

**Southern Ohio Synod – ELCA
Synod Council Electronic Meeting
April 25, 2020**

Call to Order:

Vice President Ellis called the Synod Council meeting to order a 10:00 AM. Vice President Ellis took a roll call vote:

Roll Call:

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

Members excused: Ms. Susan Wyckoff

Members absent: Ms. Carol Swank

Secretary Fischer declared a quorum to exist with 24 members participating.

Also present for some or all of the electronic meeting were members of the Finance Team, including Becky Witt, Audit Committee Chair Chris Clothier, Compensation Guidelines Task Force members Pastor Peter Kruse and Deacon Diane Schweiger-Alexander; and staff members, including Rev. Abrams, Rev. Kerrigan, Dr. Rev. Lynn Nakamura and Mr. Gary Pecuch.

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

Review and Approval of Agenda of the 4/25/2020 Meeting:

The Agenda for the day was reviewed.

VOTED:

SC.20.04.01 To approve the 4/25/2020 Agenda. (Schmidt/Walker) APPROVED.

Rev. Laura Leach-Shreffler opened with devotions and discussion on the concept of joyfulness in our lives, and the lives of our congregations, even in the midst of the current Covid-19 pandemic. She closed offering prayer to the Lord of the Dance.

Review and Approval of Minutes of the January 25, 2020 Meeting and March 24, 2020 Special Electronic Meeting:

The Minutes of the above two Council meetings were reviewed.

VOTED:
SC.20.04.02

To approve the Minutes of the 01/25/2020 and 03/24/20 meetings as submitted. (Ware/Hart) APPROVED .

Reports of the Officers and Executive Committee:

Vice President

1. Vice President Ellis reported that the planned Council Retreat, scheduled for the night of September 11 has been postponed for now. The Council meeting is September 12, 2020. She is preparing her report that would have been distributed at the Synod Assembly. She discussed that many individuals are now working remotely and live alone, and although they are not shut-ins, it's very important that we remember to check on them.

Secretary

1. Secretary Fischer reported that the work group tasked with considering recommended changes to the Synod Constitution, following the August 2019 Assembly, have been under review, and Ms. Fischer prepared a memo to the work group in the fall. The work group met again in February to finalize recommendations to Council to present at the May Synod Assembly. Due to the cancellation of the May Synod Assembly, the work group will continue its work and present recommendations at a future date.

2. Secretary Fischer reported that Trinity Lutheran Church, Crumley Road, Lancaster, has requested recognition and reception into the ELCA, according to the Synod Constitution provision for this set forth in Section 13.01c. As the interim legislative body between Synod Assemblies, this action may be approved by Council.

VOTED:
SC.20.04.03

To recognize and receive Trinity Lutheran Church, Lancaster, Ohio into the ELCA. (Fischer / Witt) APPROVED .

Treasurer

1. Treasurer Pyle provided a verbal report on the Financial Statements for February and March, 2020, and noted that the Synod is doing well considering the circumstances.

2. Treasurer Pyle reviewed the Mission & Ministry Plan for 2021-2022. He invited Becky Witt to speak as a representative of the Finance Team. Ms. Witt reported that the Finance Team is taking a proactive approach in reviewing contribution data, and notes that contributions are approximately \$48,000 behind compared to last year. Many have suffered financial hardship and the Finance Team believes it is prudent to lower projections and reduce expenditures accordingly. The Team has identified about \$15,000 less in expenditures, associated with reduced staff travel due to

COVID-19 and cancellation of the Synod Assembly. The Team will have a revised 2021 budget to present at the July Council meeting and will also review the status of the Mission & Ministry Plan for 2021-2022. However, at this time Ms. Witt reassured Council that the Synod is in solid financial shape and is well-situated to meet costs. Chris Clothier, Chair of the Audit Committee, commented that contributions may improve as congregations determine how to process checks and associated issues during COVID-19, and eventually return to in-person worship. The Bishop noted that although the Synod changed its lock-box in the first quarter, almost all congregations utilized the new lockbox despite the challenging environment created by the pandemic. Ms. Melvin expressed that this is an optimistic budget in light of the financial distress caused by the pandemic. Ms. Witt indicated that the Finance Team is closely monitoring the situation and may have recommendations for adjustments to the July Council meeting

VOTED:
SC.20.04.04

To affirm, as the interim legislative body between Assemblies, Council approval of the Mission & Ministry Plan for 2021-2022. (Schmidt /Schnittke) APPROVED .

3. Treasurer Pyle shared information regarding the Audit Report prepared by Apple Growth Partners for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2020, and asked Mr. Chris Clothier, Chair of the Audit Committee, to review the Report. Mr. Clothier reviewed the report and indicated that Synod giving was up this past fiscal year in comparison to the previous year, and the auditors found this noteworthy. Mr. Clothier noted that a new note is added (page 16) regarding Pledges Receivable, i.e., pledges receivable are primarily from individuals and businesses in the local community and are reflected at the present value of the estimated future cash flows using the applicable discount rate. Mr. Clothier noted that, for the third year in a row, the Synod has received a “clean audit” with no recommendations, which is the best possible position to be in. Mr. Pyle complimented and expressed appreciation for Finance Team members Chris Clothier and Becky Witt, and the Bishop’s management, for this accomplishment.

A. Ms. Fischer reported that on April 20, 2020, the Executive Committee voted to adopt the two recommendations of the Finance Team: (1) that the Audit Report be accepted as written, and (2) that Apple Growth Partners be engaged to do the audit for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2021.

VOTED:
SC.20.04.05

To adopt the Executive Committee’s Recommendation that the Audit Report be accepted as written. (Fischer) APPROVED.

**VOTED:
SC.20.04.06**

To adopt the Executive Committee’s Recommendation that Apple Growth Partners be engaged to conduct the audit for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2021. (Fischer) APPROVED.

4. Rev. Katie Kerrigan provided a report on the status of Stewardship for All Seasons. She noted that a congregation has requested to participate for a third year, which is a great testament to the program’s reception. It will be interesting to compare outcomes this year during the financial stresses of the pandemic between participant and non-participant congregations. At least ten congregations are anticipated to be enrolled in the next cohort.

5. Ms. Becky Witt provided the Finance Team’s recommendation regarding old Donor Restricted Funds. She indicated that the Team has concluded that the expense of taking legal action through probate court to have the funds made unrestricted likely outweighs the potential benefit. The Team may have a more formal recommendation for the July meeting regarding what to do with these funds.

Vice President Ellis declared a recess at 11:18 AM.

Vice President Ellis then reconvened the meeting at 11:30 AM.

Bishop

Bishop Dillahunt 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. The Bishop expressed her appreciation to Council members for the extra effort necessary to conduct business under the circumstances. The following are highlights and additional information presented:

1. The lease for office space at 9200 Worthington Road has been signed. It is not clear when the space will be ready for move-in due to construction delays related to the pandemic, but the Bishop has set a deadline of June 30 to move out of the current office so that no further rent will be due. In the meanwhile, staff are able to continue working remotely and items remaining in the old office space as of June 30 can be moved to storage if necessary.

2. Bishop Dillahunt provided an update on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on congregation and Synod staff operations. Staff are successfully working in a remote capacity and are providing support to congregations through social media and other electronic mechanisms. Rev. Abrams is closely monitoring the call process. He noted that the process is stalled for some congregations with primary candidates. Rev. Abrams noted

that some congregations have inquired about conducting electronic congregation meetings, however, if a congregation's constitution does not authorize this the meeting should be deferred until such time as an in-person meeting may be held. Rev. Abrams shared that many congregations may be presenting constitutional changes in the future to authorize this technology and the impact of COVID-19 will likely have a long-term effect on how church business is conducted. Pastor Wolfe asked Rev. Abrams how seminary interns are holding up in light of the current situation. Rev. Abrams indicated that hopefully congregation meetings will resume in the next few months. Dr. Rev. Nakaruma indicated that some senior students have been placed. The Bishop noted that the Synod has asked for a suspension of in-person worship through May 10, however, the Governor's office is planning to announce updated information next week. At such time as in-person worship continues, CDC protocols must be followed to protect the lives and safety of congregation members, including at minimum, social distancing, use of masks and disinfectants.

3. Gary Pecuch, Youth and Family Ministry Coach, provided a report on Lutheran Outdoor Ministries in Ohio (LOMO)'s constitutional change request which appears later on the agenda. He explained that Camp Mowana was sold, and the LOMO constitution refers to the camp in two places. The LOMO constitution requires the vote of all three Ohio Synods in order to be amended. The Bishop noted, in regard to LOMO, that LOMO has offered refunds for deposits on camps that have been cancelled for this summer. The Synod will request a refund of its deposit on Amazing Grace camp and will be able to use this to provide a deposit for the camp in summer 2021.

4. Pastor Kerrigan provided information on the New Synod Ambassadors program. The first year the program was implemented was difficult due to scheduling logistics. She has provided a written proposal to provide a more streamlined program. Under the proposal, Council members will be assigned to serve as ambassadors to 8-10 congregations outside of their conference. In this capacity, the aspiration is that better communication can exist between the Synod and congregations, so that the Synod can learn of congregational needs, concerns, and ideas in order to provide better congregational support. Members Ellis, Schrader and Reisbeck expressed support for the concept. The Council agree by general consensus to proceed with the proposal. Pastor Kerrigan indicated the plan will be to provide Council members contact information and materials, including talking points by the July meeting and implement the program following the July meeting.

Prayer was then offered by Bishop prior to the lunch recess.

Vice President Ellis declared a recess for lunch at 12:27 PM.

Vice President Ellis then reconvened the meeting at 1:00 PM.

5. Bishop Dillahunt provided information regarding the Synod's Facebook page and "SOS Storytelling", a new opportunity to share ideas. She indicated that the Thrive! campaign is temporarily on hold due to the circumstances; however, congregations are continuing stewardship campaigns.

6. The Bishop asked that Gary Pecuch provide a report on ministry in the context of our new reality. Mr. Pecuch shared that many more churches are expected to participate in the Connect event via electronic meeting. May 4, 2020 is the first online information meeting for the Youth Gathering. The current situation has accelerated future planning and allowed for development of more online resources. We have at least half the volunteers for Synod Day recruited. We are one of five Synods asked to participate in a scholarship pilot program. Mr. Pecuch reported that those in youth ministry are extremely busy during the pandemic as youth ministry staff tend to be adept at technology/social media platforms and are essentially handling this for their churches, while also under the stress of parenting their own children who are not in school. Vice-President Ellis asked about the status of Camp Noah. Rev. Kimm reported that the June camp has been cancelled due to COVID-19 but is planned to be rescheduled in the future.

Report of Auxiliaries

1. The Synod Council received written reports from the Women of the ELCA and Lutheran Men in Mission.

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

The Bishop reviewed En Bloc recommendations and discussed some additional matters that are proposed for separate votes.

VOTED:

SC.20.04.07

To approve, as the interim legislative body between Assemblies, the 2019 Southern Ohio Synod Assembly minutes as corrected. (Skamfer/Byrd) APPROVED . Abstaining: Walker, Melvin, Schmidt, Fischer.

It is noted for the minutes that a minor correction will be made by former Council Secretary Hart in the final version related to a name set forth on page 18 of the 2019 SOS Assembly minutes.

Bishop Dillahunt discussed the request by St. Paul Lutheran Church, Pleasant City, Ohio that the Synod take charge and control of the congregation's property and declare it to be a closed congregation, per the request of its Council President. The Synod Constitution, Section 13.24, delineates five factors, any one of which would support this action, and the congregation meets factors (a), (c), (d), and (e) under that Section. Pastor Kerrigan provided background information. The Synod has worked with the congregation for three years to try to enable the congregation to handle decision-making, but in the past year, the congregation has diminished to just one family and one individual, and the COVID-19 pandemic has seriously impacted the family. Thus, the congregation president has made this request. The Synod will need to address some real estate issues related to the property which includes a parsonage parcel. The Synod's attorney will handle this in addition to a realtor. Pastor Abrams noted that the Constitutional provision was intended as a safety net for these worse case situations so that, among other things, the real property value is not diminished due to neglect.

VOTED:

SC.20.04.08

To approve the request, of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Pleasant City, Ohio, to allow the Synod to take charge and control of the congregation's property and declare the congregation to be a closed congregation, per the request of the congregation Council's President. (Schnittke /Pyle) APPROVED.

Bishop Dillahunt explained that as a consequence of cancelling the Synod Assembly, Council may act as the interim legislative body between Assemblies in accordance with the Constitution and approve 1-year extensions of expiring terms.

VOTED:

SC.20.04.09

To approve a 1-year extension of terms, until the 2021 Synod Assembly, for Synod Council members: Mr. Richard Freudenberger (2020B-DA), Pastor Laura Leach-Shreffler (2020A-ALC), and Ms Kathie Skamfer (2020A-CO). (Wolfe /Kimm) APPROVED.

The Bishop asked Dr. Rev. Lynn Nakamura to review and provide information regarding the recommendation of the Compensation Guideline Task Force to approve the 2021-2022 Compensation Guidelines for Rostered Ministers. Dr. Rev. Nakamura welcomed Task Force members Pastor Peter Kruse and Deacon Diane Schweiger-Alexander to the meeting to provide background information on how financial adjustments are made based on market variables and other factors. Pastor Kruse noted that although Deacons are now ordained in the ELCA, a recent legal opinion obtained by the ELCA indicates that for IRS purposes, Deacons are not "clergy", and therefore, no part of their salary can be designated as a housing allowance. Pastor Kruse reviewed other changes in the documents, as well as the "Pulpit Supply" document, primarily to address situations where congregations have Saturday services in addition to Sunday services. Ms. Schmidt asked if the Guidelines will be sent to congregations. The Bishop indicated that the Guidelines will be voted upon by the Council, as the interim legislative body between Assemblies, and then will be posted on the Synod website, and congregations will be notified of this. She thanked the Task Force for its work.

Pastor Abrams provide information related to the Jacob's Porch constitution. Jacob's porch is a collaborative ministry involving a group of congregations and the Jacob's Porch board, and the proposed constitution is reflective of this arrangement.

EN BLOC

VOTED:

SC.20.04.10 To approve the En Bloc Recommendations. (Schmidt/Pyle) APPROVED.

Rostered Ministers Status

On Leave from Call

RECOMMENDATION: N/A

Retired Status

RECOMMENDATION:

- Deaconess Rebecca Mastalerz (9/23/2019)

Disability Status

INFORMATION:

- Rev. Betsy M. Williams, as of 4/1/2020, is off of Disability Status.

Extension of Call

RECOMMENDATION:

- To extend a Synod Council call to Rev. Anne Pairan to serve as the Chaplain at Ross Correctional Institution, in Chillicothe, Ohio, starting March 15, 2020.

Affirmation and Renewal of Appointment of Synod Authorized Ministers

RECOMMENDATION: N/A

Affirmation and Renewal of Synod Council Calls

RECOMMENDATION: N/A

Removal from the ELCA Roster

RECOMMENDATION: N/A

Legal and Governance

RECOMMENDATION:

- To approve the congregation constitution of Trinity Lutheran Church, Marysville;
- To approve the constitution for Jacob's Porch;
- To approve Page 2 Article IV Section 3 and Page 3 Article VI Section 2 of Lutheran Outdoor Ministries in Ohio Constitution;
- To approve the 2021-2022 Compensation Guidelines for Rostered Ministers as recommended by Dr. Lynn Nakamura and the Compensation Guidelines Task Force.

Information: Synod Council is to receive the 2020 Synod Assembly Resolution Regarding Voting Members from Campus Ministries at Southern Ohio Synod Assemblies. Bishop Dillahunt provided background information. She noted that some students involved in campus ministries are also members of their home ELCA congregations, and some students have no membership in an ELCA congregation. This is information only at this time, and the Synod is working out a resolution. Pastor Kimm asked if a work team is being formed. The Bishop indicated a work group composed of both staff and external members will be formed.

Other Business:

Ms. Walker shared that some candidacy CPE is situated at health care facilities and has been cancelled due to COVID-19. Although there are CPE offerings online these are expensive. Dr. Nakamura indicated it is critical to have patient interaction, and this is difficult in a remote environment, but she is hopeful that program adjustments can be made. Bishop Dillahunt noted that the next Council meeting is July 11, 2020 and the Executive Committee meeting will be on July 6, 2020. Ms. Gray requested special prayers for her family member in California who has just been hospitalized.

Bishop Dillahunt offered closing prayers.

SC.20.04.11 To adjourn the meeting (Fischer /Skamfer) APPROVED.

The meeting was then adjourned at 2:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Holly R. Fischer
Synod Council Secretary