

**MINUTES**  
**of the 188<sup>th</sup> MEETING**  
**of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL**  
**of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**  
**St. Paul's Doylestown**  
**September 18, 2025**  
**5:30 p.m.**

**WELCOME AND DEVOTIONS**

Vice President Cheryl Lafferty welcomed the Synod Council, and invited the Reverend Thomas Rusert, pastor of St. Paul's, to share some of the ministry of St. Paul's, and lead the Council in devotions.

Pastor Rusert introduced the staff that was present: the Rev. Dr. Robert Linders, the Rev. Seminarian Mac Mullens, who is being considered for a call at St. Paul's, and Ms. Meg Evans, church administrator, who is considering the candidacy process.

Pastor Rusert shared that St. Paul has a "big, hairy, audacious goal" to share God's love with one million people. They have committed to doing this one encounter at a time, enlisting the efforts of the entire congregation. He noted, "It is not about the counting, but that what you do counts." As a way of measuring their progress, members are encouraged to share, with a few sentences on a card, what encounter they had, and how they took that opportunity to share the love of God with a neighbor. A card from a child said, "Every night my sister and I pick three books to read at bedtime. I let her read one of the books. It made her really happy." A card from an adult read, "One time I was asked to leave a church. I did, and it hurt. Here I found I was welcomed and embraced, and I found a place to heal." While it will take several years to meet the goal of one million encounters, the congregation is committed to intentionally reaching out with the love of God in Jesus Christ.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Vice President Lafferty called the 188<sup>th</sup> meeting the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 5:53 p.m. The Reverend Karl Richard, Secretary, confirmed a quorum was present.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The Minutes of the 187<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council (June 26, 2025) were approved with some spelling corrections.

The Minutes of the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod (May 30 and 31, 2025) were approved as presented.

**SETTING THE AGENDA**

Vice President Lafferty presented the agenda to the Synod Council.

Bishop Penman requested adding to the agenda a discussion of the Childcare Task Force, the creation of a Compensation Guidelines Task Force, and the creation of a Task Force to determine practices and procedures regarding Synod Authorized Ministers.

The agenda was approved with the additions.

## **MISSION MOMENT**

The Reverend Kevin Tracey, co-chair of the Inclusive Communities Committee, presented to the Synod Council the work of this Committee.

The purpose: to support the LGBTQIA+ people in the synod, to assist rostered ministers, lay leaders, programs of the synod, and congregations seeking intentional inclusion, and to offer guidance regarding the expansion of inclusion efforts within the synod.

SEPA Synod is a Reconciling in Christ organization according to Reconciling Works since 1995. The first “In God’s Image” event was held in 2019. In 2022 the Synod Assembly adopted an updated Welcome Statement and formed the Inclusive Communities Committee as an ongoing, supported ministry of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

Upcoming events sponsored or promoted by the Inclusive Communities Committee include: In God’s Image event, October 4, 2025, at Trinity, Lansdale  
Transgender Day of Remembrance, November 20<sup>th</sup>.

Pr. Daniel Eisenberg (he/him) is the primary contact person for congregations navigating the process of becoming Reconciling in Christ partner congregations.

The Inclusive Communities Committee is growing in social media presence and is continuing to find new and innovative ways to bring the message of inclusion to an ever wider audience.

Bp Penman thanked Pastor Tracey for his presentation and the work of the Committee. He also added that the Welcome Statement now includes a component about racial equity as well as a welcome for the LGBTQ community.

## **REPORT OF THE BISHOP**

### **Changes in the ELCA**

Bishop Penman noted the biggest thing that has happened is change.

Our new Presiding Bishop, Yehiel Curry will be installed on October 4 in Minneapolis. His term begins Oct 1<sup>st</sup>. Our new Secretary, the Reverend CeCe Mills, begins her term on November 1<sup>st</sup>. Two new leaders, both persons of color, will bring change, both by being new to their respective offices, but also by the fact they have a different lived experience.

Bishop highly recommends See Me, Believe Me, by Yolanda Denson-Byers, a Black, Queer, ELCA pastor. It is a book about the experience of black and queer people in the ELCA, and offers action steps of how to be more aware and intentionally inclusive in our relationships with each other.

Things will shift and change, and we will support that work as best we can.

### **Core Values of the Synod**

As we work to effect change, Bishop Penman is also considering how we can settle on our Core Values as a Synod in this time. He is open to ideas, which will be considered as we redefine who we are and what will guide us as we move forward. His initial thoughts include: “We are Lutherans together, Loving God, Loving Neighbor.” Bishop stated that our purpose continues to be “Equipping the people of God for the work of Ministry.”

Other Core value ideas included: “Justice, Healing, and Joy.” These concepts are biblical, practical, and reflect what we are doing.

- + Justice work – feeding ministries, racial justice work
- + Healing – how has the church caused hurt and how can we work to bring healing
- + Joy – Our strength is in the Joy of the Lord

The Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia asked if this is something to be added to our mission statement, or if it might be a yearly focus: one year on Justice, one on Healing, one on Joy.

Bp. Penman shared that his planned theme for this year’s assembly theme will be on Justice. He has been in conversation with Kaitlin Curtice, author of Living Resistance, as a possible keynote speaker.

Vice President Lafferty loves that these are interrelated: e.g., you cannot have healing without justice.

Dr. John Connors noted we will need to teach our congregations how to live into these core values, whatever they are.

Dr. Sherrell Mickens said these particular values resonate, and if others hold them as well, it is less lonely for each individual or congregation.

Mr. Carig Mc Jett expressed his interest in the future of the church as well as what we are currently doing. At the Churchwide Assembly he saw strong youth involvement, and he wonders what we might need to do to get youth involved in SEPA Synod.

Bp. Penman said that “Youth” is on the board at the office, as we continue to determine how we might staff and organize youth ministry in the Synod. He thinks “youth” may fall under the category of healing. In October there will be a gathering of the youth leaders to discuss what is happening, and how they need support going forward. We are also focusing on our Lilly program of children/youth in worship, and how we can reimagine how we support parents of young children. This generation of young people is hungry for conversation on spiritual matters. They want church, but they do not know it.

V.P. Lafferty shared that in her work with young people she finds they are looking for a place where they can do justice work, not just talk about it.

### **Restructuring Synod-wide Conversations**

Bishop Penman also said he is considering how we might restructure the way in which we do the work of ministry in our Synod. Perhaps we can create “tables” where people can come and discuss and plan how we address concerns by networking together. These would be more porous and accessible venues than our formal Synod committees and teams. Perhaps we can ask the teams that exist to find a way to open their work to the broader Synod, so that we can invite others into conversation. The committee or team can do the structural work needed, and then set a table to hold conversations on the topic.

Dr. Connors said the Care of Creation Team would resonate with this concept.

Ms. Pia Graham said we need to find ways to spread the information about such opportunities widely. We have a hard time letting people know what we are doing and inviting them to enter the conversation. We need more than one mode of communication.

The Reverend Jonathan Steiner loves the idea of table, but what is the focus? Do we as Synod Council set a goal for the table? Or do we set a topic for a table? How quickly are we able to make this happen?

Secretary Richard suggested there may be different tables for different reasons. Some may be called to work on a particular goal. Others may be a place for conversation and networking.

One may be a table for a conversation on faith. We each have different tables in our lives, and each has a different purpose and feel: a formal Thanksgiving Dinner table is different from a picnic table.

The Rev. Dr. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath commented that we need to explain what we mean by a table. This clarification can include, “Who is welcome to this particular table,” as we make an invitation to those who may most benefit from, or be a benefit to, the table being set.

### **Synod Assembly**

Dr. Connors asked about the listing in Bishop’s written report that the Synod Assembly may be a residential event in 2026. Bp. Penman responded that this is an idea he has been exploring. The site would be Muhlenberg College. This may not be possible for 2026, as there is construction happening on the campus which may not be completed in time, and we may need more lead time to prepare congregations on the value and purpose of an “away,” residential Assembly.

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

Vice President Lafferty expressed her gratitude in being elected to this role and thanked the Synod Council for their support as she is still “gaining her feet.” She noted that since the June Synod Council meeting, she has met with the Fund for Mission Trustees, the Executive Committee, and other planning meetings. She is looking forward to visiting congregations, continuing to meet the people of the Synod, and share what we are doing together in ministry for Jesus.

### **Committee Assignments**

Vice President Lafferty noted the proposed assignments for the committees of the Synod Council were in the packet of materials distributed for this meeting. She asked if there were questions or concerns with the proposed assignments. As there were none, Secretary Richard put forth the following resolution:

**S.C.25.09.27. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council affirms the appointments of Synod Council Committees as proposed by the Bishop and Vice President.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution.**

### **Compensation Guidelines**

The Deans have been discussing the need for revised compensation guidelines, both for newly called ministers, and for assistance to ministers currently under call. Taking into account the discussion from the Dean’s meeting, the Executive Committee adopted the following resolution to present to the Synod Council:

**S.C.25.09.28. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve that the 2026 Unadjusted Minimum Compensation for First Call Ministers of Word and Sacrament be \$50,997 for salary, and \$18,000 for Housing Allowance for congregations without a parsonage, and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the 2026 Unadjusted Minimum Compensation for First Call Ministers of Word and Service be \$52,528.

*This represents a 3.3% increase over the minimum compensation guidelines for 2025.*

A discussion was held regarding housing allowance and why it is available for Ministers of Word and Sacrament (pastors), but not for Ministers of Word and Service (deacons). The reason is based on IRS statutes which allow this benefit for pastors, but not for deacons.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution.**

### **Health Care Recommendation**

Portico Benefits has made significant changes to the healthcare options available to rostered ministers. As part of the guidelines for compensation, the Deans have also requested clarification of what to recommend for health care for rostered ministers. Striving to keep rostered ministers covered as closely as possible in the new configuration as they were in the previously recommended Gold+ plan, the Executive Committee adopted the following resolution to present to the Synod Council for consideration:

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve that congregations offer their rostered ministers either the Select Co-pay 2000, or the Select HDHP 2000 with a funded HSA in the amount of \$1,000 for individuals, \$3,000 for families.

The Reverend Karen Sease, Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations, was recognized to give context and clarification to this proposal. Pr. Sease works with the Deans and the mobility process. She explained the general differences between the current plans Portico Benefits offers, and the new plans that are being established for 2026. They are not simply modifications of the previous structure, and so congregations and ministers will need to do their own research to determine which is best for them.

Portico is calling one of the plans its “value” plan, which gives the impression that it would be the best choice. This is not necessarily true. The value plan will save the congregation the most money, but it will shift most of the cost to the rostered minister. The suggestion of the Committee of Deans is close to, but not quite correctly reflected in the proposal from the Executive Committee. To match as closely as possible the benefits of the current Gold+ plan the Synod currently recommends, the Deans proposed either the Select Co-pay 2000 plan, or the *Value HDHP 4000* with an employee contribution to an HSA in the amount of \$1,000 for individuals, \$3,000 for families.

Bishop Penman moved we amend the original resolution to reflect the recommendation of the Committee of Deans. His amendment was approved.

**The Synod Council then adopted the amended resolution:**

**S.C.25.09.29. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve that congregations offer their rostered ministers either the Select Co-pay 2000, or the Value HDHP 4000 with an employee contribution to an HSA in the amount of \$1,000 for individuals, \$3,000 for families.

**REPORT OF THE SECRETARY**

**Updates on the Constitution**

Secretary Richard noted that the changes to the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions adopted at the August 2025 Churchwide Assembly are being incorporated into the Synod’s Constitution. The provisions that involve non-required provisions are being reviewed and will be presented to the Synod Council at the December meeting so recommendations may be presented to the Synod as a whole for action at the May 2026 Synod Assembly.

**Actions on the Roster**

***Invitation to Full Communion Partners to Serve ELCA Congregations in SEPA Synod:***

**S.C.25.09.30. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves entry rite, Invitation to Extended Service, to the Rev. Dr. Karyn Wiseman as Pastor at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, Conshohocken, PA beginning September 15, 2025, for 25 hours per week. This Invitation to Extended Service requires an annual report to the synodical bishop for the full length of service. Extended service is eligible for renewal annually by Synod Council upon recommendation of the Synod Bishop.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution**

***Request to Move from Active Roster to Retired Roster***

**S.C.25.09.31. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant retired status to the Rev. Sue Lang effective December 1, 2025.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution.**

**Information not requiring action**

**Transfer**

The Reverend Nathan Krause to Northeastern Ohio Synod

**Death**

The Reverend Joyce E. Nelson, August 16, 2025

**REPORT OF THE TREASURER AND FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Ms. Janet A. Neff, Treasurer, was not able to attend. Mr. Martin Schwab, Senior Accountant for SEPA Synod, made the report in her stead.

**Statement of Financial Position  
Highlights as of 1/31/2025 and 7/31/2024**

	1/31/25	7/31/25
Total Cash & Investments	\$ 18,413,573	\$ 20,231,967
Total Assets	\$ 22,337,569	\$ 24,157,405
Total Liabilities	\$ 191,226	\$ 147,007
Total Net Assets	\$ 22,146,343	\$ 24,010,398

Unrestricted	\$ 15,539,313	\$ 17,497,559
With donor restrictions	\$ 6,607,030	\$ 6,512,839

### Statement of Activities

#### Revenue

as of 7/31/25

	2025 Actual	2025 Forecast	2026 Budget
Mission Support	\$ 722,388	\$ 713,761	\$ 1,600,000
Other Contributions	\$ 241,304	\$ 271,821	\$ 498,686
Registration Fees	\$ 77,008	\$ 90,756	\$ 114,256
Investment Income	\$ 682,782	\$ 583,775	\$ 1,226,630
Beneficial interest in Trust	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 60,000
Proceeds from property	<u>\$ 1,834,546</u>	<u>\$ 1,746,750</u>	<u>\$ 700,000</u>
Total Revenue	\$ 3,588,028	\$ 3,406,862	\$ 4,199,572

### Statement of Activities

#### Expenses

As of 7/31/25

	2025 Actual	2025 Forecast	2026 Budget
Operating Expense	\$ 975,105	\$ 1,180,566	\$ 2,193,776
ELCA Proportionate (50%)	\$ 361,194	\$ 356,880	\$ 800,000
Property Management	\$ 93,859	\$ 79,500	\$ 84,000
Distributions to other agencies	\$ 52,910	\$ 53,363	\$ 98,725
Remit to designated agency	\$ 8,779	\$ 6,270	\$ 12,540
Grants to Organizations	<u>\$ 209,144</u>	<u>\$ 50,781</u>	<u>\$ 153,460</u>
Total Expenses	\$ 1,700,991	\$ 1,727,360	\$ 3,342,501

Mr. Schwab shared the following to go along with the statistics.

With regard to our Financial Position:

Our cash and investments were \$20,231,000, which is an increase of \$1.8 million from the beginning of the year. This is mainly due to the sale of two properties.

Our liabilities went down by \$45,000 to \$147,000 in July.

Our largest liability at the moment is our mission support to the ELCA.

With regard to our Revenue:

As of July 31<sup>st</sup>, our mission support from congregations was \$722,000. This was \$9,000 better than the prior year.

Other contributions were \$241,000. This includes All Saints donations, any bequests, trust distributions, ELCA grants, and Fund for Mission donations we've received.

Registration fees of \$77,000 is mostly for the Synod Assembly.

We had investment income of \$683,000. That's about \$100,000 higher than we budgeted, so our investment returns are doing well for the first 6 months of the year.

Proceeds from property sales was \$1.8 million, which was slightly higher than we anticipated.

Total receipts as of July 31<sup>st</sup> was \$3,588,000, which is about \$100,000 higher than the budget.

With regard to our Expenses:

Our operating expenses are \$975,000.

This includes salaries, benefits, stipends, rent, insurance, travel, database, office expenses for the copier and supplies, internet and phone.

The ELCA received \$361,000. This is 50% of the mission support the city received.

Property expenses were \$94,000. This is for five (5) cemeteries that the Synod is responsible for, and three (3) former church properties under Synod Care.

Distributions to agencies were around \$52,000. This includes Muhlenberg College, United Lutheran Seminary, Campus Ministry at University Lutheran, Bear Creek Camp, and Lutheran Congregational Services.

Remittance to designated agencies was about \$9,000. This is donations we received from congregations that are specified for other agencies. The largest one is for Christ the King Church.

Grants to organizations was \$209,000. The largest grants here are the Fund for Mission Grants that have been approved by the Trustees, as well as some ELCA grants and St Petri-Hope disbursements.

Total expenses of July 31st were just about \$1.7 million.

Ms. Pia Graham, Chair of the Finance Committee, made the following comments on her submitted report:

The Committee met and reviewed all the reports. It is very good news to see that Mission Support is up by the \$9,000 indicated by Mr. Schwab. We continue to try to communicate with congregations to more effectively inspire generous and timely support of the Synod.

The Committee also reviewed the minutes of the Fund for Mission Trustees meeting, which included support of the Share the Love Family Boutique, and support of children to attend Bear Creek Camp, and support of the training event to be held at the Bishop's Convocation.

There are two new members of the Finance Committee, and we are grateful to have them on board.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Reports from committees were received in writing, with no actions required.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

None .

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Childcare Task Force**

The Synod Assembly charged the Synod Council with establishing a Task Force to consider if it is possible to offer childcare at the Synod Assembly and other Synod events. This task for is to be comprised of not more than nine (9) persons, at least three (3) of whom should be parents of young children. Consideration for the task force are state requirements, cost, training, safety, liability, and other issues that may impact the safety of children and the protection of their caregivers for providing such care at Synod events, as well as what type of Synod functions may require childcare or warrant the expense of providing such care.

The task force is charged with determining if childcare is possible for the 2026 Synod Assembly by the February meeting of the Synod Council, and so its empanelment is needed as quickly as possible.

Dr. Sherill Mickens agreed to be the Synod Council representative on this Task Force. Various suggestions of people who would be candidates were made. The Bishop and Vice President will take these into consideration. The process will then follow our process for seating Synod Council committees, where the suggested names will be shared with the Executive Committee for their input, and then shared with the Synod Council for their action. In light of the timing, the Synod Council will be asked to vote by email for the suggested members of the Task Force. Further suggestions of qualified people should be submitted to Bishop Penman and Vice President Lafferty by September 26<sup>th</sup>.

### **Synod Authorized Minister Task Force**

Bishop Penman discussed his desire to have a task force to consider how we might make use of Synod Authorized Ministers. Recognizing that, expectations around SAMs are not very specific yet, because it is such a new position and such a new terminology, he would like to create a task force to clarify what criteria we expect for SAMs, how they're credentialed, and then also how they're held accountable, and what kind of support and oversight that they have.

The Rev. Dr. Nelson Reivera-Garcia was selected to be the Synod Council Representative on this task force. The Reverend Erica Wesch will serve as Synod Staff person on this team.

Much discussion ensued over names of other possible members, and over what the responsibilities and parameters of this task force will be. As it will be more effective to pick the proper configuration of people when the work of the task force is more fully prescribed, Bishop Penman will work on defining the purpose, scope, and timeline for this team, with the hope of having this ready for the December meeting of the Synod Council, with an eye to empaneling this task force at that time.

### **Task Force on Compensation Guidelines**

Bishop Penman spoke of his concerns with our current process for setting compensation guidelines for rostered ministers of the Synod. There are several aspects of this concern, including how is an increase determined, and by what time so congregations can plan their budgets; the process of how we account for the increase for settled ministers, taking into account length of service and other learned knowledge over time; and in particular, the balance of equitable compensation based on cost of living for different regions in the Synod. Bishop expressed particular concern of the metric of housing values based on Zillow, both because Zillow is not fully reliable, and because, depending on the timing of housing booms, one may have an over or under inflated cost of living based on an accident of timing that may adversely impact either the minister or the congregation over a long period of time.

Bishop Penman asked for the following resolution to be considered:

**S.C.25.09.32. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council empanels a Compensation Guidelines Task Force to review and revise the guidelines for the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, with their proposal to be presented to the Synod Council by its September, 2026 meeting.

**The Synod Council adopted the resolution.**

Deacon Katie Afflerbach will serve as the Synod Council representative on this task force. Pr. Karen Sease will serve as the Synod Staff person. Other names will be considered and suggested to the Synod Council to fill out the rest of this task force at a future time.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

None.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:09 p.m. with prayer by Bishop Penman.  
The next meeting of the Synod Council is scheduled for December 11, 2025, and will be held via Zoom.

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

*Approved by Synod Council, December 11, 2025*