to register and begin this process.

Bishop Penman has travelled to Indianapolis, IN, twice since the last Synod Council meeting, both times in relation to our two Lilly Grants, the one for the Love Revolution, the other for our Faith Alive initiative for involving children in worship.

Bishop Installations

Bishop also attended the installation of Bishop Hirsch as Bishop of the Metro DC Synod, and Bishop Compton as Bishop of the New Jersey Synod. He also was present for the Retired Rostered Leaders Luncheon for those retired pastors and deacons of our Synod.

As our Mission Moment presenters became available, the Report of the Bishop was paused to hear from these presenters.

MISSION MOMENT – Gather, Philly

The Reverend Mycah McNett and Deacon Grace Markus were welcomed to provide a Mission Moment on the work of the Gather network.

Gather is a network of ELCA Young Adults, established to create a space for young adults to gather for fellowship, support, and conversation. There are fifty Gather sites across the country.

Gather began in 2018 in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, in response to a desire to have young adults know that they are not alone, and that they can be brought together for support and growth.

Gather Philly – “Wherever Young Adults are gathering in Philadelphia, that is Gather Philly+” Our village is still growing. Each event brings new friends, new ideas, and new community.

Events are grown from the group out, not from leaders down. Churches that host provide space for free, and the group brings food and beverages. Gather has an Instagram and Facebook presence. These are the best sources to find out where, when Gather events are taking place, and what the event will be.

Dr. Marcia Boraas asked if these are only social events, or if they are more programmatic? Deacon Markus shared that currently most of them have been fellowship, but within these fellowship events we have had either some sort of activity, such as petitioning our representatives, or some sort of program.

Pr. McNett shared the goal is to have three different types of events each year – fellowship, bible study, and service project. The Instagram posts give the focus of each gathering.

BACK TO REPORT OF THE BISHOP

New Candidacy Process

SEPA is a pilot Synod for the new candidacy program. Bishop finds it exciting that we will be getting in on the “ground floor.” This new process will jettison the idea that there is a one-size-fits all process. It will expand the options of TEEM (Theological Education for Emerging

Ministries) and SAM (Synod Authorized Minister) training. It will also move from a solely academic process, to make room for skill-based assessments as part of the preparation for ministry. Kendyll Ward, one of our SEPA Synod college students, is likely to be one of the first of those to enter candidacy in this new process.

Another Grant

Our Synod has received a CASTLE Grant from Wartburg seminary for leadership training for “rural” congregations. This is a further reflection of the diversity we have in our Synod – from inner city Philadelphia to farmland in Upper Bucks, Upper Montgomery and Chester Conferences. We will be creating a video training center for congregations to prepare them for the possibility of receiving a SAM.

Ordinations

Bishop Penman presided over two ordinations – Deacon Ali Clark, serving at KenCrest, and Deacon Sister Paula Estornell, serving at the Wellness Center of Grace, Broomall.

Over the past several months it has been good to see we have placed more misters in congregations than we have added congregations seeking ministerial leadership!

Document on how to redefine calls from full-time to less than full-time

As we work to provide appropriate leadership to congregations with different levels of resources, both human and financial, we find we may need to rework the call arrangement between several ministers and their congregations. As this requires a reset of the expectations of responsibilities for the rostered minister, and the compensation levels provided by the congregation, this necessitates a change in the call arrangement. The Reverend Karen Sease, Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations, and Secretary Karl Richard, are working on a process for this to happen faithfully and appropriately.

New Roster Status

The Churchwide Assembly has made changes to the roster manual which has resulted in new rostered status requirements. “On leave from Call” will be designated “On Leave.” It will also and is extend the time one may be in this status from 3 years to 6 years, renewable once. The new provisions also lower the number of hours for a position to be considered a “call” from 15 hours down to 10 hours per week. (Portico Benefits still holds to 15 hours.) And there has also been a new category added called “supply,” which can prevent people from falling off the roster due to lack of a call.

The Rev. Dr. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath asked how this time will be tracked. Is there a minimum number of hours?

Bp. Penman said this is not fully clear, but we will work to help ensure this tracking happens.

The Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia asked if someone may request to be on this roster.

Bp. Penman replied yes, but there are some situations where he would not recommend this route. Dr. Rivera-Garcia also noted that 12 years is a long time to be out of ministry. If a minister were to return to an active call after such a length of time, they may not be ready for where things are now.

Ms. Yvonne Curtis, Director of Operations, and a member of the team that is working on changes to the roster manual, noted that there must be conversation with the Bishop as to whether being on the Supply roster is good for the minister and the church, and the same is true for if a person were to be considered for an active call.

Update from Federal Chaplain – the Rev. Chris Otten

The Conference of Bishops was given an update from the Rev. Chris Otten, who serves as the designated Ecclesiastical endorser for our Federal Chaplains at the direction, and by the designation of our Presiding Bishop. He wanted to bring some concerning developments happening at the federal level in our country.

First, he wanted us to know that a significant number of JAG's (which are the attorneys for the military) have been let go, leaving the military unable to enforce ethical and moral affairs for the military.

Second, it is most concerning to see the extra-judicial killings on boats in the Caribbean. These actions are completely illegal.

Third, the deployment of the national guard by the federal government goes against procedure and the norm for having them activated to support state specified matters.

Fourth, he wanted us to be aware that the military is preparing tactical strike forces that could be deployed in the event of civil unrest in our country.

Finally, he wanted us to be aware that the chaplains at the top levels of the military are no longer being invited to briefings, but that there is a strong possibility that we are headed towards some kind of global conflict with Russia, China and North Korea.

VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT

Updates on Task Forces

The Childcare task force has been empaneled and has met twice already.

The Childcare Task Force will bring a report to the February meeting of the Synod Council.

The Synod Authorized Ministers (SAM) Task Force is in process. We hope to have a proposal for the Council's consideration in February, after which we can determine who might be helpful people to serve on this team.

The creation of a Compensation Guidelines Task Force was approved at the last Synod Council meeting. The names of those proposed to serve on this committee are before you today:

S.C.25.12.33. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves the following persons to serve on the Compensation Guidelines Task Force:

- + Ms. Joyce Adams Faith-Immanuel (East Lansdowne), Delaware Conference
- + Deacon Kathie Afflerbach* St. John's (Spinnerstown), Upper Bucks Conference
- + Ms. Tracey A. Beasley Reformation (Philadelphia), NE/NW Conference
- + The Rev. Bill Coleman St. Paul (Telford), Upper Bucks Conference, Dean
- + The Rev. Dan Eisenberg St. John (Mayfair) Philadelphia), NE/NW Conference, Dean
- + The Rev. Chris Franz Advent (West Chester), Chester Conference, Dean
- + Mr. John Menapace St. Luke's Devon, Chester Conference

- + Mr. Frank Roth St. Paul's (Ardmore) – former Portico Board Member, Delaware Conference
- + The Rev. Karen Sease, Synod Staff
*Member of Synod Council

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Recording of email vote

Secretary Richard stated that for the record, we will be including the results of an email vote from October 30, 2025, in which the Synod Council was asked to affirm the members to serve on the Childcare Task Force, requested by action of the 2025 Synod Assembly.

S.C.25.12.34. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council affirms the following members of the Childcare Task force as proposed by the Executive Committee:

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| + Dr. Sherrell Mickens | Synod Council Rep | lay | |
| + Ms. Becca Shelor | Christ, Oreland | lay | |
| + Ms. Joanne Steinly | Trinity, Perkasio | lay | |
| + Ms. Catherine Carmen | Trinity, Perkasio | lay | |
| + Ms. Cheryl Detweiler Grace, | Pottstown | lay | |
| + MS. Laura Steiner | Trinity, Lansdale | lay | Young Parent |
| + Pr. Axel Kaegler | Christ, Oreland | roster | Clergy couple |
| + Ms. Lisa Hand | Good Shepherd, KOP | lay | |
| + Mr. Andrew Bruno | St. John's Ridge, Valley | lay | Young Parent |
| + Dcn. Ali Clark | St. Paul's Red Hill | approved rostered minister | |

The Synod Council adopted the resolution. 18 responses received, 17 yes, with Pr. Steiner choosing to abstain as his wife was under consideration.

N.B. – The parameters of the task force was that it be comprised of nine members, and this list included 10. Consequently, since Ms. Steinly and Ms. Carmen are both members of Trinity, Perkasio, Ms. Steinly has been asked if she will be willing to serve the Synod in a different capacity at a future time.

Actions on the Roster

Call to Interim Ministry:

S.C.25.12.35. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call The Rev. Dr. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath to interim ministry at Redeemer Lutheran Church (Jamison) beginning September 21, 2025, and extending until a pastor is called by the congregation or until Pastor Rodrick-Schnaath resigns this call, whichever comes first.
The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Call to Specialized Ministry:

S.C.25.12.36. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend a renewable call to Specialized Ministry to the Deacon Alison Clark as

Faith Engagement and Outreach Coordinator at KenCrest beginning December 6, 2025, to December 5, 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.

2026 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 2026

The Rev. Annemarie Cook - \$42,728.00

The Rev. Paula Lebo - \$12,753.00

The Rev. Violet Little - \$32,677.44

The Rev. Linda Manson - \$46,476.00

Bishop Bryan Penman - \$54,240.00

The Rev. Karen Sease - \$23,000.00

The Rev. Erika Wesch - \$30,000.00

S.C.25.12.37. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the 2026 housing allowances for the Reverends Cook, Lebo, Little, Manson, Penman, Sease, and 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 adopted the resolution.

Reception of the property of a former congregation

WHEREAS the congregation of St. John-Tinicum Lutheran Church, Essington, PA has voted to end its ministry,

S.C.25.12.38. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council acknowledges with sadness the action of St. John-Tinicum Lutheran Church, 601 Seneca St., Essington, PA, to close, effective November 2, 2025, on which date the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod received the property of St. John-Tinicum Lutheran Church, Essington, 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,

December 11, 2025, authorizes the Bishop of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, or the Bishop's representative(s), to disburse the property on behalf of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Renewal of Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities

We have several Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities in our Synod. This authorization requires renewal on an annual basis. To that end:

S.C.25.12.39. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council authorizes the following ministries that are continuing as Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities in 2026:

- + The Welcome Church - The Rev. Violet Little, mission developer
- + The Well - The Rev. Shaunel Steinnagel, mission developer
- + Kairos - The Rev. Robert Fisher, mission developer
- + Mindfulness Plus Church - The Rev., Tom Natalini, mission developer

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Strategic Ministries

In like manner to Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities, we have several Strategic Ministries in our Synod, which also need annual authorization.

S.C.25.12.40. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council authorizes the following as Strategic Ministries continuing in 2026:

- + Grace Lutheran, Broomall - The Rev. Kayla Sadowy, pastor
- + Iglesia Luterana Nueva Creacion - The Rev. Lyzette Rios-Sanchez, pastor
- + Mediator Lutheran, Philadelphia - The Rev. Regina Goodrich, pastor
- + St. Michael's Lutheran, Philadelphia - The Rev. Dr. Noah Hepler, pastor
- + Trinity Lutheran, Philadelphia - The Rev. Eric Allison, pastor

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Authorization of the Share the Love Family Boutique as a Synod Authorized Outreach Ministry

WHEREAS the work of the former Community of Love Lutheran Church in Oxford, PA, had begun a boutique to provide for the needs of the members of that community, and

WHEREAS that ministry to the community has proven to be an ongoing need for the residents of Oxford and the surrounding area, and

WHEREAS the congregation of Community of Love ended its ministry as a worshipping congregation, but the property remains the responsibility of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod,

S.C.25.12.41. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council designates the Share the Love Family Boutique as a Synod Authorized Outreach Ministry (SAOM) of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod/ELCA, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council designates the property of the former Community of Love Lutheran Church to be the host site for this ministry.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Amendments to the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA.

Secretary Richard directed the Council to the following information which was included in the packet of materials for the December meeting of the Synod Council, which contains recommended amendments to the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA. These changes are from the action of the Churchwide Assembly, reflecting the proposed changes to the Constitution for Synods. Text ~~struck through~~ is to be removed, text underlined is to be added.

Changes to Required Provisions

The amendments to required provisions in section 1, and the redesignation of one provision from “recommended” to “required” in section 2, are mandatory, and have been incorporated into our constitution.

Change from Required to Non-Required Provisions

In section 3 is the reclassification of three provisions from “required” to “non-required” provisions, with a suggested change of one word in the third provision.

The Synod may choose to eliminate these provisions altogether by a majority vote at the Assembly. These are simple provisions with which I find no concern and recommend we keep them.

I further recommend that we make the one proposed update that changes “The” to “A”. This one-word change will need a majority vote by the Assembly in May.

S.C.25.12.42. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council recommends the Synod Assembly adopts the change to S11.04. from “**The** Mutual Ministry Committee” to “**A** Mutual Ministry Committee.”

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

Amendments to Non-Required Provisions

Section 4, the last page of the document, contains suggested amendments to non-required provisions.

Under this section, I recommend we propose the adoption of the changes to S7.26., S9.04., S10.05., and S13.41.

I further recommend that we propose the adoption of the new non-required provision of S10.06. If we adopt this, the next changes are renumbering the subsequent provisions and bylaws, as there is currently a provision numbered S10.06. in the Constitution.

I further recommend that we delineate the following as the committees that would apply in the open space: Candidacy Committee, Finance Committee, and Nominating Committee, Mutual Ministry Committee, Consultation Committee, and the Committee on Discipline.

S.C.25.12.43. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council recommends the Synod Assembly adopts the following changes to Non-Required Provisions of the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA:

Chapter 7.

SYNOD ASSEMBLY

S7.26. This synod may establish processes through the Synod Council that permit persons currently serving as synod-authorized ministers and/or lay representatives of authorized worshipping communities and/or outreach ministries of the synod, which have been authorized under ELCA bylaw 10.01.04., to serve as voting members of the Synod Assembly, consistent with †S7.21.

Chapter 9.

NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS

S9.04. The bishop shall be elected by the Synod Assembly by ecclesiastical ballot. Three-fourths of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election on the first ballot. If no one is elected, the first ballot shall be considered the nominating ballot. Three-fourths of the legal votes cast on the second ballot shall be necessary for election. The third ballot shall be limited to the seven persons (plus ties) who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on the second ballot, and two-thirds of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. The fourth ballot shall be limited to the three persons (plus ties) who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on the third ballot, and 60 percent of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. On subsequent ballots a majority of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. These ballots shall be limited to the two persons (plus ties) who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on the previous ballot.

Chapter 10.

SYNOD COUNCIL

S10.05. No ~~Elected members~~ of the Synod Council shall not receive compensation solely for such their service as council members.

S10.06. No person related to a synod staff member shall be eligible for nomination to or membership on the Synod Council or the following synod committees: Candidacy Committee, Finance Committee, and Nominating Committee, Mutual Ministry Committee, Consultation Committee, and the Committee on Discipline. For this purpose, a related individual is one who, with respect to the synod employee, is a spouse, parent, son, daughter, sibling, uncle, aunt, niece, nephew, grandparent, grandchild, including corresponding members of blended families and in-laws (parent, son, daughter, or sibling of a spouse, spouse of a sibling, or the parent or sibling of the spouse of a sibling).

S10. ~~0607.~~ If a member of the Synod Council ceases to meet

S10. ~~0708.~~ The composition of the Synod Council

S10. ~~0809.~~ *Robert's Rules of Order*, latest edition, shall govern

Chapter 13.

CONGREGATIONS

S13.40. Synod-authorized Worshipping Communities and Outreach Ministries

S13.41. Authorized worshipping Worshipping communities and outreach ministries, authorized by the synod and acknowledged under criteria, policies, and procedures approved by

the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, shall accept and adhere to the Confession of Faith and Statement of Purpose of this church, shall be served by leadership under the criteria of this church, and shall be subject to the discipline of this church.

The Synod Council adopted the resolution.

These proposed amendments will be shared with the Synod for adoption at the 2026 Synod Assembly.

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 10/31/2024**

	1/31/25	10/31/25
Total Cash & Investments	\$ 18,413,573	\$ 20,961,267
Total Assets	\$ 22,337,569	\$ 24,886,820
Total Liabilities	\$ 191,226	\$ 141,578
Total Net Assets	\$ 22,146,343	\$ 24,745,242
Unrestricted	\$ 15,539,313	\$ 18,297,749
With donor restrictions	\$ 6,607,030	\$ 6,447,493

Statement of Activities

Revenue

as of 10/31/25

	2025 Actual	2025 Forecast	2026 Budget
Mission Support	\$ 1,044,493	\$ 1,048,868	\$ 1,600,000
Other Contributions	\$ 335,992	\$ 322,570	\$ 498,686
Registration Fees	\$ 90,476	\$ 100,506	\$ 114,256
Investment Income	\$ 1,738,527	\$ 831,654	\$ 1,226,630
Beneficial interest in Trust	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 60,000
Proceeds from property	\$ 1,834,546	\$ 1,910,000	\$ 700,000
Total Revenue	\$ 5,044,032	\$ 4,213,599	\$ 4,199,572

Statement of Activities

Expenses

As of 10/31/25

	2025 Actual	2025 Forecast	2026 Budget
Operating Expense	\$ 1,445,289	\$ 1,721,568	\$ 2,193,776
ELCA Proportionate (50%)	\$ 522,246	\$ 524,434	\$ 800,000
Property Management	\$ 123,319	\$ 126,750	\$ 84,000
Distributions to other agencies	\$ 76,208	\$ 76,044	\$ 98,725
Remit to designated agency	\$ 10,529	\$ 9,405	\$ 12,540
Grants to Organizations	\$ 272,802	\$ 76,172	\$ 153,460
Total Expenses	\$ 2,450,393	\$ 2,534,373	\$ 3,342,501

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

Balance Sheet

We are in good ratios in terms of assets and liabilities.

Some highlights regarding Income

We are down slightly in partnership support. We trust this will rebound as the year moves on. The All Saints Appeal brought in \$16,000.

We have garnered Registration Fees for the Stewardship Extravaganza.

Investment Income – we have done very well, which has helped our bottom line significantly.

We also have proceeds from property sales. The property of the former St. Paul Lansdowne sold for approximately \$600,000, and that of the former St. Paul, Norriton, sold for approximately \$1.2 million.

Some highlights regarding Expenses

Our gifts to the ELCA are a little lower, but they still represent 50% of what we received. Management of properties includes the expenses of the properties we have from former ministries.

Designated agencies have received payments from the Synod.

Operating expenses are down, but there is nothing unusual in terms of the current levels of spending.

REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Ms. Pia Graham, chairperson of the Finance Committee, shared the following.

The Committee reviewed the reports and agreed with the Treasurer's assessment and report. Seminary debt relief applications were reviewed.

The Committee also reviewed the Fund for Mission disbursements to be aware of the use of those resources, and looked at some Mission Development projects.

And the Committee disbursed money for food ministries, as Bishop Penman brought a request for the support of 24 food ministries in our congregations.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Investment Committee

Dr. Marcia Boraas referenced the submitted report, noting the minutes are complete.

She highlighted that the Committee is impressed with our investment team from Girard, and noted that they are available if the Committee has any other needs.

Bp. Penman made the observation that when we went with Girard, we did consolidate our funds, but this means our investments in the ELCA Mission Investment Fund were wiped out. Was this planned?

Treasurer Neff stated that this was not the intent. The Committee will reach out to Girard to have the investments in the MIF reestablished.

Constitution Committee

Dr. John Connors, chairperson, noted the text in their report in dark blue are changes since last SC meeting. There are no actions required at this meeting.

Nominating Committee

Dr. Rodrick-Schnaath is the chairperson. The process for securing candidates will begin in the new year. Synod Council members were reminded that if you are eligible to serve another term, you need to fill out a nomination form to declare that intention.

OLD BUSINESS

2026 Synod Assembly

The Synod Assembly will not be held at Muhlenberg College this year. Construction projects will not be completed in time.

We are not likely to meet at the Episcopal Cathedral in Philadelphia, as the parking lot is likely to be the site of a new building by then, the space for eating within the building is not enough for our needs, and there are not enough rooms for breakout sessions.

We need to rethink how or if an urban Assembly is possible with the costs, and the few settings with adequate space for our needs.

The current plan for the 2026 Assembly is to return to Trinity, Lansdale. We are considering a shift in the timing to accommodate working people. The theme is “Imago DEI,” with the intentional double meaning of “Dei” as “of God,” and DEI as “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.”

Muhlenberg College is still being considered as a possible site for the 2027 Synod Assembly.

NEW BUSINESS

None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

The meeting was adjourned with prayer by Dr. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath at 7:55 pm.

The next meeting of the Synod Council is scheduled for February 19, 2026, and will be held via Zoom.

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

Approved by Synod Council, February 19, 2026

MINUTES
of the 190th 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 190th 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 189th 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 29th at 5:00 PM through Saturday, May 30th, 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, 3rd 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, 2nd 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 31st, 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 15th.**
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