

METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON, D.C. SYNOD OF THE ELCA
SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING – January 14, 2023
By Zoom and in person, Saint Luke Lutheran Church, Silver Spring, MD

Saint Luke Lutheran Church is located on the original and ancestral homelands of the Piscataway and Nacotchtak (Anacostan) peoples, and we give thanks for their presence here since time immemorial. We also wish to recognize and honor all our Indigenous siblings who have and continue to call this land their home.

Present:

Bishop Leila Ortiz, Bishop
Jennifer Slagle Peck, Vice President
Barbara Bilodeau, Secretary
Julie Hamre, Treasurer
Sheena Foster, DC
Pr. Judith VanOsdol, DC
Melody Stachour, Fairfax
Pr. Elijah Mwitanti, Fairfax (via Zoom)
Pr. Angela Shannon, Maryland
Anita Smallin, Montgomery
Pr. Betty Landis, Montgomery
Pr. Sarah Scherschligt, Potomac
Don Wallace, Virginia
Andreas (Andre) Dangin, At-Large
Pr. Eva Steege, At-Large
Kirsten Nusum, At-Large Young Adult (via Zoom)

Absent:

Pr. Henry Langknecht, Virginia

Synod Staff:

Pr. Lamar Bailey, Assistant to the Bishop, Director of Evangelical Mission
Pr. David Shank, Assistant to the Bishop, Generosity & Giving
Katharyn Wheeler, Admin Assistant to Bishop

Vacancies:

MD Lay
Potomac Conference Lay
Member of Youth Organization

Devotions / Worship

Worship and eucharist were held in the sanctuary.

Call to Order Vice President Slagle Peck called the meeting to order at 9:58 a.m. This being the first in-person meeting in a long time, each attendee introduced themselves. We spent several minutes in small groups identifying things we had in common.

The secretary verified the attendance.

Moved/Seconded/Adopted: SC23.01.01 To approve the agenda for the January 14, 2023, Synod Council meeting; and to approve the minutes of the November 12, 2022, Synod Council meeting.

Reports and Other Matters

1. Council

- a. Council Vacancies. Noted two current vacancies: MD Conference Lay Position; Potomac Conference Lay Position.
- b. Executive Committee Size. Opened discussion on item presented last meeting, to change the size of the Executive Committee. **Moved/Seconded/Adopted: SC23.01.02** That the Synod Council propose to the Synod Assembly an amendment to the Synod Constitution that S10.07.05 be changed to: "There shall be an Executive Committee which shall consist of the bishop, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and two members of the Synod Council. Of the two members elected by the Synod Council, no more than one shall be from the same conference. The Executive Committee shall exercise such powers as delegated by the Synod Council." (reducing the size by two members).

2. Update from Church-Wide Council, Sheena Foster

Sheena Foster, a member of the Synod Council, provided an update on recent Church-wide actions as a member of the Church Council. Minutes from recent meetings are on the ELCA.Org website; Ms. Foster noted the following specific Church Council actions:

- Established the nomination process for members of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church in response to memorials by several synod councils, including the MetroDC Synod.
- Received report from the Task Force Addressing Disciplinary Concerns of Leaders of Color. Exploration of a Racial Justice Ombudsperson position.
- Received a presentation on current church wide diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) portfolios.
- Affirmed the Witness in Society Team's decision to not endorse the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act or similar legislation; clarifying that we still have net zero goals, the team is just not endorsing this particular legislation.

3. Staff and Officer Reports

- a. Bishop Ortiz
 - i. Roster matters. **Moved/Seconded/Adopted: SC23.01.03** To approve Roster Matters as follows:

- That the Rev. Krista Vingelis be called to Specialized Ministry serving as Interim Pastor at Christ the Servant Lutheran Church in Reston, VA effective January 2, 2023.
- That the Rev. Faye Coddling be placed on the Retired Roster effective January 1, 2023.

ii. Events, activities, and other updates.

- Building Puentes: Discussed the relationship that started in 2016, and differences from other Lutheran disaster relief efforts, that Building Puentes directly supports the people and pastors, not the buildings. Requested help with the messaging. Received over \$30k.
- Global Mission – Slovakia relationship is hardest as we don't have a pastor that speaks Slovakian and they have developed relationships with other denominations that do. Must consider if we should move onto a different relationship or invite them to send us a Slovakian pastor.

b. Treasurer's Report, Ms. Julie Hamre

- Financial reports - The Synod Council authorized the establishment of an account at Charles Schwab for this purpose and the Committee has decided to invest \$750k in laddered CDs for a two year term, with 25% of the funds maturing every six months. This will result in interest income of nearly \$35,000 over that period, a significant improvement over the current situation, but still provide access to the cash should it be necessary.
- Clergy Housing allowance recommendation **Moved/Seconded/Adopted: SC23.01.04** That for the calendar year 2023 the following housing allowances for ordained Synod staff be approved: 40 percent of the compensation paid in the form of salary to Bishop Leila M. Ortiz; 80 percent of the compensation paid in the form of salary to the Rev. Lamar Bailey; and 30 percent of the compensation paid in the form of salary to the Rev. Sarah Garrett-Krey; the remainders be designated as a rental/housing allowance in accordance with the provisions of section 107 of the Internal Revenue Code.
- The Finance Committee has reviewed options for putting a portion of our assets into socially responsible investing. The Committee recommends using the Thrivent ESG Index Portfolio for this purpose. Proposal to move funds into a Thrivent socially responsible funds. The Committee recommends putting 50% of the equities in our long-term fund (~\$450k) into the Thrivent ESG Index Portfolio, and requested Synod Council's feedback on the strategy. Discussion provided the sense of approval. **Moved/Seconded/Adopted: SC23.01.05** To thank the Treasurer and Finance Committee for addressing the social responsibility profiles of our funds.
- Presented the proposed fee structure for June 2023 Synod Assembly. Last year: Scholarships are available, ask the treasurer. Add that we would continue the scholarship program. **Moved/Seconded/Adopted: SC23.01.06** To approve the 2023 Synod Assembly Fees be as follows:

- o \$110 for all early bird rates, including visitors, except for retirees who will be \$100.
 - o \$135 for all regular registrations, including visitors, except for retirees who will be \$125.
 - o No promotional rate fees for voting members under 30 because not all congregations would get this information prior to their congregational meetings. Provisions will be made to announce fees earlier next year.
 - o \$150 late registration regardless of category.
 - o That the 2023 Synod Assembly Fees in case we need to pivot to a 100% online forum be set at 75% of the rates listed above.
 - o That Scholarships would be available to those in need through the Treasurer.
- v. Presented a proposed “PROCEDURES FOR DISBURSING SYNOD GRANTS AND LOANS.” The document was amended so that “the Assistant to the Bishop for Generosity” is “a staff person as appointed by the Bishop.”
Moved/Seconded/Adopted: SC23.01.07 To adopt the “PROCEDURES FOR DISBURSING SYNOD GRANTS AND LOANS” as amended.
 - vi. Noted Mission Support funds are down and need to communicate what the Synod Mission Support is providing to congregations.
 - vii. Discussion on how to discourage “permanently restricted” funds, terminology of endowments, restrictions, and board restricted reserves. Is there any teaching mechanism for treasurers? Treasurer Hamre noted she is always happy to talk to treasurers. There should be a recording on the web of training she provided.
 - viii. Noted that the approach for budget preparation for 2024 will be different: After two years of deficit budgets, the Committee is determined that the annual operating budget presented to the Assembly will be balanced. Spending needs that cannot fit within the annual budget will be presented in a separate budget that shows which reserve fund will be tapped to cover those expenses. The Committee will consult with the staff and tables/committees to justify all budget lines. Will provide a first draft of a 2024 budget to the March meeting.

c. Assistant to the Bishop and DEM, Pr. Bailey –

- i. Described recent trip to El Salvador.
- ii. New and Renewing Missions Table.
- Received a request for \$70k from New Connections for King of Kings / Dulles South Campus. Council acted on this in 2017 so no Council action needed at this time. Table agreed to support for one year. This will exhaust the New Connections funds.
- The Table is meeting with congregations quarterly.
- Pastor Darcy Tilman has accepted a call to Buffalo, so are looking for a new chair for the Table.

iii. Stewardship and Mission Support Table. Offering two trainings and a gratitude film series, in final stages of editing.

d. Assistant to the Bishop for Generosity, Pr. David Shank

- Submitted resignation as Pr. Shank has accepted a position for the ELCA, covering mid-Atlantic.
- There have been two appeals that have been slow to begin but show of potential: Local Ministry fund and Building Puentes. Building Puentes exceeded goal and raised 34k. The Local Ministry fund appeal had different levels of support but we did have support.
- Treasurer Hamre commended Julie Jackson for moving 2022 donor information from a database that was expensive and failed to Tithely. Now we are in a position to send out thanks/information at end of year to both congregations and individuals, and it will be easier to maintain the historical information.

e. Assistant to the Bishop, Pr. Sarah Garret Krey – Submitted written report.

f. Assistant to the Bishop, Youth & Family Ministry, Deacon Nicole Roop

- A Youth retreat will be next weekend. Lots of congregations that have not participated. Noted that this is a partnership with the Delaware/Maryland synod; disappointed that there isn't as much participation from Metro DC synod, but we are hoping to build connections and excitement for upcoming youth programming.
- The high school program is being created and led by the youth, with adults there to supervise.
- An elementary school retreat and middle school retreat is being planned for March.

g. Vice President's Report, VP Slagle Peck

- i. Nominating Committee. Committee consists of the Conference Deans and 5 members of Council, to work beside the Assembly Planning team. Three Council members volunteered: Kirsten Nusum, Melody Stachour, and Sheena Foster.
- ii. Gold Audit. It has been about a year since we kicked this off. Actions so far have been: reviewed documents; did a survey; held listening sessions; met with Synod Council in August. Now trying to translate the results into a strategic plan. Form strategic team which met with the Consultant on January 10, 2023. Strategic planning team broken into 5 groups; our teams are doing the writing with the resources they provide.
- iii. Discussion of Land Acknowledgement Memorial from Churchwide Assembly. Discussed how to be in relationship with native voices, and how to ask them what would be helpful (without pushing work to them). Noted that <https://native-land.ca/> provides the indigenous territories by address. Call to become educated (some information in Sacred Ground already). Be in deepening relationships: want to be careful to not just check a box, but have conversations. Share some stories of congregations doing it well. This may be a good place for the Leadership Academy; see if we can bring someone in willing to talk to us. Decided:

- Add land acknowledgement to our minutes. Invite congregations to also insert land acknowledgements in their bulletins.
- Reach out to Vance Blackfox (ELCA director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations) for available training.
- Put a subfolder in our Council folder called landback, to drop in documents of examples of what is working. (folder created)
- Review synod websites to see the original language of the memorials sent to the Churchwide Assembly to ascertain whether they included indigenous perspectives. Melody Stachour volunteered to look for the background info.
- Invite the Racial Equity Team and Faith in Action Racial Equity Network to assist communications when we have something we want to share.

4. Committees, Tables, and Teams – Reports as needed

- a. Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations Committee (ERIC). Pr. Steege provided a written report. The committee would welcome additional members. Pr. Brown wanting to step away as Chair, asking the Bishop to provide nominations for a new chair. The group has lots of partnerships, ripe for new things, but needs new leadership.
- b. Climate Justice. Reported that team members are overextended and are looking for others to join. Next Friday there is a webinar with the Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions.
- c. Worship Team. Don Wallace shared that the Worship Team has started to plan for the 2023 Synod Assembly. If anyone has music recommendations, please let him know.

5. Youth Organization Report

[TBI]

6. New Business

Select Learning. Metro DC has been approached about taking over the management of “Select Learning.” Current Select Learning leaders want to retire and either close the program or hand it over. The platform originated to train associates in ministry before deacon programs. Was a program to get training while they were already doing ministry. Select Learning efforts declined when deacons were going to seminary and being called. Select Learning wants it to support populations that have otherwise not been served. (Noting that United Seminary has no Spanish speaking professors.) There are 4 synods that rely on Synodically Authorized Ministers (lay leaders), so Select Learning has every course imaginable to support rostered leaders, but there has not been a lot of marketing. No one knows it exists; the same professors as the seminaries but the costs are less than seminary. Bishop Ortiz has been a board member for Select Learning. Taking this over would mean: A) administration (maintain the current resources) B) be the fiscal agent. Expect it should pay itself; if we do it right, could bring income to the synod. Expect more logistic information to be gathered and Bishop will bring it to a vote in March.

7. Visioning Discussion

Bishop Ortiz shared an update on the conversations and visioning that occurred during the staff retreat in August. Several ideas were shared including:

- Synod Retreat: Note the prayer night, March 9. St. Pauls Pr. Andrea Walker.
- Story telling: Engage on a podcast, announce at Synod Assembly. Some already in progress.
- Gifts of hope: Would like to raise funds to pay for the administration so that all funds raised goes directly to the ministries being supported. \$18k every year to administer.
- Revival: A group of Bishops are dreaming of having a large event after the synod assemblies in 2025;a big party with simulcast to the other synods that also have celebrations of a first term. A full day of celebration of our cultures, highlighting how beautiful we are.

8. Connection Activity

Vice President Slagle Peck shared “What Is GOD Like?,” a picture book by Rachel Held Evans and Matthew Paul Turner. Thereafter, we created poetry and art inspired by the idea of what God is like. Among the poems and offerings provided by council members, Melody Stauchour offered that God is like music: completely unspeakable; totally expressible; never understood the same way twice.

The meeting adjourned at 3:45 pm with prayer.

Next Scheduled Meeting: **March 11, 2023 via Zoom**

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara A. Bilodeau
Secretary