

WHAT: Minutes of the Synod Council Meeting
Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod, ELCA
WHEN: March 19, 2011
WHERE: St. Michael's Truth Lutheran Church, Mitchellville, Md.

Present: Bishop Richard Graham Vice president Dr. John White, Treasurer John Handley, Secretary Dr. Marguerite Rourk, Wendell Anderson, Jim Brookshire, Pr. Joel Guttormson, Ruth Manchester, Deacon Kati Miller-Holland Pr. Thomas O'Brien, Bonnie Priebe, Robert Schilpp, Barbara Topel, Amanda Wahlig, Pr. Kendall Summers, Gretta Williams
Staff: Assistants to the Bishop Pr. Phil Hirsch and Pr. Amy Sevimli, Synod Administrator Harold Sargeant, Administrative Asst. Amy Acland
Absent: Rachel Carle, Pr. Teka Fogi, Pr. Amsalu Geleta, Shirley Gibbs. Pr. Jane Halpern, Pr. Dax Jordan, Pr. Michael Wilker
Guest: Ken Whitlow, Chair of Synod Finance Committee

Dr. White called the meeting to order, and Barbara Topel offered devotions.

Minutes of the Synod Council 29 January 2011 meeting were adopted as amended.

The Bishop explained how *Nothing But Nets* began with basketball at the University of Maryland, and they raised several thousand dollars for the ELCA Malaria Initiative.

Report of Assistant to the Bishop Pr. Amy Sevimli

+ She thanked the Synod Council for supporting her throughout her maternity leave. She suffered post-partum illness for the first six weeks she was out, and was thankful for the generous time given to her to be at home and heal.

+ She reported that in the most recent assignment process our synod received 4 of our candidates. We now have a number of first-call candidates, and the staff will help them as best they can to find calls. She noted that if congregation calling a new pastor might discern if a first-call person would be a good fit. No first call candidate would be placed where they should not be, but it is hoped that more congregations would be open to a first call candidate. The synod is developing a support and mentoring protocol for first call pastors and congregations.

+ While the synod theme this year is *To See Ourselves As Others Do*, we are still actively nurturing and supporting ministry with young adults. Indeed the goal is to have five ministries with young adults functioning by the end of 2013. They are encouraging small groups to meet in congregations, but more like the group sponsored by Luther Place, where young adults gather on a regular basis for spirituality, sharing, learning, sharing, worship, and fellowship. They sometimes meet at a restaurant, bringing in speakers and focusing on Lutheran theology and tradition but in their very own way. Both money and energy are being offered for 501 Church (supported by First Trinity), as Pastor Wendy Moen illustrates another model of what is possible in terms of going out and meeting with anyone who meets with her. She has visited the Chamber of Commerce, neighborhood groups, and more to build "journey groups" who meet for weekly bible study and community building each month. It is hoped that congregations will continue with their small groups of 5-30 people. These groups cannot, however, always weather the comings and goings of young adults. so, while congregations are encouraged to continue their small groups, we want to have five young adult ministries around the synod by 2013 with at least 40 people in them, and these are the ministries we will be working to build up. Pr. Sevimli spoke of targeting congregations where this would be a good possibility and where leadership shows interest in this developing ministry.

There was offered **MOTION SC 11.03.01** to approve and accept the Recommendations for the Closing of a Congregation in the Metropolitan Washington DC Synod. It was noted that the synod cannot tell a congregation what to do, but it is the synod's responsibility to make recommendations for pastoral and administrative assistance, and to insure that the congregation's assets are well used. (See attached) Items A through F deal with the basics of a congregation closure, thanking God for the life and ministry over the years, archiving all appropriate items, and caring for the pastor and those who work for the parish. We will help them move from step to step as they prepare for the next part of their lives.

Appropriate and proper distribution of the congregation's assets in paramount, but the congregation has a choice of selling assets or distributing them before closure. If the parish decides not to distribute those assets, then all assets return to the synod and the synod would decide how those assets are to be used and/or disbursed. The bishop noted the importance of remembering that caring, faithful Christian people gave their money to establish and support a congregation on that property within this synod. Use of any funds must be in accordance with the reasons of the donors, to establish and support congregations in this synod. The synod needs these resources to help start and maintain other congregations and ministries. A closing congregation can be the source of the resources for the beginning of a new community of ministries. Congregations do get to decide how to give 10% of their assets, a tithe, perhaps to a mission or food pantry, etc. After closure expenses (and attendant legal expenses which can be considerable), paying the pastor who can be there half-time, and expenses of selling the property through an agent, paying the parish bills throughout this process, plus any other expenses the congregation is unable to cover, the remaining 90% would be tithed to the ELCA and remaining assets used to nurture missions on the property of the Metro DC Synod. Constitutional provisions pertaining to these matters are printed on the back of the "Recommendations" sheet. These recommendations were developed for St. John, Riverdale, to assist their closing as an act of mission in a way that insures that ministry continues. The turn-key method, on the other hand, means that the congregation relinquishes all administrative functions including payroll and building issues for three to nine months (see Option B), as the synod works to help them do that.

+ Every congregational closing is a unique experience and situation, and it is important to have these guidelines in place before beginning this process as a synod. This is to be a pattern for what to do about the ministries that are closing and how faithfully to care for their assets. These assets become permanently restricted funds specifically to be used for new and renewing congregations.

+ Pr. Summers spoke of developing a strategy Prince George County (PGC), as the majority of parishes closing are in that area. Pr. Hirsch explained that his would be addressed later in the meeting. He stated that Bethany, which is closing, understands that the synod is not abandoning ministry in PGC, but will continue to nurture ministries there. He further stated that the synod is intending to establish a policy/strategy addressing the needs of the PGC area. **MOTION 11.03.01** was tabled until after Pr. Hirsch's presentation later in the meeting.

+ Pr. Hirsch reported that Bethany voted to close on February 27. Pr. Sevimli said that she has had people approach her about what the synod can do about how to affirm their ministry and recognize their years of service. Other congregations have also asked how they might help. Suggestions include holding a final service at a time other than on Sunday morning so that more can attend that celebration.

+ The Synod Council must decide whether or not to take Bethany under synodical administration. Bob Tuttle, legal advisor to the synod, asked whether we really wanted to do this or rather to let them close themselves. The Council must have this discussion. The synod has asked Pr. Dick Reichart to accompany them through this process. Right now he is a supply pastor, but is talking with members and he is willing to take this on and to nurture these members through the process toward the end. A real estate agent recommended to the synod is assessing the value of the building/properties for sale. The synod has engaged a law firm to work with us to do this in the best way. Prs. Sevimli and Hirsch are meeting with Bethany's Council tomorrow, as they need to pick a closing date. They have not yet decided what they will do in the meantime nor where they would go. They are to discuss the 10% and where they want those assets to go, perhaps toward a ministry in PGC. The synod will pay Pr. Reichart so that the congregation can focus on paying their bills. Everything is to be disbursed, from Christmas decorations to a baby grand piano. There are currently five groups renting space at Bethany, and those groups constitute another hurdle in settling the issues around closure.

+ **MOTION SC11.03.02** to have the synod offer pastoral and administrative support to the congregation while determining whether it is appropriate to bring it under synodical administration was carried.

+ With **MOTION SC 11.03.03** Pr. Summers' moved that the Synod Council direct the bishop's office to establish and facilitate a mission strategy for PGC, and the motion carried.

+ **MOTION SC 11.03.04** to resume discussion of **MOTION SC 11.03.01** carried, and **MOTION SC**

11.03.01 to approve and adopt the Recommendations When Considering the Closing of a Congregation in the Metropolitan Washington DC Synod was carried.

Report of the Treasurer (attached):

+ The current report shows figures through the first month of the synod's fiscal year. We roughly broke even for 2010, with congregational benevolence just above \$1.8 million. This year's budget goal is \$2 million. Congregational benevolence for the month is so far more than for the same month in 2009. A small deficit is not significant at this point. Line 53 shows all receipts better than any since 2008.

+ Shepherd of the Hills has acquired property, and we have offered to do an arrangement similar to what was done for Christus Victor to appeal to the synod's congregations for funds and we would sign the mortgage. Christus Victor is due to deplete their synodical funds before very long, and we will use Metro 200 monies to make up that shortfall.

Report of the Finance Committee

+ The draft budget (attached) was presented by Ken Whitlow. The Synod Council will adopt the budget so that we might present it to the Synod Assembly in May. John Handley noted that the 2012 proposed budget assumes the same amount of congregational benevolence in 2012 that we estimated for the 2011 budget. Belmont Ridge will grow and take on more of its own fiscal responsibilities, but we must still be the paying agent for this year, after which they will assume this role. Some funds for Belmont Ridge come from the ELCA but that amount for 2012 is not known at this time. Our support for Belmont Ridge is reduced by \$25,000, but we will keep our commitment to support the pastor's salary.

Report of the Bishop

+ The Public Policy office in Maryland was changed, as ELCA decided to withdraw its grant, and Pr. Lee Hudson has retired. The Delaware/Maryland Synod became involved in an ecumenical effort with the Presbyterian Church USA, and the Episcopal Dioceses of Maryland and Washington. Metro DC is contributing \$2,500 for the remainder of this year to help this ecumenical outreach and advocacy ministry to prosper. We have commitments of approximately \$1,300 to assist this ministry. John Handley noted that there are funds in the Church and Society budget to raise this amount for 2011.

+ The restructuring of the ELCA continues, and LIFT has drafted final copy of its report.

+ Aid to Japan devastated by the earthquake and tsunami can be offered through the church on the ELCA website, following the link to Lutheran World Relief or Lutheran Disaster Relief. The Lutheran Church of Japan's strong connection to the US is through the South Carolina Synod, as the first Lutheran missionaries were from St. John, Charleston. Sendai, center of the disaster, has a Lutheran congregation; their pastor and family are safe, and most members have been found alive along with the children in their school. The teachers, however, are still missing, and all need our prayers.

+ Synod office relocation efforts continue; our current space is already being shown. We wish to stay in the District, perhaps sharing space with a congregation or social ministry organization that is close to the Metro, easily accessible and has parking. John Handley is negotiating with an agency now.

+ St. Matthew, DC, hopes to attain their Planned Urban Development status within a few months. They have sent \$2,000 to the synod.

+ We will provide time at the May Synod Assembly for Pr. Amsalu Geleta to speak to the Council about his work on the ELCA Church Council.

+ The synod staff continues to work on restructuring, and hope to present some observations at the April Council meeting, showing how we might restructure and focus on ministries. They are studying some other synods are doing this as well.

+ The Bishop visited with middle schoolers at Shekinah, on Friday evening, March 18, reporting great

attendance (more than 200) and enthusiastic group spirit. He reminded us that the National Youth Gathering is next year, with registration beginning this coming May.

+ the Bishop told the Council how grateful he was to the synod staff with which he is privileged to work. They are all so gifted and accomplished, and all work well together.

+ Amy Acland reported on Synod Assembly plans. There will be voluntary AIDS testing available, as well as a workshop with information about testing and facts available. As Washington DC has the highest rate of AIDS in the country, we need to be much more aware and informed. Assembly Registration is now open. Information on nominations, resolutions and memorials is all on the synod website. She reminded everyone that there is a reduction in cost for all voting members under 30 years of age. Their good planning team has worked well and efficiently. We are back at the National Conference Center this year. Having the Assembly this close to home means that more people are able to attend, but it is more costly. Contract negotiations for the next three years are already in the works. She also asked for everyone's email addresses, as hers were cleaned out in a data transfer. Amy also referred all questions about the AIDS testing to Deacon Kati Miller-Holland.

+ The secretary was asked to note on the agenda for the next Synod Council meeting to designate the Synod Assembly offerings at the next meeting.

Report of Assistant to the Bishop Pr. Phil Hirsch

+ In addition to his earlier presentation, Pr. Hirsch reported that St. John, Riverdale has decided to give themselves a year and establish bench marks, which if not met after a year, they will close. Our strategy for Prince George County is intentional but still emerging. An overarching strategy for renewing existing congregations must consider the massive jobs relocation at Ft. Belvoir, with 10,000 new families there, 5,000 being added at Quantico, 7,000 more in the 395 and Seminary Road area, with Ft. Meade and Andrews AFB also adding housing. We need workshops to equip ourselves to reach out to military and government families, and about ministry with returning war veterans. The Bishop has already funded this ministry. There is an initiative coming from the New and Renewing Missions Table with Spark grants up to \$3,500 matching grants to congregations to strategize and do outreach and evangelism. Luther Place is hiring someone to do outreach work up the 14th Street community with the arts and theater area. Epiphany, Burtonsville is preparing coaching for their pastor and people.

+ Pr. Hirsch is planning 2-day workshops to help congregations focus on develop their own mission and outreach strategies. Emmanuel, Vienna is voting today to partner with them for this mission strategy. Resurrection, Kensington, votes May 22 on whether or not to close. They were intending to become a Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community, but decided to close and sell their facility to the Oromo Fellowship. Pastor Hirsch wants to work with the Oromo Christian Fellowship to develop an English-speaking community within the next few years. Pr. Sevimli will continue to coordinate the effort to reach out to military families affected by BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure).

Report of the Women of the ELCA

+Bonnie Priebe reported that the WELCA convention will be at Abiding Presence in Burke on Saturday, May 7. Their offering will go to Outdoor Ministries. The Triennial Convention will be in Spokane, WA, this coming July, and the next Triennial will be held in Charlotte, NC.

The meeting adjourned with prayer at 11:58.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Dr. Marguerite M. Rourk
Secretary of the Synod