

**METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON, D.C. SYNOD OF THE ELCA**  
**SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING – January 21, 2026**  
**via Zoom**

*The Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod is located on the original and ancestral homelands of the Nacotchtank, Piscataway, Manahoac, and Doeg peoples. 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 Phil Hirsch  
Patrick Anderson, Vice President  
Barbara Bilodeau, Secretary  
Pr. Mike Gutzler, Treasurer  
Pr. Judith VanOsdol, DC – Rostered  
Breeze Lawless, Fairfax - Lay  
Rachad Ya Ntima Esengo, Maryland – Lay  
Pr. Eric T. Randolph, Maryland - Rostered  
Pr. Kari Parsons, Montgomery – Rostered  
Deborah Tyler, Virginia - Lay  
Pr. Elijah Mwitanti, Virginia – Rostered  
Edyn Wheeler, At-Large Young Adult  
Ethan B, At-Large Youth  
Pr. Alexander P. Stall, Jr., Potomac – Rostered

**Absent:**

Camille Trott, DC – Lay  
Pr. Kelsey Kresse, Fairfax - Rostered  
Anita Smallin, Montgomery - Lay

**Synod Staff:**

Pr. Amy Sevimli  
Katharyn Wheeler

**Guests: (for a portion of the meeting time)** LSSNCA representatives Kristyn Peck (CEO) and Charlotte Haberaecker (Governance and Nominations Chair)

**Vacancies:**

Potomac – Lay

**Greetings and Devotions:** The meeting was opened with sharing of Highs and Lows.

**Call to Order** Vice President Anderson called the meeting to order at 7:18 pm. The attendance was verified.

**Council Meeting/Business**

**Moved/Seconded/Adopted: SC26.01.01** To approve the agenda.

**Moved/Seconded/Adopted: SC26.01.02** To approve the minutes of the December 13, 2025 Synod Council Meeting.

## 1. Staff and Officer Reports

### a. Bishop Hirsch

#### i. Roster matters - **Moved/Seconded/Adopted: SC26.01.03** to approve the following change in status:

- That the Rev. Kirsten Laderach be called to serve in specialized ministry as Interim Pastor at Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Bethesda, MD effective January 1, 2026.
- That the Rev. Michelle Kulhman be called to serve in specialized ministry as Interim Pastor at Community Lutheran Church in Sterling, VA effective January 11, 2026.

#### ii. Bishop Staff Review

Bishop Hirsch announced the two new staff members. This information is being announced to pastors tomorrow. It is not the totality of the staff and we are still working out the titles and responsibilities.

Rev. Dr. Moses Barrios – will be shared between St. Matthew Lutheran Church and the synod office. He will be called by St. Matthew and employed by the synod, as one can only have single “call.” The synod will receive funds from St. Matthew for part of his salary. His roles will include evangelism, new ministry starts, and making our churches becoming more welcoming on a broader scale.

Halima Ellams – a Lutheran Volunteer Corps Fellow. She will staff the front office for St. Matthew and for the synod office, working with staff, providing an office presence, and managing the space.

**Moved/Seconded/Adopted: SC26.01.04** For 2026 that 55% of the compensation paid in the form of salary to Pr. Moses Barrios be designated as a housing allowance in accordance with the provisions of section 107 of the Internal Revenue Code. (Noting that this is 64% of his time/salary, which is from the Synod, and 36% of his time/salary is from St. Matthew.)

#### iii. Feedback from conversations

One third of our synod congregations have a preschool; a common concern is that over time the mission of the preschool and congregation diverge. The synod is going to join the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association ELEA to help foster synod wide workshops and conversations.

Please review the Bishop Report for the drafts of the priorities, as developed from the December retreat. We will probably settle on something in February/March, with different forms for different purposes.

### b. Guests Kristyn Peck and Charlotte Haberaecker from LSSNCA joined the meeting for a conversation on the proposed updated ByLaws for Lutheran Social Services National Capital Area. Council members had shared concerns and questions at the December meeting about the reduction and the number of people to be on the Board of Directors from ELCA.

Ms. Peck shared that:

- 68% revenue was lost last year because of federal cuts; ELCA provided about 3 times the normal support from prior years; she gave examples of congregations that support.
- We must rethink how we do our work since we can no longer be dependent on federal grants. We are examining the work LSS is doing, perhaps adding behavioral health and mental health services. Some of the ideas require more diversity on the board.

- We have enjoyed a strong relationship with the Lutheran organizations; and 60% Lutheran representation on the Board of Directors made sense when it was pan-Lutheran. However, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) has decided to no longer support the inclusive family work of LSS, and the ELCA alone can't meet the 60% Board representation. (Noted that the local LCMS organization is still supportive of LSSNCA efforts.)
- The proposed changes include having the board of directors at 30% Lutheran representation. LSSNCA will be looking for new board members with the skills and expertise we need.

Ms. Wheeler, who has been a board member, noted the opportunity for interfaith efforts (including Afghan and Jewish involvement).

Bishop Hirsch commented that we want to keep the connection between LSSNCA and the church but also move forward, hoping our relationship can deepen. The need for our social ministries is important although is more than what a small synod staff can provide. We don't need the 60% Board representation if we have a good relationship. The 30% would allow us to be in compliance with DC non-profit laws, but that that doesn't mean we can't exceed it if we can recruit successfully.

**Moved/Seconded/Adopted:** **SC26.01.05** To accept the changes to the LSSNCA bylaws as presented.

- c. Treasurer Report, Pr. Gutzler: Written finance reports provided, almost at the end of the fiscal year. Noted that the net income is coming in under the deficit. The Finance Committee has been doing additional research and has seen an increase in giving, which is helping with the deficit.
- d. Assistant to the Bishop, Pr. Amy Sevimli –see written report.
- e. Secretary's Report: the result of reviewing Congregation Constitutions since the last meeting
  - i. Reviewed and provided recommendations: Lord of Life, Fairfax VA; Abiding Presence, Burke VA.
  - ii. Concurred, please send final for approval after vote: St. Marks, Springfield, VA; Redeemer, Mclean, VA
  - iii. Approved: Good Shepherd, Alexandria, VA; King of Kings, Fairfax, VA
  - iv. Reviewed after Congregation vote, but Not approved: Community, Sterling, VA; Christ the Servant, Montgomery Village
- f. Holy Closure status:
  - i. Holy Comforter, DC: Expect more work to get it on the market.
  - ii. Good Samaritan, Lexington Park, MD: written report provided.
  - iii. St. John, Riverdale: Complete except for finishing the dissolution of the corporation.

## 2. Committees, Tables and Teams:

- a. New and Renewing Missions Table: will be meeting and working on strategy with Pr. Barrios. Have a report on the 11 partnership grants and more than a dozen sabbath grants provided this year. The Sabbath grants were very well received, a low cost item that had a good return, so expect to continue these.
- b. Stewardship and Mission Support Table: We have invited Tim Brown head of ELCA Resource Hub to the March council meeting to see how to help with stewardship.
- c. Racial Equity Team – Is meeting tomorrow; no update at this time.

## 3. New Business

- a. 2026 Synod Assembly planning – Pr. Alex Stall suggested that we allow for a hybrid Assembly allowing voting members to attend virtually. Noted that for every voter there is a cost

associated with the voting activity, whether or not they attend in person. There would be no cost for any on-line visitor/non-voter. The end date for early bird registration is May 1.

**Moved/Seconded/Adopted:** **SC26.01.06** to allow for hybrid attendance at the 2026 Synod Assembly with the registration fee for virtual voting members of \$95 (regardless of lay/roster), and to correct the previously passed non-early bird rate for rostered leaders to \$150. The motion had 2 opposed, 1 abstain.

#### 4. Announcements

- b. February 1, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Alexandria VA, for a presentation by Dr. Justene Hill Edwards on the history of the Freedman's Bank. Edwards, a professor of history at University of Virginia, wrote the 2024 book Savings and Trust: The Rise and Betrayal of the Freedman's Bank. The book follows the life of the bank, which was established after the Civil War to serve formerly enslaved people, as well as its demise nine short years later.
- c. February 7 is the 2026 Congregation Council Training event.

**The meeting adjourned** at 8.36 pm

Next Scheduled Meeting: 10am, March 21, 2026 in person at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

Respectfully submitted,  
Barbara A. Bilodeau  
Secretary