

**MINUTES**  
**of the 192<sup>nd</sup> MEETING**  
**of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL**  
**of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**  
**June 25, 2026**  
**6:00 p.m.**  
**Zoom Meeting**

**WELCOME AND DEVOTIONS**

Vice President Cheryl Lafferty welcomed the Synod Council at 6:00 p.m. and invited the Reverend Dr. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath to lead the Council in devotions.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Vice President Lafferty called the 192<sup>nd</sup> meeting the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 5:52 p.m.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The Minutes of the 191<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council (April 9, 2026) were approved as presented.

**SETTING THE AGENDA**

Vice President Lafferty presented the agenda to the Synod Council.  
The agenda was adopted as presented.

**MISSION MOMENT – Synod Anti-racism Team**

The Reverend Gwendolyn King, co-chair of this team, and Ms. Janet Bischoff, a member of the team, presented a summary of the work of the Anti-racism Team in this synod. In addition to Pr. King and Ms. Bischoff, the Team includes the Reverend Dr. Susie Folks as the other co-chair, and Synod Council member Deacon Kathie Afflerbach, along with other clergy and lay members who make up the 11 people currently volunteering their time in this effort. The Reverend Linda Manson, co-Director of Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging, is the staff member on the Team. People in the synod are welcomed, and encouraged, to reach out to any member of this Team as they engage the work of anti-racism in their ministry context.

The Team sees itself as peer educators. As they enter settings where the issues of racism are being addressed, they begin with a question, “When were you first aware that your race mattered?” By starting with this question, they are trying to “flip the script” by talking less and listening more. Rather than offering a presentation, they are working on engaging conversation, through which the realities of race and its impact can be revealed and discussed.

The Team’s work has thus far focused primarily on training for Rostered Ministers. It is now working to expand its programming to assist lay people, congregations, and ministry sites in identifying and countering racism in their day-to-day lives and in their organizations.

This is a life-long process of learning. It is never fully completed, and it is always important. The Anti-racism Team continues to participate in such ongoing learning, even as it continues to offer workshops book studies, film studies, and discussions to open minds and confront the effects of implicit bias as well as explicit racism in our communities.

The recent focus of this Team is encouraging deeper conversations on White Christian Nationalism and Critical Race Theory. In this effort, they have been working closely with the foundational work of Inez Torres Davis and the Women of the ELCA, who lift up two key foci for the conversation: history and connection. By exploring history and connection, there can be movement to becoming allies for each other. And then, we can move from being allies to being advocates for the efforts of diversity, equity, and inclusion of all people.

## **REPORT OF THE BISHOP**

Bishop Penman greeted the Synod Council. He shared his pleasure with the Synod Assembly. He noted the efforts of the staff, particularly Ms. Carrie Schwab in her role as the overall coordinator of the Assembly, and Pr. Linda Manson, who helped with the Keynote presentation. Bishop Penman expressed his thanks to all the staff for their tremendous work on the Assembly.

Among the things he noted from his written report:

- + The Reverend Karen Sease, Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations, is on sabbatical for July and August. The Reverend Erika Wesch, Assistant to the Bishop for Faith Formation, will be covering much of Pr. Sease's work in this time.
- + The Reverend Paula Lebo, Assistant to the Bishop for Mission Interpretation, has launched a new website and branding package for the Synod. Please look at the new site, and give feedback on what is working well, what could use improvement, and what might be helpful to add to the site.
- + The Synod was present at Philly Pride this year, and we received positive feedback on the visible and affirming presence of the Church at this event. We were pleased to join with the Episcopal Church of St. Luke to provide an ecumenical worship service.
- + It was graduation time for both Muhlenberg College and United Lutheran Seminary. Bishop Penman was invited to give the invocation and benediction at Muhlenberg's commencement.
- + The application for a third Lilly Grant on Spiritual Practices, dubbed "The Calling Collective," has been submitted. This grant would help connect younger adults in their 20s and 30s with spiritual practices and discernment for their lives, both professionally and personally. This grant would include money to establish mentorships, as well as provide for pilgrimages to sites such as Mother Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC, or the path of the Civil Rights movement.
- + Bishops gathered with Common Ground to see what we can do to be prepared for whatever may come our way this election season.
- + The ELCA's Rostered Ministers Gathering is being held this July. Co-Directors of Evangelical Mission Dr. Moses Suah-Dennis and Pr. Manson, as well as the Reverend Annemarie Hartner Cook, Program Director for the Faith Alive Initiative, are a part of the leadership for this event.
- + The Constitution Center has invited local religious leaders, including Bishop Penman, to be on the lawn as they present an award to Pope Leo XIV for religious liberty.

- + The process to revise the social statement on Human Sexuality has begun and a study is underway. The first step in this reconsideration was begun last summer at the Churchwide Assembly, where some language was updated. Gay marriage was not even legal when this statement was first adopted, and so these language adjustments were a clear and simple first step. The next stage is to see how we engage in conversation across the ELCA, and provide feedback on what we question, or what we still affirm in this Social Statement.

## **REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Vice President Cheryl Lafferty referred the Synod Council to the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting.

### **Forms to be completed**

She encouraged members of the Synod Council to return the Confidentiality Report to Synod Office. She also asked the members to complete and return the “gifts and committees” form so assignments may be aligned as far as possible with members gifts and desired areas of service.

### **Synod Assembly**

The Vice President shared that she was very pleased to be a part of the planning and implementation of the Assembly, and to be part of the leadership of the Assembly and this Synod.

### **Task Force Updates**

#### **Childcare**

Childcare was provided at the Assembly. Vice President Lafferty thanked Dr. Sherrell Mickens and the Childcare Task Force for their efforts. The work of this Task Force will continue with two more pilot programs providing childcare, and the reworking of the policies on how we care for and protect children and youth as a Synod.

#### **Compensation**

The Compensation Task Force also continues its work. This effort is currently “on pause” as Pr. Sease, staff liaison to this team, is on sabbatical.

#### **Synod Authorized Ministers**

This Task Force has been empowered, but not yet empaneled. The process of determining members of this Task Force has begun, but there are no names to bring before the Synod Council at this time. Members of the Synod Council are welcome to share potential nominees for this team with the vice president or bishop.

## **REPORT OF THE SECRETARY**

### **Summary of Actions**

Secretary Richard shared a summary of the actions taken at the Assembly in May, noting

- + The Resolution on Care of Creation has been referred to the Care of Creation Team and the Synod Communications Team to establish and promote such engagement.
- + The Memorial to the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA On Deepening the ELCA’s Commitment to Climate Justice has been referred to the Church Council through the Office of the Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

- + The Resolution Rejecting Christian Nationalism and Affirming the Gospel's Call to Public Witness and Civic Engagement Rooted in Christ Alone has been referred to the Office of the Bishop for implementation and dissemination.
- + The Constitutional amendments approved at the Assembly have been incorporated into the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA, and the amended document has been submitted to the Office of the Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for ratification.

### **Actions on Roster**

#### *On Leave Requests:*

**SC.26.06.19. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant "On Leave" status to the Rev. W. Roger Randolph, 2nd year, beginning June 1, 2026.

A question was raised that it was understood that Pr. Randolph is serving an Episcopalian congregation. Is he still on our roster?

Pr. Randolph is pursuing a transfer to the Episcopal Church in the USA. Until that comes to pass, he continues on our roster and is subject to the regulations of this Church. Therefore, he needs to be considered "On Leave" at this juncture.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution.**

*Dr. Mickens asked it to be noted she abstained from this vote.*

**SC.26.06.20. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant "On Leave" status to the Rev. Dr. Miles S. Hopgood, 1st year, beginning June 1, 2026.

A question was raised about Dr. Hopgood starting a position at Trinity Seminary. If this is so, why move him to "On leave?"

Dr. Hopgood's call to Trinity begins after the time he ends his ministry at Southampton, and so in the intervening time he is placed "On Leave" until the formal beginning of his call to the Seminary.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution.**

#### *Request to move to the Retired Roster:*

**SC.26.06.21. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant retired status to the Rev. Kathleen R. Harkness effective September 1, 2026.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution.**

### **REPORT OF THE TREASURER**

Ms. Janet Neff, treasurer, presented the financial reports.

#### **Statement of Financial Position Highlights as of 1/31/2025 and 1/31/2026**

|                          | 5/31/26       | 1/31/26       |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Total Cash & Investments | \$ 21,937,912 | \$ 21,446,164 |
| Total Assets             | \$ 26,290,095 | \$ 25,797,884 |
| Total Liabilities        | \$ 361,214    | \$ 361,651    |
| Total Net Assets         | \$ 25,928,881 | \$ 25,436,233 |

|                         |               |               |
|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Unrestricted            | \$ 19,402,947 | \$ 18,811,638 |
| With donor restrictions | \$ 6,525,934  | \$ 6,624,594  |

#### Statement of Activities

##### Revenue

as of 5/31/26

|                              | 2026 Actual  | 2026 Forecast | 2027 Budget  |
|------------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Mission Support              | \$ 482,745   | \$ 488,680    | \$ 1,550,000 |
| Other Contributions          | \$ 157,195   | \$ 133,792    | \$ 416,816   |
| Registration Fees            | \$ 51,928    | \$ 70,542     | \$ 83,875    |
| Investment Income            | \$ 858,242   | \$ 534,033    | \$ 1,772,602 |
| Beneficial interest in Trust | \$ 0         | \$ 0          | \$ 100,000   |
| Income from trusts           | \$ 32,648    | \$ 23,000     | \$ 69,000    |
| Proceeds from property       | \$ 0         | \$ 0          | \$ 800,000   |
| Total Revenue                | \$ 1,582,758 | \$ 1,250,047  | \$ 4,792,293 |

#### Statement of Activities

##### Expenses

As of 5/31/26

|                                 | 2026 Actual  | 2026 Forecast | 2027 Budget  |
|---------------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Operating Expense               | \$ 644,101   | \$ 744,068    | \$ 2,032,209 |
| Lilly Grants                    | \$ 111,250   | \$ 135,343    | \$ 511,266   |
| ELCA Proportionate (50%)        | \$ 241,373   | \$ 244,340    | \$ 775,000   |
| Property Management             | \$ 55,419    | \$ 64,333     | \$ 85,000    |
| Distributions to other agencies | \$ 35,479    | \$ 35,167     | \$ 99,500    |
| Remit to designated agency      | \$ 6,540     | \$ 4,667      | \$ 14,000    |
| Grants to Organizations         | \$ 40,675    | \$ 50,962     | \$ 182,219   |
| Total Expenses                  | \$ 1,134,837 | \$ 1,278,880  | \$ 3,699,193 |

Treasurer Neff provided the following summaries of our four accounts.

- + **Unrestricted** Revenues were over budget by \$332,711. Our congregational mission support was \$482,745, which was under budget by \$5,935.
- + Unrestricted expenses were under budget by \$144,043.
- + **Temporarily Restricted** Revenue and Expenses have a deficit of \$29,018. We have spent \$111,250 from the two Lilly grants we have received.
- + **Mission** Revenue and Expenses have a surplus of \$596,154, which is primarily due to investment gains of \$633,776.
- + **Permanently Restricted** Revenue and Expenses have a deficit of \$1,000 due to stipends paid.

In summary, the unrestricted current assets and investments total \$18,529,379. Our current liabilities total \$145,033. Therefore, our current ratios are in good order.

#### FINANCE COMMITTEE

Ms. Pia Graham, chair of the Finance Committee, referenced her submitted report, including the minutes of the meeting of the Fund for Mission Trustees.

The committee reviewed the financial statements provided by Treasurer Neff and Senior Accountant Martin Schwab and found all to be in order.

The Finance Committee discussed the way in which the Audit and Financial reports were presented at the Assembly this year. The Committee felt the presentation was well done. It successfully connected numbers to impact on ministries, rather than focusing on line items. Feedback included that all went smoothly without questions, and having multiple presenters was beneficial in breaking up the content.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **Investment Committee**

Dr. Marcia Boraas, Chairperson, shared that the Investment Committee met in April. The information shared in the packet is from the first quarter. We did have a negative return in the first quarter, but we were still up from last year when we first invested through Girard. Since that meeting the returns are up again.

Two of the three members from Girard assigned to our account will no longer be on the team, one due to an unexpected death, and one who moved to another position. The third continues with us, and two new members will be brought on board by Girard and made aware of our account and our needs and goals.

### **Nominating Committee**

There is no report from the Nominating Committee at this time, but Vice President Lafferty took this opportunity to thank the Rev. Dr. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath for her diligent and faithful work getting nominees to place before the Assembly.

### **Constitution Committee**

Dr. John Connors, Chairperson, noted the current updates on congregational constitutions are in the report. There are no constitutions ready for ratification at this time.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

The Synod Council spent time discussing the recent Synod Assembly.

Dr. Mickens was not present at the Assembly, but she felt well supported as she worked to help provide childcare in this first pilot effort to offer such care at a synod event.

Dr. Connors thought the joint Keynote provided by Bishop Penman and Pr. Manson was very powerful. He has shared the recording of it with his congregation.

Pr. Jonathan Steiner spent time with the youth attending the Assembly, and the ones that attended were wowed by what we do as a Synod. He would love to see us find ways to grow this engagement. It seems to him that the Friday evening through Saturday afternoon timing helped in this manner.

Bp. Penman shared that he feels we need to do more to grow into this. He noted there used to be a program in the Virginia Synod when he was a youth that was very impactful.

Dr. Rodrick-Schnaath said she used to be chair of the youth convo for Rocky Mountain Synod and said there are ways to engage youth in a fun and dynamic way.

Mr. McJett felt the Imago Dei theme was well thought out and well presented. And the food was good, and readily available. This was his second Assembly, and he loved it.

Bp. Penman noted the reviews were across the spectrum. For some the timing was too compact, and they would like to try a longer Assembly. Others spoke strongly against a multi-day residential assembly. Bishop said that if they mean three days of business, he agrees with them. But if we can build a case for why we need to be connected, and show how the Assembly will build this community, not just accomplish the business of the Synod, then he is hopeful that this can work. He is strongly in favor of trying a multiday, residential assembly, unless the Synod Council strongly disagrees.

Vice President Lafferty feels we ought to try it and then determine what we do going forward. People do not know what it is until they try it.

Dr. Rivera-Garcia asked if this will significantly increase the cost for congregations. Is there any way to mitigate this expense, particularly for our smaller congregations?

Bp. Penman is hoping we can keep the rate the same, and have the Synod pick up the rest, similar to the way the ELCA helps offset the cost of the Churchwide Assembly. We may be able to use some of the resources from our Lilly Grants for the programming.

Pr. Manson shared that Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod has a long tradition of residential assemblies. She does not know when we moved from that model, but for many years that was the case.

Dr. Mickens said there is a thing called “feedback fatigue,” and completing a form at the end of a long meeting may result in more negative responses. It may be beneficial to send the same survey out a few months after the Assembly. If we do a residential assembly, then strong marketing to build excitement would be a good plan. Get people excited by hyping the program and building momentum.

Dr. Connors noted there were very positive comments on the workshops at this year’s Assembly. With a residential program it could be helpful to have a list and a sentence about them prior to the Assembly.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Election of Executive Committee**

Vice President Lafferty began the process for the election of the Executive Committee for 2026-2027 by thanking current members of the Executive Committee, Deacon Kathie Afflerbach, Dr.

John Connors, and Ms. Pia Graham, for their service this past year. She then opened the floor for nominations.

**Nomination for Clergy person:**

The Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia was placed in nomination.

As there were no other nominees brought forward, nominations were closed and Dr. Rivera-Garcia was declared ELECTED.

**Nominations for Lay Man:**

Mr. Craig McJett was placed in nomination.

As there were no other nominees brought forward, nominations were closed and Mr. McJett was declared ELECTED.

**Nominations for Lay Woman:**

Dr. Marcia Boraas was placed in nomination; she declined the nomination.

Ms. Pia Graham was placed in nomination.

As there were no other nominees brought forward, nominations were closed and Ms. Graham was declared ELECTED.

The meeting was adjourned with prayer by Vice President Lafferty at 8:03 p.m.

The next meeting of the Synod Council is scheduled for September 10, 2026, at 5:30 p.m., and will be held in person at the United Lutheran Seminary.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Karl M. Richard, Secretary  
Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA