

WHAT: Minutes of the Synod Council Meeting
Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod, ELCA

WHEN: July 17, 2010

WHERE: Caroline Furnace Lutheran Camp, Fort Valley, Virginia

Present: Bishop Richard Graham, Vice president Dr. John White, Secretary Rev. Dr. Marguerite Rourk, Treasurer John Handley, Wendell Anderson, Jim Brookshire, Rachel Carle, Pr. Joel Guttormson, Pr. Jane Halpern, Pr. Tom O'Brien, Bonnie Priebe, Robert Schilpp, Pr. Kendall Summers, Barbara Topel, Amanda Wahlig,

Absent: Pr. Teka Obsa Foge, Shirley Gibbs, Ruth Manchester, Deacon Kati Miller-Holland, Pr. Amsalu Geleta, Pr. Michael Wilker

Staff: Asst. to the Bishop Pr. Phil Hirsch, Asst. to the Bishop Pr. Amy Sevimli, Synod Admin. Harold Sargeant, Admin. Asst. Amy Acland

The Council was welcomed by Pastor Wayne Shelor, Executive Director of Camp Carolina Furnace. VP John White called meeting to order and Bishop Graham gave devotions.

Minutes from the 7 May 2010 Synod Council meeting were approved as amended.

Treasurer's Report (attached)

Schedule 1 shows a \$53,000+ deficit, but this is reflective of assembly monies for registrations and rooms not yet accounted. Mr. Handley noted that the Synod is expecting approximately \$15,000 in deficit, but this can be covered by reserve funds set up for this express purpose. Synod benevolence is running slightly over last year, but below the two previous years. Mr. Handley and the Council will review receipts later to see if congregational benevolence enables us to move from the level 1 to the level 2 spending plan. It was noted that the Office for Federal Chaplaincies reimburses the synod for part of the facility rent (through the ELCA). We have paid out about 40% of budgeted expenditures, rather than the 42% expected at the end of six months. It must be remembered that some things are paid up front all at once, such as insurance, etc., and therefore those figures cause the total percentage expended to look larger than it is in actuality. Pr. Hirsch reminded the Council that our level 1 spending has been less than was budgeted because of having temporarily restricted funds available to us. Also attached is the report on congregational benevolence and status for 2009/2010. Stretch benchmarks are shown in the Treasurer's Report as well.

In preparing the proposed budget, the Finance Committee asks each division for its projected needs and expenses, and the committee bases its draft on those figures plus what we reasonable expect to receive. Included in this process is maintaining our 55% benevolence to the ELCA. We have been at that rate for more than ten years. The rate of inflation has meant squeezing programs a lot so that staff remains at the same size and so that we can maintain our 55% to the ELCA. Next year's draft budget increased funding for synod programs, especially Gettysburg Seminary and three new mission starts (Belmont Ridge, LaPlata, and the District). When we set up 55% we assumed that the ELCA would keep up its level of seminary and new mission support, but ELCA support has dropped by half over just the last 5 years. The Finance Committee and Synod Council approved presenting a draft budget which reduced our benevolence percentage to 44% (a \$220,000 difference), with the bulk going to the seminary and

the new mission starts. (The Bishop noted that only about 15 synods are still at 55%. Many are between 45 and 55%, with very few below 40%, but that we are still among those at the top.) The draft budget was presented to the Assembly in May; it was reviewed and there were presentations made by Mr. Ahlberg and Treasurer Handley. The draft budget will be put before the Assembly in its September session. Synod Council must approve what is put before the Assembly. Changes in our percentage of benevolence to the ELCA is to be approved by the Church Council after an Assembly vote before the new percentage is enacted. The Finance Committee could propose a revised plan which would be submitted on line to the Synod Council, and the Council could then vote on line and approve that proposed budget for presentation to the September Assembly. The Bishop wants any revised plan distributed immediately after Labor Day, with the “bottom line” being that we are wanting to hold steady at 55%, and if so, then how would this be accomplished? It would be made clear that such a figure would apply only for this next year, 2011. Gettysburg Seminary would have to take the biggest “hit” if we stick with the 55% ELCA benevolence because we cannot maintain our current level of support for the seminary and also support the ELCA at 55%. Synod staff will make a proposal to the Finance Committee to review and prepare a budget for presentation to Synod Council and then to the Assembly. Our retaining our 55% mark will give the ELCA a little more time to work out their issues. The Bishop noted that we are still figuring out how we can raise the funds to do the ministries that we have chosen to do. We absolutely must explore new funding models.

Pastor O’Brien encouraged Council to show congregations and people of the Synod what it is that the synod does, and suggested getting “real people” to put a living face on the synod’s ministries.

Bishop’s Report

+ The Bishop presented rostering matters (attached) to the Council which approved those decisions and/or appointments in **MOTION SC 07.10.01**.

+ The Bishop is a member of the LIFT Task Force (Living into the Future Together). Presiding Bishop Hanson states that our church is an ecology of various eco-systems that interact. LIFT has a website which can be reached through the ELCA website. The task force wants feedback such as how the ELCA plans to manage its staff, funding, etc. Bishop Graham asks us to look at this and respond to what they ask. How do we rebuild and restructure “while the house is burning or being demolished?” The website offers places and opportunities to comment.

+ Where should the Synod Council meet? We have wandered about for several years endeavoring to cover all areas of the synod, but should we be more consistent and meet in one place for several months in a row? Would not the place have to be close to Metro, buses, etc., and offer easy parking? He asked the council to respond with input and ideas. One example could be the question of meeting is a central during bad weather months? Might we move toward the outer areas of the synod when the weather is better? Council will address this later in the meeting or perhaps at the September meeting.

+ The Bishop has had additional conversation with Pr. Craig Settlage; he offered to come to the September Assembly session, but the Bishop declined his offer with thanks. We have not had an

ELCA representative at the fall session, and it would be advantageous to offer a freer arena for budget discussion and debate.

+ Gettysburg Seminary has taken the biggest hit, receiving less than \$60,000 this year, down from \$120,000. Perhaps we can have Seminary Sundays, and ask people to offer special gifts to the seminary this year.

Vice President's Report

Dr. White noted that we have been informed of the new plans for tables for synod ministries and mission support. Council will address this more at the September meeting. We now have urban centers focusing on the Lutheran Hunger Initiative, AIDS help, and relief support.

Reports of Assistant to the Bishop Pr. Phil Hirsch

Pr. Hirsch referred the Council to previous discussions of mission tables, concentrating on the two that have begun working: the Stewardship and Mission Support Table, and the New and Renewing Table. He said that Mission Support must explore new ways to generate support, and this would be addressed at the next Council meeting. The United Lutheran Appeal and the Gifts of Hope program have decided to merge, and they are working on a proposal to address the use of existing funds.

+ The New and Renewing Table's first step is working out an assessment of all our synod's 76 congregations: how they are doing is illustrated by 4 categories ranging from at risk/using up reserves all the way to emphasizing responsibility and accountability and establishing bench marks for congregations with which the synod can assist. Pr. Hirsch noted that some new starts level off at about 40 or 50 members which is not sustainable. How can the synod help them grow into self-sufficiency?

Some new starts or plans therefore include

- > La Plata (south of Waldorf) – most likely the next new mission site
- > NOMA - North of Massachusetts Avenue - planned and financed through First Trinity, DC. Pr. Wendy Moen is trying to see if this is a viable plan. They would never own a building, but rent space. Pr. Hirsch also mentioned St. Matthew, DC, which 12 year ago was asked by Synod Council and the Bishop to do a study. Pr. Hirsch suggested that Pr. Huber be invited to address Council and report on their work, progress, plans, etc., for Council assessment.
- > Christus Victor is doing well in its financial arrangement of incremental decrease in support by the synod. Pr. Wasemann is leaving in September, and there will be a search for a new pastor/developer to revitalize and strengthen them.

+ Next year's theme around which our synod signature events will take place will highlight our ministries and mission: To See Ourselves as Others Do. This could help each congregation understand how they are perceived by others. Creative ideas for feedback can spring from visits

with congregations. It was suggested that young adults do some of this, and perhaps there could also be pulpit exchanges.

+ Some missions, like La Sagrada Familia, will never be able to be self-sustaining, as they are missions to the very poorest immigrant folk, so the synod will always support and nurture those missions.

+ Rosario Hernandez is in the candidacy process and should be up for approval by the end of July. She has developed La Sagrada. Pr. Hirsch asked for an email vote to recommend her and call her to be pastor at La Sagrada Familia, as the Synod Council is the body to extend that call.

+ **Synod Administrator Harold Sargeant** reported that our Metro DC synod has 28 persons in the candidacy process. There is one congregation in the synod that is ready to extend a call to a pastor; 2 congregations have completed profiles and are awaiting names; and about 6 or 8 congregations are preparing to submit their profiles.

+ **Administrative Assistant Amy Acland** announced that the Synod Assembly fall session would be back at Good shepherd, Gaithersburg, MD, with information for voting members on the web by next week All voting members need to re-register so that we can have an accurate count. She asked that consider further where we want to have Synod Assemblies in the future, especially considering times and places offering more young people opportunity to be more involved. She noted that the closer the assembly is to the central part of the District, the higher the costs. That fiscal situation, however, might be offset by having more people able to attend, miss less work time, and enjoy an easier drive than previous trips to Roanoke College or to Gettysburg.

+ **The Synod Compensation Guidelines** are being revised and amended by Barbara Topel and her committee. They are gathering information that will help update the guidelines, as there has been no significant alteration in 3 to 5 years. Using Orange County, California, synod guidelines, an area which accords well with our overall demographic situation, cost of living and other statistics they plan to present the updated guidelines to the Spring 2011 Synod Assembly. Pr. Sevimli suggested that they have a pastor on the committee, and that they also address family leave matters.

+ **Report of the Women of the ELCA** (report attached)

Bonnie Priebe reported that WELCA has also experienced financial constraints. the Chicago office staff of 20 has been reduced to 13, and the situation is quite stressful for them. Katie's Fund will get monies directly to them to use in planning and carrying their Triennial Convention in Spokane, WA. Their Synodical Unit convention was at St. Mark, Springfield, this May. They sent more than 100 health kits to the ELCA. Their fall meeting will be at First Trinity, DC. The All-Women's Retreat, a pan-Lutheran women's event of both the Metro DC and Virginia Synods, will be in Harrisonburg, VA,

+ **Vacancies on Synod Council** were addressed: a lay member from the Maryland Conference is needed to replace Robert Smith. The Council will ask the Maryland Conference to nominate for election at the fall Assembly session. There is also a vacancy from the Fairfax conference due to Pr. Justin Lathrop moving to another synod. Names are due from the Conference by August 25.

+ **The Youth Ministry Committee** asks (see attachment) Council to direct the Synod to fund an endowment (to which others could also contribute) to assist with expenses for youth and adults attending and/or training for youth events. They wish to ask Synod Council in January if there might be funds designated for this endowment or scholarship fund. **MOTION SC 07.10.02** to establish a Metro DC Synod Youth Ministry Scholarship Fund, with further details to be provided to the Division for Congregational Life, was carried.

Report of Assistant to the Bishop Pastor Amy Sevimli

+ She addressed updating the synod theme this year, *The Year of the Young Adult*, and noted that Council had previously approved the use of this theme as well as establishing a \$12,000 fund for this ministry. She asked if the funds would still apply if the theme were changed or altered for 2011. Mr. Handley stated that the Council could so move. **MOTION 07.10.03** carried, stipulating that the Synod Council direct the Division for Congregational Life to allocate \$6,000 of their \$25,000 for Young Adult Ministry and any additional spending up to \$6,000 be considered spending in addition to the currently approved level 1 spending plan.

+ Pr. Sevimli distributed a feed-back questionnaire about Synod Council members' congregations' involvement in Young Adult Ministries. She read a "problems statement," noting that getting the word out is important. She emphasized that she is not doing young adult ministry for congregations, but facilitating congregations' ministries with their own young adults. The Task Force has employed several methods: Pr. Chris Nelson, speaker at the Bishop's Convo; Kristen Glass, ELCA Director of Young Adult Ministries who was our synod's ELCA representative this spring; the Rev. Karen Ward, Apostles, Seattle, WA; and a Fall Event with Dr. Rodger Nishioka as speaker. Pr. Sevimli said that there is no neighborhood with less than ten percent in the age category in the District. District efforts out of Luther Place and First Trinity (Pr. Wendy Moen, Associate, First Trinity, is devoting 80% of her time to this ministry), have had good response. There are new congregations in the works, but people must buy into this to make it happen. Fellowship, service, discussion, study, prayer are especially emphasized, along with a non-Sunday worship service and congregational leadership helping. Both Lutheran Place and Good Shepherd, Gaithersburg, MD, have committed to this, and already have young adults serving on their Councils and in lay leadership roles as well. Pr. Sevimli stated that all can see this plan online. Many congregations of other traditions around the DC area have tried this and have succeeded. She read from Robert Wuthnow's *After the Baby Boomers* and recommended the book. He is a sociologist of religion and provides graphs and statistics and excellent information. Pr. Sevimli asked us to make this a reality in our own congregations, reminding the Council that, with no zip code district in our area having less than 20% of its population in this age group, young adults attract young adults, and we cannot underestimate the importance of critical mass. She intends that the Young Adult Working Group will continue to meet and to offer resources for how they can continue to mentor this ministry in and among congregations. It

is hoped that we can continue to emphasize this on through next year's Seeing Ourselves As Others See Us, as it is an important dimension of that emphasis.

+ **VP White noted that the Executive Committee**, comprised of the 4 synod officers and 4 Council members, needs three new members. Barbara Topel remains on the Executive Committee, but Phil Soucy and Pr. Beth Platz have rotated off, and Pr. Justin Lathrop has moved to another synod. Eligible to serve are Pastors Wilker, Fogi, Halpern and Summers, Deacon Miller-Holland, Jim Brookshire and Ruth Manchester. Volunteers to will be solicited by email.

+ **The next meeting of Synod Council** was set for Saturday, 11 September 2011, at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Falls Church, Virginia, at the kind invitation of Pr. Jane Halpern. Barbara Topel will offer devotions.

The meeting adjourned with prayer at 2:25pm.

Respectfully submitted,
The Rev. Dr. Marguerite M. Rourk
Secretary of the Synod