

**Southern Ohio Synod – ELCA
Synod Council Electronic Meeting
December 4, 2021**

Call to Order:

Vice President Ellis called the Synod Council meeting to order a 9:04 AM. Secretary Fischer took a roll call vote and confirmed a quorum was present.

Roll Call:

Members present: Rev. Matt Byrd, Rev. Mark Combs, Mr. Rick Davila, Bishop Suzanne D. Dillahun, Mr. David Drumm, Ms. Marjorie Ellis, Ms. Holly Fischer, Rev. Bonnie Gerber, Ms. Jeni Gray, Mr. Roy Hart, Mr. Matthew Hazzard, Rev. Stephen Kimm, Rev. Laura Leach-Shreffler, Mr. Imanuel Lyatuu, Ms. Abbie McCandlish, Mr. David Miser, Mr. Kevin Pyle, Ms. Michelle Riesbeck, Mr. Ethan Roberts, Ms. Laura Schmidt, Ms. Cindy Schrader, Rev. Cheryl Siegenthaler, Ms. Kathie Skamfer, Ms. Marcia Ward, Rev. Dr. Kenneth R. Witt, Ms. Susan Wyckoff.

Members excused: Mr. Doug Ware.

Members absent: None.

Also present for some or all of the electronic meeting were staff members including Rev. Katie Kerrigan, Rev. Robert Abrams, Rev. Lynn Nakamura, Gary Pecuch, Rev. Karl Biermann, and Deacon Dan Jacob. Guest Becky Witt, Finance Team Chair was also present.

Vice-President Ellis asked that participants identify themselves before speaking.

Review and Approval of Agenda of the 12/04/2021 Meeting:

The Agenda for the day was reviewed. Vice President Ellis proposed two amendments.

VOTED:

**SC.21.12.01 To approve the 12/04/2021 Agenda as amended. (Schmidt/Byrd)
APPROVED.**

Marica Ward opened with devotions.

Review and Approval of Minutes of the September 11, 2021 Meeting:

The Minutes of the above Council meeting were reviewed. Mr. Hazzard had two corrections on page 2 (change spelling of “Capitol” to “Capital” and his residence from “Bexley” to “Columbus”).

VOTED:
SC.21.12.02

**To approve the Minutes of the 09/11/2021 meeting as amended.
(Leach-Shreffler/Kimm) APPROVED .**

Reports of the Officers and Executive Committee:

Vice President

Vice President Ellis provided a verbal report on the monthly meetings of the Synod Vice-Presidents.

Secretary

Secretary Fischer provided a report with updates on the Region 6 Archives Advisory Board and the Synod Online Digital Archives (SODA). Ms. Fischer's report is attached to these minutes for review.

Treasurer

Treasurer Pyle submitted written reports for the General Fund Budget Comparison (February to October 2021) and Net Assets Designated by Council and Net Assets with Donor Restrictions. Mr. Pyle indicated that overall, the Synod is doing well. Mr. Davilla asked about whether the year to date "actual" represents obligations or actual expenditures? Mr. Pyle responded the latter. Mr. Davilla asked if there is a concern regarding the accounts that are exceeding 100% of the budgeted amount? Mr. Pyle explained that this primarily the bank service charge and insurance account, and that the amounts allocated to those expenses were estimates that are sometimes difficult to predict and are subject to change by the service provider. Mr. Pyle indicated that the overall expenses are at around 70% as of the end of October, so he is not concerned as to the overall budget. Ms. Witt added that the numbers are estimates for budgeting purposes and not fiscally binding and agreed there is no concern at this point as to the overall budget.

Mr. Hazzard asked what the "Oklahoma farmland" is? The Bishop explained that the Synod was gifted this land by a closed congregation and is in the process of trying to sell the land. Mr. Hazzard asked if thought had been given to gifting the land to indigenous peoples? Mr. Pyle indicated that this has not been discussed and would not provide a tax benefit to the Synod, however, the Finance Team could explore this.

Mr. Pyle clarified for members the distinction between Council Designated accounts and Donor Restricted accounts, and shared that regarding the latter, these cannot be modified as to the use of funds without a probate court order as to each discrete account. Pastor Abrams shared that to obtain a court order, attorney fees and legal costs for publication would likely exceed the account balances.

Regarding mission support, Bishop Dillahunst asked Rev. Kerrigan to provide information on the status of Statements of Intent responses. Rev. Kerrigan shared a PowerPoint Interim Report on the 2021 Mission Support Appeal for FY 2022-2023. As of December 2, 48 congregations have submitted statements of intent (just over 26% of all congregations). Because most annual meetings to establish budgets occur in January, most statements are received after that time.

Vice President Ellis called a recess at 10:07 am.

Vice President Ellis reconvened the meeting at 10:12 am.

Bishop

Bishop Dillahunst noted that her written report was distributed to the members of the Synod Council. The Bishop's Report is attached to these minutes for review. In addition to her written report, the Bishop provided information, and invited staff members to provide verbal reports as discussed below.

1. The Bishop asked Rev. Kerrigan to provide an update on the new Authentic Diversity, Inclusion and Justice Team. She indicated the team is in the process of being developed, and resources are being collected that can be shared with congregations and on the Synod website Sandbox.
2. The Bishop discussed the Churchwide Assembly, which will be hosted in Columbus at the Columbus Convention Center August 8-12, 2022. The Synod Assembly team is working with Mr. Tim Skamfer to assist the ELCA team. The Synod will be responsible for hospitality support, for example, providing shuttles from the hotels to the airport. At the Churchwide Assembly a new ELCA Vice-President will be elected. The Assembly will be live streamed so all interested may watch.
3. The Bishop shared that in the next year, the structure of Synod Council will be analyzed. The Council membership is very large, and this can constrain robust discussion. She would like to explore options to restructure Council to better facilitate work and leadership. In conjunction with this the governing documents will need to be reviewed.
4. Bishop Dillahunst referred to Pastor Donner's Thrive! report and indicated she is extremely pleased with the direction of Thrive!. Receipts and pledges have been fantastic, noting that small and medium size congregations have stepped up and exceeded their campaign goals. Campaigns will continue through May – June 2022 and Pastor Donner will continue to lead Thrive! through next

summer. She noted that Planned Giving is the next phase of Thrive! Rev. Kerrigan shared that The Center for Generosity is an online site with resources and access to experts on congregational stewardship and organizational development. Up to 100 Synod congregations are eligible for a free subscription to this great resource through April 2022. The Bishop noted that the Finance Team will be making recommendations on the establishment of additional endowment funds in broad categories that may be accessed to support new initiatives (e.g., Holy Experiments and Innovations).

5. The Bishop asked Pastor Biermann to provide information regarding his work with Planned Giving. Pastor Biermann explained that he works directly with both congregations and individual members. At the congregation level, he will work with endowment committees, and provide assistance with the development and review of gift policies, for example. With individuals, he can conduct interviews to develop asset inventories and review of estate plans and will put together a legacy proposal. Pastor Biermann encouraged Council members and their congregations to reach out to him to take advantage of these free services.
6. The Bishop asked Deacon Dan Jacob, the new Synod Storyteller and Media Ambassador to provide information on his work. Deacon Jacob provided information on his background and noted he also works at Capital University in campus ministry. Deacon Jacob enthusiastically discussed methods employed to tell the story of the Gospel of Jesus throughout the Southern Ohio Synod. Three primary venues are the Synod website, email, and social media. The latter is primarily Facebook and Instagram at this time, but plans are to add Tik Tok and engage in podcasting in the upcoming year. Deacon Jacob shared current statistics noting the November 2021 average email open rate was 39.5%, which is double the industry standard. Social media hits are about 1500-1800 people per week, so this venue allows the greatest storytelling impact. Mr. Davilla asked how we can reach those without internet access? Council members shared ideas from their home congregations.
7. The Bishop provided an Outside the Box (OTB) team update. The team has been visiting non-denominational congregations to observe how they create a welcoming presence (both online and in person). As congregations continue to conduct worship and activities online, welcoming can be an issue, but there are techniques to enhance the experience for visitors. Pastor Abrams shared that sometimes very simple, no-cost options work, for example, greeting visitors online through “chat box” messages. Pastor Kerrigan noted that hospitality and welcoming principles need to be developed not only online but in person. Discussion ensued with many Council members sharing

ideas and suggestions. For example, regarding visitors from other cultures or denominations, Ms. Gray noted that at her church, a member is assigned to sit with visitors to assist them through the Lutheran order of service, and to interact with them following the service. Mr. Lyatuu mentioned that with online participants who speak English as a second language, the “chat box” feature and screen sharing is very helpful as the written word is more accessible. Mr. Davilla questioned what the rules of etiquette are for online interaction. Mr. Roberts shared his perspective that it’s important to appreciate that younger visitors are present because they want to be present.

8. The Bishop asked Rev. Nakamura, Director of Candidacy and Leadership Development, to provide an update on the Leadership Academy. As is noted in the Bishop’s written report, Dr. Cory Driver has left his position in order to take a call to teach in Cairo, Egypt, and Rev. Nakamura has assumed responsibility for the Leadership Academy. Rev. Nakamura identified some of the current challenges including the need to obtain grant funding and instructors, and to conduct an evaluation of the program’s progress. Currently 16 people are enrolled in classes. Rev. Nakamura provided information regarding the pulpit supply process. She noted that changes were made during the pandemic, so that the Synod is now utilizing supply lists and asking congregations to identify dates needed, which is how most other synods operate. She is asking for congregations to participate in the education of lay leadership by providing opportunities for lay leaders to preach, and for the congregations to provide feedback. She cited shortages for leadership particularly in parts of Eastern and Southern Ohio. Rev. Nakamura encouraged Council members to ask individuals interested in lay leadership to contact her.

The Bishop noted that Mr. Doug Ware needed to be excused from this Council meeting in order to attend Synod Authorized Minister classes.

9. The Bishop noted that asked Mr. Gary Pecuch to report on the Youth Gathering. Mr. Pecuch shared that the Youth Gathering occurs every three years, and the 2020 event was postponed due to the pandemic, so the next event is in Minneapolis in 2022. Typically, the Gathering has about 30,000 attendees. As of the November 21, 2021 early bird registration date, 10,000 have registered, including 331 from the Southern Ohio Synod. Ms. Laura Schmidt asked about attendance estimates and the impact of the pandemic on the event? Mr. Pecuch indicated there are no estimates at this time and processes to address

the pandemic are “day to day” due to the uncertainty as to the landscape next July.

Vice President Ellis called a lunch recess at 12:06 pm. Pastor Abrams provided a lunchtime prayer.

Vice President Ellis reconvened the meeting at 12:40 pm.

10. The Bishop asked Rev. Abrams to provide an update on the Congregational Resource Team. Rev. Abrams shared that this Team was formed four years ago and is currently composed of 12 members (about half lay members and half clergy). The Team serves to provide support and assistance primarily to congregation pastors and council presidents. The assistance is initiated by a request from the congregation. Currently the Team is working with five congregations. Ms. Ward asked what the process is for making a request? Rev. Abrams indicated requests need to be made through the congregation council, although the Team also works individually to provide pastoral support.

Rev. Abrams also reported on mobility issues and pastoral vacancies. Of 184 congregations, about 58% are looking or will be looking for a pastor fulltime, and 5 congregations have a vacancy. He provided additional statistics and noted the numbers are fairly stable over time, and overall, compared to other regions, the Southern Ohio Synod is in a healthy and stable position. However, it remains challenging to fill calls. Approximately 80% of all call candidates have come from outside the Synod. It appears that within Region 6, the SOS has the lowest vacancy rate.

11. The Bishop asked Rev. Kerrigan, Director for Evangelical Mission, to provide information regarding the “Cultivate emerging lutheran communities” Holy Experiment. Currently we have two established communities, Tikkun Farms and Gathering Cincinnati. These communities receive ongoing “tending” or support as needed. Rev. Kerrigan shared a PowerPoint presentation regarding September and November 2021 events and the upcoming February – April 2022 Cultivate Recruitment tour. The next stage of the process is Equipping our “planters”. Rev. Kerrigan shared that the Cultivate team is working jointly with the United Methodist Church, our ecumenical partner. Bishop Dillahunt noted that although we are partnering with the U. Methodist church, this is a Lutheran program with Lutheran theological backing.

Report of Auxiliaries

The Synod Council received a written report from the Lutheran Men in Mission. Mr. Drumm thanked the Bishop and Council for their support of men's ministries.

The Council received a written report from the Women of the ELCA. Ms. Wyckoff noted that WELCA met for the first time in person since December 2019 in November 2021 and is establishing dates for 2022 Gatherings.

The Reports of the Officers, Lutheran Men in Mission, and Women of the ELCA were then received by the Synod Council.

The Bishop reviewed and provided background information concerning En Bloc recommendations.

EN BLOC

VOTED:

SC.21.12.03 To approve the En Bloc Recommendations, and to ask that the minutes reflect that Mr. Matthew Hazzard and Rev. Laura Leach Shreffler are abstaining from the vote as to their respective appointments. (Fischer /Pyle)
APPROVED

Rostered Ministers Status

On Leave from Call

RECOMMENDATION:

- Deacon Julija Volfa, 1st yr. (11/18/21)
- Rev. Jenelle Rue

Retired Status

RECOMMENDATION:

- The Rev. Jeffrey M. Glawe (1/1/2022)
- The Rev. Jodi Keith (11/15/21)

Disability Status

RECOMMENDATION: N/A

Extension of Call

RECOMMENDATION:

- To extend a Synod Council Call to Rev. Gil Santiago to serve as Intentional Interim Pastor,
at First Lutheran Church, in Springfield OH, beginning October 15, 2021.

Affirmation and Renewal of Appointment of Synod Authorized Ministers

RECOMMENDATION: N/A

Affirmation and Renewal of Synod Council Calls

RECOMMENDATION: N/A

Removal/ Resignation from the ELCA Roster

RECOMMENDATION:

- Mr. Paul W. Heine (9/20/21)
- Mr. Brian Whitton (10/3/21)

Legal and Governance

RECOMMENDATION:

- To appoint Mr. Matthew Hazzard to serve a first five-year term on the Candidacy Committee, beginning January 1, 2022 thru December 31, 2026.
- To appoint Rev. Laura L. Shreffler to serve a second five-year term on the Candidacy Committee, beginning January 1, 2022 thru December 31, 2026.
- To appoint Rev. Julianne Smeck as chair of the Authentic Diversity Inclusion and Justice Team.
- To re-appoint Ms. Kay Labrosky to the Oesterlen Board (12/13/21 to 9/26/21)
- To approve congregation constitutions for:
 - Bethel Lutheran Church, Grove City OH (9/15/21)
 - Faith Lutheran Church, Wilmington OH (11/14/21)

Information: The Bishop provided information regarding:

- Grace, Centerburg closing, 2nd vote December 2021
- Triumphant Cross, Trotwood

Other Business: None.

Vice-President Ellis asked members to review the Synod Council Roster 2021-2022 and send her any corrections.

Rev. Kerrigan offered a closing prayer.

SC.21.12.04 To adjourn the meeting (Fischer / Witt) APPROVED.

The meeting was then adjourned at 1:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Holly R. Fischer
Synod Council Secretary