

**METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON D.C. SYNOD OF THE ELCA
SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING – SEPTEMBER 10, 2011
EPIPHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH, BURTONSVILLE, MARYLAND**

Present: Bishop Richard Graham
Vice President Dr. John White
Secretary Pr. John Bradford
Pr. Terry Hannon
Pr. Gerry Johnson
Pr. Christine Stephan
Pr. Michael Wilker
Deacon Katherine Miller-Holland
Wendell Anderson
Shirley Gibbs
William Johnson
Ruth Manchester
Bonnie Priebe
Bob Schilpp
Amanda Wahlig
Margretta Williams

Staff: Assistant to the Bishop, Pr. Phil Hirsch
Assistant to the Bishop, Pr. Amy Thompson-Sevimli
Administrator, Associate in Ministry Harold Sargeant

Absent: Treasurer, John Handley
Pr. Emmanuel Grantson
Pr. Charles Oberkehr
Jim Brookshire
Rachel Carle

Dr. White called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.

Deacon Kati Miller-Holland offered devotions from a book by Henri Nouwen.

The proposed agenda for the September 10, 2011 meeting of the Synod Council was accepted.

Minutes of the Synod Council on July 9, 2011 were adopted as amended.

Pr. Christine Stephan offered some background information on Epiphany Lutheran Church, Burtonsville, Maryland, where she serves as Pastor.

Dr. White explained the new format for our council meetings, which revolves around the concept that the Synod Council is more than an administrative body, but is taking on a more spiritual aspect of our function, i.e., Council Mission Table Conversation.

Bishop Graham described “tables” – used to be called committees, task forces – as bodies of people that get together to do more than simply make decisions. Calling it a “table” means that

the Council comes together as equals and bring their own gifts. Most folks don't like to go to committee meetings, but people like coming to "tables." Referring to the Synod Council as a primary mission table more aptly embraces our function of mutual conversation through which God's mission is being accomplished through us rather than a burdensome requirement of another meeting which must be recorded. We are not simply the administrators of the institution, but rather we are to function as thinkers, hoppers, prayers – to generate an environment where creativity is allowed and encouraged. Accordingly, in all future meetings of the Synod Council, we will front load our time together with real decisions about real ministry and real work.

Primary Mission Table Conversation

Our first mission table conversation centered on Christus Victor Lutheran Church, Manassas, Virginia. Assistants to the Bishop, Pr. Amy Thompson Sevimli and Pr. Phil Hirsch led us through this conversation.

Christus Victor Lutheran Church (CV), Manassas VA, was a mission started in 1988 by Pastor Richard Elliot. Until 2010 it was served by Pastor David Wassemann. In 2005, the synod teamed up with CV to move the congregation out of a rented space and to buy a building on Route 234 about six miles west of I-95. Synod congregations and individuals contributed a large amount of money to the purchase of the building, and the synod co-signed the mortgage and has been helping CV pay its mortgage ever since. When Pastor Wassemann retired, he left a part time diaconal minister, Wayne Ralston in place. The synod appointed interim pastor, Mary Kieser. The congregation's attendance has ebbed and flowed during its existence, but it has struggled in the past few years. At this time there are forty-something people in worship on a strong Sunday and somewhere in the teens attend on a low Sunday. Most Sundays, there are thirty-some people for worship. The congregation's finances have also ebbed and flowed, but at this time, the congregation's finances are very weak. They are paying Pastor Kieser at about 25% of what she would make as a full-time pastor, and they are concerned they may not be able to keep this up. Wayne Ralston has always worked for a very minimal salary. The mortgage continues to be paid, but the congregation often wonders whether it will be able to make its monthly payments.

Proposal

On Tuesday, August 30, 2011, Pastor Phil Hirsch, Pastor Joe Vought (Chair of the New and Renewing Missions Table), and Pastor Amy Sevimli, met with the CV council, discussed the history of the congregation, and agreed on the fact that the congregation is not viable if it continues as it is.

The following proposal was made to them:

If the congregation would be willing to change its name and dissolve its leadership, including the council, rostered leadership, and other lay leadership, and go under synodical administration, the synod would be willing to consider treating the congregation as a "restart." This would mean that the synod would:

1. Partner Christus Victor with St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Woodbridge, VA. (This partnership would include among other things help with bookkeeping, administrative

functions, Sunday School, an occasional exchange of choirs, etc. It would not include financial resources or pastoral leadership.)

2. Pay for a full-time mission developer, who would develop his/her own leadership team. The Synod would ensure that the mission developer is paid at synod guidelines for a period of three years. (The synod will continue paying its part of the mortgage regardless of whether this plan is followed.)
3. Apply for grant monies from the ELCA to help fund the project

Why Christus Victor?

CV is in one of the fastest growing areas our synod has; the ELCA has provided the synod with demographics on this area, and there are few areas around our synod as well-suited to growth as this one. Construction continues here and this part of the county stands to benefit greatly from the Base Realignment and Closure. This is also an area with many young families, and where many families attend church. The building is well placed along a busy road. What's more, CV's congregation has already voted to move forward with this idea should it be approved by the synod council. They are a willing cadre of leaders. Finally, the synod has already made a significant investment in this congregation when it reached out to congregations and individuals in 2005 to help them purchase their current building. From that initiative alone, the synod raised more than \$200,000 on CV's behalf.

Finances

It is hard to know how CV's finances will change if these changes take place, but when we consider the costs for this project minus CV's regular giving, we estimate this project will cost at least \$300,000 over three years. An ELCA grant would cover \$90,000 over three years, leaving the synod to cover a little over \$200,000 (including the mortgage payments to which we are already committed).

Timeline and Benchmarks

The synod would develop a timeline and benchmarks for the congregation, so that the congregation's progress could be measured over three years. There must be a clear sign of growth both in worship attendance and giving for the project to continue. If the timeline and benchmarks are not met, then the project would be concluded.

Council Action

As the main mission table for the synod, the synod council needs to decide whether this is the direction in which the synod wants to move and something in which the synod wants to invest. At the September 10 meeting, the council will be asked to vote on whether it would like to commit to this plan.

Council Conversation and Questions...

Where will the funds come from?

We do not have the funds now. The idea is that they might be part of the allocation from the sale of Bethany Lutheran Church. New and Renewing Mission Table agreed that the funds from Bethany must be discussed in light of the entire Synod and specifically Prince Georges County strategy.

How many new or restarts do we have now? Four – this would be a fifth one.

When the mission developer is called, who calls and supervises the person? The call would come from the Synod Council. When the leadership dissolves, the congregation will come under synodical administration. The mission developer will be called by Synod Council. Supervision will be divided between Synod Council, St. Matthew, and the Director of Evangelical Mission.

Pr. Hirsch indicated that this is not the only congregation struggling and raised the issue of why we would consider making such an investment here? Part of that is because of the community context...one of the fastest growing areas in our synod...the Synod has already made a significant investment in the facility...a building already exists – an important aspect of mission development...it would be prudent to take advantage of the existing building.

What are the other aspects of this particular redevelopment that should result in a new and thriving congregation instead of that which has existed for 20 years? Pairing with St. Matthew should be a vital piece of the new thought process for this congregation as St. Matthew knows what works in that area as indicated by their vitality and growth over the past 40 years. Must find the “right” person to redevelop the site!

The reason the synod has a financial investment in Christus Victor was to help them purchase the building they are now in. The synod asked other congregations in the synod to contribute to assist them in purchasing the building with the thought that with the building they would grow much more quickly.

There was also some discussion regarding the BRAC initiative and consideration of the potential movement of more military families in the area. Question as to whether or not many of the people relocating due to BRAC would be moving their families. Although there most likely will not be a great many families relocating at this time, the thought is that there will be new people coming in and there will also be turnover of current personnel in the future.

With the other congregations in that area, do we really need Christus Victor? CV is on a throughway on 234 and most people go the other way. The question arose as to how much building will happen in the immediate area surrounding CV? CV has opportunity to serve a different set of people than the other ELCA congregations in the immediate area. How many people will come to CV that are not members of other ELCA congregations in the area? We agreed that we are not about the business of taking people from other Lutheran congregations. We are looking for people who are not attending other churches in the area. We do need to consider the metric of size as the present size of CV is not sustainable.

Population density – one determining factor is how far apart are the high schools? Many different factors must be weighed together. An in-depth study of demographics has been done for the area that CV serves, including talking to the other Lutheran pastors in the area – what

we heard was although the churches are close to one another, they are serving different communities.

Motion SC 09.10.01 – Motion was adopted that the Synod Council approves the plan proposed by New and Renewing Mission Table as indicated above for the restart of Christus Victor Lutheran Church, Manassas, Virginia, contingent upon financial and personnel resources becoming available.

The next issue discussed by the Primary Mission Table...

The sale of Bethany Lutheran Church, District Heights, MD and use of funds from sale. The congregation indicated that after a tithe to local missions, a tithe to the ELCA, and the costs of the sale are covered, the remaining proceeds from the sale of the facility should go to new and renewing missions in the Synod. There is a contract on the building – with a 60-day due diligence and a 30-day closing period, we could settle in early November 2011. The process could go faster than that because buyer has financing in place. One item that could hold up the process is the inspection – there is water in the boiler room, but there is a plumber contracted to take care of the problem.

In connection with our Prince George’s County initiatives and considering how neighborhoods (contexts) are changing, our prayer (as well as our actions) should be intrinsically about inviting and welcoming. All our congregations must carefully consider those who live around their congregations – these are the people we should be getting to know and invite into our communities of faith.

The last item on the Primary Mission Table agenda is...

Update on Synod Office relocation. The Synod Office will be moving to 1725 Duke St in Alexandria, VA in November 2011. The King Street Metro is located near the building. We will be sub-leasing from a defense contractor. There is room in the new Synod offices to accommodate Synod council meetings. Building overview, layout and cost sheet are attached.

Treasurer’s Report

Treasurer John Handley was not able to be at the meeting but provided printouts of the Budget Report for the period ending July 31, 2011, Comparison of Receipts and Expenditures for Unrestricted Funds for the period ending July 31, 2011, and Report of Temporary Restricted Funds as of August 29, 2011, with the following explanatory information offered by Secretary, Pr. John Bradford...

We haven’t closed August yet, so these financials run through the end of July.

Our deficit narrowed slightly during July due to a good month’s benevolence receipts. While the deficit still shows as nearly \$75,000 (Schedule 1, line 33), there are several items that, once resolved, will bring the number down by nearly half. The two larger items are Synod Assembly and New and Renewing Missions.

Nearly \$12,000 has been spent on Synod Assembly beyond the fees that the event generates (Schedule 2, line 60). That will be covered from our synod assembly reserves but the transfer will not be made until after the fees and costs of the fall assembly are taken care of.

Within New and Renewing Missions, we decided to cover part of the cost of the Belmont Ridge mission start (Schedule 2, line 33) from our endowment funds. Treasurer John Handley is in the middle of a project to research the funds to determine how best to use the funds consistent with initial intent and past practice. We haven't used any of these funds for some time (pre-dating John's time as treasurer), so this is taking more time than expected. John hopes to be able to make a proposal to the finance committee that should then make it to the next synod council meeting.

Report from Assistant to the Bishop, Pr. Phil Hirsch

The Oromo Evangelical Lutheran church, which had been meeting in rented facilities, has moved back into the Grace Lutheran Church facility.

The Indian Lutheran Fellowship (Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community (SAWC)) in Frederick, Maryland will be receiving a contribution from both the Metro DC Synod and the Delaware Maryland Synod of \$7500 each. This is a one year commitment from our Synod in support of this SAWC.

The process of closing Resurrection Lutheran Church in Kensington, Maryland is now completed and is occupied by the Oromo Fellowship, who should be designated as an ELCA congregation by the end of this year.

How to Get More Members is a two-day seminar planned for Oct 22 and 23 at Epiphany Lutheran Church in Burtonsville, Maryland. Griffith Coaching Network, which will bring the training, has a reputation for helping churches become invitational. The seminar is offered in conjunction with our synod's 2011 theme, "To See Ourselves as Others Do."

Report from Assistant to the Bishop, Pr. Amy Thompson Sevimli

There is a young adult (20's/30's) conference on Saturday, November 5, 2011 at the N St Village across from Luther Place. The theme for the conference is "I believe in God – Now What?" This conference is designed around young adults who are struggling with their spirituality. They believe in God and trust Jesus but not always the church. Some of them attend church while others do not, but they all believe that there must be more to their spiritual longings than what they have found so far. So, they are inviting young adults from across the DC area to explore spirituality for a day and then see where it goes from there. The speakers for the event are two young adult authors, Enuma Okoro and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, both of whom have struggled with these very questions. Cost is \$25.

There is a Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Conference scheduled for Saturday, October 29, 2011 at Faith Lutheran Church in Arlington, Virginia. The conference will begin at 8:30 am and go until 1 pm. The cost is \$15 and includes lunch. This workshop is designed to inform attendees about the approximately 31,000 jobs that will migrate to and around the metro DC area as a result of the BRAC initiative and deepen awareness and involvement in the lives of people affected by BRAC while strengthening the ministry for military members, veterans, and family members. Keynote Speaker, Colonel Donald Sutherland, Special Assistant to the

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff will remark on connecting military and civilian communities.

Project "Connect" continues and is an initiative of our Gettysburg, Philadelphia and Southern Seminaries for vocational discernment. Our Synod is working on this effort geared to 18-30 year olds who are thinking about "vocation," lay and clergy. Refer persons interested to Pr. Amy Thompson Sevimli, Pr. Mark Olson, or Pr. Meredith Lovell Keseley.

Report of the Vice President

Dr. White indicated that we have two issues regarding the Synod Executive Committee. First is that at our July 9, 2011 Synod Council Meeting we mistakenly elected two lay persons to the Executive Committee rather than one. Deacon Kati Miller-Holland agreed to step down and Council concurred. The second issue is that the clergy person elected to the Executive Committee does not have the constitutionally-required one year on Synod Council; however, since there are no additional clergy persons on the Council who meet that requirement, Council waived the one year on Council requirement for Pr. Emmanuel Grantson.

We need one more clergy at large representative for Synod Council and one clergy person to serve on the Committee on Discipline. These issues will be taken care of before the next Synod Council Meeting.

Report of the Bishop

The Bishop reported that he has had an interesting summer. He went to El Salvador with 20 people from the Synod in July for the 25th anniversary celebration of the Iglesia Luterana Salvadorena and Bishop Medardo Gomez' leadership. The Bishop attended the Churchwide Assembly together with our Synod's voting members. The Bishop reported that the Assembly was remarkably humane and not contentious. There were some lively debates but not angry. The goal established at the Churchwide Assembly was to have ten percent of all gatherings be youth and young adults (30 and under). Interesting to note that at this Churchwide Assembly, the number of youth and young adults was 12 percent. The Living into the Future Together (LIFT) task force went well. This is a task force of the ELCA commissioned by the Church Council to develop and recommend options for the future of the ELCA in light of its identity, changes in its environment and its call to God's mission. The Assembly adopted a campaign for the next several years to raise 15 million dollars to combat malaria in Africa.

The Metropolitan Washington DC Synod sent four resolutions to the Churchwide Assembly:

1. Bullying, Harassment, and Related Violence
2. Kairos Palestine Response
3. Investment for Positive Change in Palestine
4. Human Rights Violations Against the Oromo People

The resolutions were approved and we will be kept informed by the Office of the Secretary, ELCA of any action taken on them.

The Bishop reported that he is now serving on jury duty on a first degree murder trial. More to follow!

Congregational Updates

Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Washington, DC has called a new pastor, Rev. Michael Wilker

St Matthew Lutheran Church in Washington DC is still in process of waiting for their planned urban development certificate needed to move forward with development and financing. If all comes together, this will be a new start.

Christ Lutheran Church in Bethesda, Maryland is in the beginning stages of redeveloping the block that it owns. They are now looking at a space that would include some offices and church space as well as condominiums. They have been granted a work permit by Montgomery County – a neighbor has appealed, so it may end up in the Maryland Supreme Court. They are currently looking toward the next stage of finding a developer, financing, etc.

There is an identified need for a Personnel Committee in the Synod. The Bishop deferred to Synod Administrator, Associate in Ministry Harold Sargeant who will draw on people from each conference to form this committee.

Roster Matters

MOTION SC 11.09.02 approved the Rev. Lisa Hufford to go on leave from call, as she requested.

MOTION SC 11.09.03 approved the Rev. Dr. Ronald Christian to be transferred to the retired roster effective October 1, 2011 while continuing to serve as Synod Representative to the Muslim Community.

With the new Synod Office Space, the Bishop commented that we may schedule to January and March Synod Council Meetings to be held at the Synod Office for ease of travel in the winter months.

WELCA Report...submitted by Bonnie Priebe on behalf of Linda Heffern, President, Metro DC SWO

The Triennial Convention and Gathering was held July 12-17 in Spokane, Washington. It was a spirit-filled, inspiring event with great speakers, unique and lively worship and workshops. Over \$18,500 was raised through 365 participants in the 5K Walk, Run & Roll in support of grants that are made available for start-up programs in Raising Healthy Women and Girls.

During the convention Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson thanked the Women of the ELCA for its leadership of the whole church. He challenged convention delegates to take up what he called the “One percent challenge,” and respond to the one percent of the people in their communities who want to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ----“because if one percent of the people in each community responded to that living articulation of God’s grace in Christ, we’d be a church of 8 million people, not 4 million.”

Leymah Gbowee gave a most inspiring talk on Reclaiming Our Space: A Call to Action for Women of Faith. Leymah will be in the Washington, DC area on the weekend of September 18 as part of her 8 city tour promoting her book on her experience working for peace in Liberia.

The spring convention of the METRO DC SWO will be held on Saturday, March 31, 2012 at Christ Lutheran Church in Fairfax, VA. Pastor Maggie Rourk will be leading the worship service as we celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Women of the ELCA.

We will be promoting our 2011-2013 Giving Appeal with a goal of adding \$5,000 to the Roanoke College endowment fund that the SWO began in May of 2000. We have hopes of finding matching funds for this appeal. Please post the attached flyer in your churches.

There is a new title and logo for the *Lutheran Women Today* magazine. Beginning with the September issue it will be called *Gather*. The words "for Faith and Action" appear under the word Gather in the logo.

The 2011-2012 Bible Study is "To Follow and to Serve: The Gospel of Mark." It covers the 16 chapters of the Gospel of Mark with an emphasis on what it means to follow Jesus Christ today.

Plans are being made for an All Lutheran Women's Retreat to be held in the Williamsburg/Virginia Beach area October 19-21, 2012. The theme for this retreat is "Always Healthy All Ways." The chairperson for this event is Kathleen Newburn from Abiding Presence in Burke, VA.

Youth Report

None provided as our youth representative was unable to be present.

Synod Assembly

Dr. White emphasized the need to register for the September 24, 2011 Synod Assembly at Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, McLean, Virginia.

The session adjourned with prayer at 12:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John C. Bradford". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "J".

The Rev. John Bradford
Secretary of the Synod