

METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON, D.C. SYNOD OF THE ELCA
SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING – APRIL 18, 2020
ELECTRONIC/ZOOM MEETING

Call to Order The meeting was held electronically, using the Zoom platform, in light of the public-health recommendations to avoid in-person meetings involving more than ten individuals. Interim Vice President Droney called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. The roll was called to verify attendance.

Devotion Interim Vice President Droney opened the meeting with contemplative prayer.

Interim Vice President Droney presented the proposed agenda for the meeting.

SC20.04.13: To approve the agenda for the April 18, 2020, Synod Council meeting.

The draft minutes of the March 21, 2020, Synod Council meeting were presented to the Council for approval. Interim Vice President Droney asked for corrections or amendments. There were none.

SC20.04.14: To approve the minutes of the March 21, 2020, Synod Council meeting.

The draft minutes of an electronic vote of the Synod Council conducted from March 26-28, 2020, were presented to the Council for approval. Interim Vice President Droney asked for corrections or amendments. Two members reported that they had voted on the motion, but the draft minutes indicated that they had not voted. As corrected, the draft minutes were presented for approval.

SC20.04.15: To approve the minutes of an electronic meeting of the Synod Council conducted from March 26-28, 2020.

1. Synod Council Primary Mission Table

a. New Connections Campaign Overview and Update

Pastor Bailey noted that all funds contributed to the Campaign to date have been committed. In light of the current circumstances, plans for the Campaign will be adjusted as necessary going forward.

b. New Connections Campaign Financial Reports

Financial reports for the Campaign had been distributed to the Council in advance of the meeting.

2. Staff and Officer Reports

a. Bishop Ortiz:

- i. Roster Matters for Synod Council Action. Bishop Ortiz brought two roster matters to the Synod Council.

SC20.04.16:

That:

1. The Rev. Mitchell Watney be placed on leave from call effective May 1, 2020; and
 2. The Rev. Elijah Mwitanti be called to specialized ministry as Interim Pastor for Good Samaritan Lutheran Church in Lexington Park, Maryland, effective May 1, 2020.
- ii. Roster Matters for Information. Although not requiring any action on the part of the Synod Council, Bishop Ortiz's written report to the Council noted that the Rev. Jonathan Linman was called to serve as senior pastor at Resurrection Lutheran Evangelical Church, Arlington, Virginia, effective April 1, 2020.
 - iii. Rev. Jeanne Lowe. Bishop Ortiz noted the death of the Rev. Jeanne Lowe, who until her death was a member of the Synod Council and until January was the Chaplain at The Village at Rockville.
 - iv. General Updates. Bishop Ortiz described the nature of the bishop's presence in the Synod, characterized by limiting preaching but reaching out in other ways, participating in regular virtual meetings with each of the six conferences, and completing a "Coffee with the Bishop" virtual event on April 14. She also offered praise for the performance of the Synod staff during this challenging period.
 - v. Leadership Academy Updates. Bishop Ortiz noted that all future events in the Leadership Academy Series have been postponed and/or moved to an online virtual platform. Events that have been scheduled or completed include Equipping Leaders for Digital Ministry (April 16), Stewardship in Uncertain Times (April 23), Enneagram Workshop (May 11 and 13), Council Leadership 101 (May 14), and Grief and Self Care (May 21). The Synod Council retreat will also be moved to an online virtual platform.

b. Assistant to the Bishop and DEM, Pr. Bailey:

Pastor Bailey provided an update on the work of two tables. The New and Renewing Missions Table has paused some of its work, neither approving nor funding any new grants. Support of congregations will move to low-cost or no-cost alternatives. The Stewardship and Mission Support Table has also shifted its focus and is discussing needs for a COVID-19 fund, or some other form of crisis fund for congregational support, particularly as funds from Paycheck Protection Program loans are depleted. Pastor Bailey does not expect funds available from churchwide sources to be sufficient to meet the needs of the Synod's congregations.

c. Assistant to the Bishop, Pr. Swenson-Reinhold:

Pastor Swenson-Reinhold reported the launching of a new faith discernment group in April. She also discussed the challenges faced by congregations in transition, including how to conduct congregational call votes. Some congregations have temporarily suspended their call process, while others are moving forward.

In addition, Pr. Swenson-Reinhold reported that the Synod's efforts to fill a part-time administrative position have been suspended and will be reconsidered at a later time.

d. Interim Vice President's Report:

In his first meeting since being appointed as Interim Vice President, Jackson Droney began with a brief biographical introduction. He continued by articulating four norms that should guide the conduct of meetings of the Synod Council. First, remain engaged throughout the meeting. Second, speak as an individual (for one's self) and do not purport to speak for the entire Synod Council or the Synod itself. Third, allow for discomfort, particularly where there are difficult or challenging matters to discuss. Fourth, it is acceptable to be "raggedy" in speaking, if thoughts are not fully formed or cannot be carefully articulated. He asked that these four items be placed on each agenda for future meetings of the Council.

He further invited members of the Synod Council to engage in two new practices. First, each member is empowered to ask for a pause at any point in the meeting if it should be necessary to refocus attention or to restore the meeting to its intended tone and atmosphere. Second, each member is invited to reach out to one other member of the Council for a one-on-one discussion, with the hope that matters arising out of these discussions may be shared, as appropriate, with the entire Council at a subsequent meeting.

He asked each member to obtain and begin reading the book *Quietly Courageous: Leading Church in a Changing World*, by Gil Rendle. The first three chapters will be discussed at the May 30 meeting.

Finally, he expressed his intention to convene the ad hoc retreat planning committee so as to focus on strategic planning for the Synod Council.

e. Treasurer's Report:

- i. Year-to-Date Financial Statements. Copies of the financial statements for the first two months of the current fiscal year, through March 31, 2020, were distributed in advance of the meeting. Setting aside an investment loss of nearly \$107,000, these statements reflect a deficit in undesignated receipts, compared with expenditures, of approximately \$26,800. The results do not reflect a significant decrease in income. Treasurer Julie Hamre noted that money budgeted for certain line items, such as Ecumenical Affairs, Racial Equity, Youth Ministry, Camps, and Campus Ministry, should be considered as discretionary spending, as opposed to fixed costs such as salaries and benefits.
- ii. Identification of Financial Priorities. The onset of the pandemic has caused, and is likely to continue to cause, a decline in financial support of all three expressions of the church. The Executive Committee met in advance of this meeting to discuss how to prioritize expected constraints on available funds. The Synod incurs approximately \$55,000 each month for operations, including staff compensation and benefits and facilities costs. Treasurer Hamre reported that, at the present time, choices among competing priorities do not have to be made. In particular, a consensus was expressed to continue to fund churchwide benevolence contributions in accordance with the approved budget of the Synod.
- iii. Available Funds. Ms. Hamre provided the members with an analysis of the liquid assets available to the Synod, including an identification of restrictions applicable to some of the funds. Although a significant portion of such assets is subject to restrictions, it could be reasonably estimated that, in dire financial circumstances, funds would be available to sustain the operations of the Synod for more than six months. In view of incomplete information available about the effects on congregations, the availability of churchwide financial support, and other relevant factors, no specific decision was being sought at the time of the meeting.
- iv. New Appeal. Discussion then turned to the consideration of a new financial appeal to support the Synod and its congregations in light of the expected shortfalls in regular contributions. In order to establish a new appeal, a process

must be put in place for the administration and disbursement of the funds. A consensus emerged to view this new appeal as a response to the short-term crisis as well as fulfilling longer-term synod-wide objectives.

SC20.04.17: That a disaster relief fund be established by the Metropolitan Washington, DC Synod, and that a subgroup of the Synod Council be appointed to develop criteria and a methodology for distributing funds.

The initial members of this subgroup are Interim Vice President Droney, Treasurer Julie Hamre, Barbara Bilodeau, Sheena Foster, Pr. Angela Shannon, Joseph Triolo, and Ashelyn Mosby.

- v. Paycheck Protection Program Loan. A discussion of the Paycheck Protection Program under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act described the purpose, eligibility, and scope of the program. In general, organizations (including tax-exempt “501(c)(3)” organizations) with not more than 500 employees may seek PPP loans from a bank participating in the Small Business Administration loan program. The proceeds may be used to pay payroll, benefits, rent, and utilities for a specified transitional period and, to the extent so used, the loan will be forgiven. Anecdotal information was shared regarding congregations and other synods that have applied for such loans. At the time of the meeting, all funds appropriated by Congress for this purpose had been applied for, and no additional funds would be available in the absence of further action by Congress.

SC20.04.18: That the Treasurer be directed to submit, on behalf of the Metropolitan Washington, DC Synod, an application for a loan under the Paycheck Protection Program under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act in the maximum amount available, when and if additional funds become available for such loans.

3. Synodical Women’s Organization

Sheena Foster supplemented the written report that had been provided in advance of the meeting, noting in particular that the one-day annual convention scheduled for May 2 has been cancelled.

4. Youth Organization

The Synod Council’s youth representative reported few changes since the most recent meeting of the Council. A planned meeting of the group formed to assess the future of the youth organization, intended to be held late in March, did not occur. At the present time, youth activities are being conducted principally at the congregational level.

5. **New Business**

Secretary Kevin Anderson advised the Synod Council on the implications of cancelling the 2020 Synod Assembly on the terms of its members.

The Synod Council was informed that Pr. Tom Prinz has retired from his position as Chair of the Ecumenical Affairs Committee. Pastor Mark Brown has agreed to assume this position, but recommended that the name of the committee be changed to “Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations Committee,” in order to conform to the language used for comparable churchwide activities and efforts. A question was raised concerning whether this change required an amendment to the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Synod. Pending such a change, which will likely be presented to the 2021 Synod Assembly, no objection was raised concerning the immediate use of the new name for this committee.

The meeting adjourned with the Lord’s Prayer at 11:56 a.m.

Next Scheduled Meeting: May 30, 2020; Zoom/Electronic.