

Southern Ohio Synod – ELCA
Special Electronic Synod Council Meeting
March 24, 2020

Call to Order: Ms. Marjorie Ellis, Vice President of Synod Council, called the Special Electronic Synod Council meeting to order at 7:03 pm. Ms. Ellis took a roll call vote.

Roll Call:

Members present: Rev. Mark Combs, Bp. Suzanne D. Dillahunt, Ms. Marjorie Ellis, Ms. Holly Fischer, Mr. Richard Freudenberger, Ms. Jeni Gray, Mr. Roy Hart, Rev. Stephen Kimm, Ms. Sheryl Melvin; Rev. Laura Leach-Shreffler; Mr. Kevin Pyle, Ms. Michelle Riesbeck, Ms. Laura Schmidt, Mr. Steven Schnittke, Ms. Cindy Schrader; Rev. Cheryl Siegenthaler; Ms. Kathie Skamfer, Mr. Doug Ware, Rev. Dr. Kenneth R. Witt, Rev. Ralph Wolfe.

Members excused: Rev. Matthew Byrd; Mr. Steve Goff; Ms. Morgan Walker; Ms. Susan Wyckoff.

Members absent: Mr. David Drumm; Ms. Carol Swank.

Ms. Fischer declared a quorum to exist with twenty (20) members participating.

Also present on the electronic conference were members of the Finance Committee, Accountant Joy Hacker, and staff members Rev. Abrams, Rev. Kerrigan, Rev. Larry Donner and Ms. Barton-Nonno.

The Vice President requested the participants identify themselves prior to speaking.

Bishop Dillahunt offered prayer at the commencement of the meeting and provided devotions (Ezekiel 37: The Valley of the Dry Bones).

The purpose of the meeting was to consider and take action in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Bishop Dillahunt provided a report regarding staff operations during the pandemic. Staff are working remotely and have been able to work cooperatively to continue that work. Churches have expressed concern regarding the impact of the pandemic on the call process. Rev. Bob Abrams shared that although call votes may be postponed, this should not lead to the loss of a candidate to another congregation, as all are impacted equally. He indicated that congregations have continued to interview candidates by telecommunication.

The Bishop shared that the SOS Synod will offer multiple resources to congregations through its website and social media. She encouraged congregations to send materials which will be warehoused on the Synod website on a dedicated COVID-19 space.

Rev. Larry Donner and Rev. Katie Kerrigan shared information related to the Thrive! campaign. The campaign is continuing through the pandemic but with the understanding that congregation finances will likely be impacted due to the pandemic. Rev. Kerrigan shared that the resources will be extended to congregations to assist in managing budgets and finances; for example, an electronic meeting is being hosted on April 2 to assist with stewardship maintenance during this difficult time, and GSB, the Synod fundraising consultant, is also available to provide help. Rev. Donner emphasized that although budgets are impacted, as a people of faith, we don't stop engaging in stewardship.

Bishop Dillahunt asked the Finance Team to provide a report, indicating that the Ministry and Mission Plan for the current year will be reviewed and adjusted as needed. Ms. Becky Witt reported that the Finance Team is closely monitoring the Synod's financial condition and will look for opportunities to streamline where possible, and present recommendations to Council.

Bishop Dillahunt discussed how staff will continue to reach out to congregations through electronic mediums, texting, and social media, especially in light of the upcoming Holy Week. We have planned a Good Friday Vigil Service and an Easter Vigil Service. The Bishop noted that although the faith community may not be present together on April 12, every Sunday is a Resurrection Sunday. We may consider planning an "Easter" celebration in the form of a worship service this summer.

Bishop Dillahunt next addressed the issue of the upcoming Synod Assembly, in the context of COVID-19. Epiphany Lutheran, Centerville, where the Assembly is to be held is concerned in that they will not be back in the church until May 10 – giving a very short time to prepare for the May 16 Assembly. In addition, it is unclear whether it will be safe by May 16 to conduct a large in-person meeting. Further, the Synod Constitution does not require that the Assembly occur every year, and Assembly was held last year. Lastly, there are few business agenda items planned, and the Assembly is only scheduled for one day. For these reasons, although it is with sadness, the Bishop is recommending cancelling the Synod Assembly.

Discussion ensued. Council members Siegenthaler and Ware expressed that energy and resources could be better devoted during this time of crisis. Mr. Ware agreed that it would be a further burden during the pandemic to require the host church to be prepared for the Assembly in such a short time frame. Ms. Riesbeck asked how nominations and elections would be handled without the Assembly? Bishop Dillahunt responded that at the April Synod Council meeting, terms slated to expire can be extended by one year, as authorized by the Synod Constitution.

VOTED:

SC.20.03.1 To cancel the May 16, 2020 Synod Assembly. APPROVED (Schrader /Schmidt).

The Bishop provided information regarding the April 25, 2020 Council meeting. The meeting will be electronically conducted unless circumstances change. She reviewed the meeting agenda. Council will need to approve the 2021-2022 budget on behalf of the Synod since there will be no Synod Assembly. Council will review any resolutions received. She noted that Trinity Lutheran Church in Lancaster has voted to join the ELCA and will be eligible to join the SOS.

The Bishop provided an update regarding the new proposed Synod office space, located at 9200 Worthington Road in the Columbus area. It is anticipated the lease will be signed this week. A move-in date is not certain due to the pandemic's impact but staff will continue to work remotely, and furniture from the old office space can be moved into a storage pod if necessary.

Bishop Dillahunt noted that Bishop Eaton asked for all people of faith to pray the Lord's Prayer at Noon on March 25. Rev. Abrams noted that additionally, this was an invitation made to Christians across the world by Pope Francis.

The Bishop noted that the Women of the ELCA spring gatherings have been cancelled. Rev. Kimm noted that Camp Noah is still planning to proceed with its June date.

Vice-President Ellis thanked the Bishop and all Synod staff for working so hard during this time of crisis.

Rev. Bob Abrams closed the meeting with prayer.

VOTED:

SC.20.03.2 To adjourn the meeting. APPROVED (Skamfer /Wolfe).

The meeting was then adjourned by Vice President Ellis at 8:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Holly Fischer
Synod Council Secretary