

MINUTES
of the 184th MEETING
of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
Hybrid Meeting – St. Matthew, Springfield with Zoom option
December 12, 2024
5:30 p.m.

DEVOTIONS

Vice President Tracey A. Beasey invited the Rev. Karl M. Richard, pastor of St. Matthew, to bring greetings to the Synod Council. She then asked the Rev. John Heidgerd to lead the Council in devotions. His reflections focused on the liturgical celebration of Gaudette – in the midst of all that happens in this world, we are called both to repent, and to rejoice, for as we repent (turn back to God), we find joy.

CALL TO ORDER

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley called the 184th meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to order at 5:46 p.m. The Rev. Karl M. Richard, Secretary, confirmed a quorum was present.

APPOINTMENT OF SYNOD COUNCIL MEMBERS

Vice President Beasley brought forward two Nominees for open seats on the Synod Council. These nominees are the Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia to fill the term left vacant as the Rev. Jennifer Casey moved from Synod Council to serve on the Candidacy Committee, and Mr. Tony Scheivert to fill the open seat for Chester Conference Representative, Lay Man.

S.C.24.12.24. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves the appointment of the Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia to the open clergy seat on Synod Council, term to end May 2025.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

S.C.24.12.25. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves the appointment of Mr. Tony Scheivert to the open Chester Conference Representative seat on Synod Council, term to end May 2026.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Dr. Rivera-Garcia was then admitted to the meeting. Mr. Scheivert was not available for this meeting but will take his seat at the February meeting of the Synod Council.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the 183rd Meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council (September 19, 2024) were approved as presented.

SETTING THE AGENDA

Vice President Beasley presented the agenda to the Synod Council. The agenda was approved as presented.

MISSION MOMENT

Vice President Beasley welcomed the Rev. Karen Sease, Assistant to the Bishop for Candidacy, Mobility and Interim Ministry, and Mission Advancement, to present the Mission Moment on the status of our congregations in transition. Pr. Sease spoke in particular about the changing needs of congregations, and ways the Church is trying to address these needs through the use of Synod Authorized Ministers. Some statistics from her presentation:

Future Leadership Needs of SEPA Synod

Key Figures: The Supply of Rostered Ministers

Number of ELCA ordinations, 2015 – 2023	1,914
Number of Retirements, 2015 – 2023	3,773
Net change in Rostered Ministers	-1,859
SEPA Ordinations, 2015 – 2023	35
SEPA Retirements, 2015 – 2023	79
Net change in SEPA Rostered Ministers	-44
Pastors serving congregations in the ELCA	6,013
Number of ELCA congregations	8,464
Number of SEPA congregations	141
SEPA congregations in transition	24

Focusing on the 24 SEPA congregations in transition, Pr. Sease noted that:

- 1 is ready to receive full-time candidates
- 8 are ready to receive part-time candidates
- 4 might all a full-time pastor when the transition process is completed
- The remainder are not yet ready to entertain candidates for their openings
- The longest ongoing transition process for one of our congregations is 56+ months.

More than 33% of ELCA congregations in transition are in our smallest congregations, which is an increase since the pandemic.

It is estimated the 45% of ELCA congregations cannot afford a full-time pastor (based on 2022 numbers).

Synod Authorized Ministers:

One piece of the solution to helping provide pastoral coverage seems to be Synod Authorized Ministers. SAMs have helped in varying capacities in different synods – preaching, presiding, pastoral care, funerals, weddings.

Seventy percent of Synod Bishops support the use of SAMs, and many have been using them for some time. Seven percent do not support the use of SAMs, and nineteen percent support the use of SAMs only in very rare instances.

Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod has one Synod Authorized Minister serving at this time. Bobbie Hoffman is caring for St. Luke in Gilbertsville.

United Lutheran Seminary is developing a certificate program to train SAMs, which will be more formalized and consistent than the variety of programs that have existed in the numerous Synod “congregational deacon” programs across our Region.

We currently have two people discerning if Synod Authorized Ministry may be an area in which they feel called to serve in our Synod.

Pr. Sease concluded with the following summary:

- + Fewer ordained pastors are available to call, and fewer congregations are able to afford full-time pastors.
- + Affordability and access are the primary drivers to changes in congregational leadership models.
- + The status quo won't hold. New pastoral leadership models are necessary.
- + Vitality practices must be infused into the transition process and encouraged in all SEPA congregations.
- + Our communities need as many vibrant witnesses to the gospel as we can get.
- + The Holy Spirit is always at work. Our future will look different, and the gospel will be proclaimed.

Bishop Penman noted there are three paths which congregations are asked to consider in the time of pastoral transition: Transformation, Partnership, or Resurrection.

- + Transformation – taking a good assessment of where you are and what your ministry might become as you move into the future, not presuming you can or should stay as you have always been.
- + Partnership – considering all the possible ways in which you might share ministry with other congregations around you – in terms of staffing, resources, building usage, and other ways in which the gospel can be proclaimed without a full-time pastor needed on site.
- + Resurrection – which may need some Good Friday/Easter framing around it; what needs to end so something new can begin? Is it portions of this ministry? Is it closing this ministry and folding in with another?

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

Love Revolution

Bishop Penman shared that Love Revolution has launched, and in order to make this program work two more people were hired to administer it. In addition to the Rev. Rick Summy, the Program Director, we have also hired the Rev. Kayla Sadowy of Grace, Broomall, to be the Grant Evaluator, and Ms. Loretta Green as a part-time administrative assistant for the program, and she is also serving as part-time administrative support for the Synod office, particularly in the area of mobility.

In God's Image

This annual training event, provided by our Synod's Inclusive Communities Committee, was held October 12th at St. Paul's Ardmore. It was good to be a part of this day as people were given greater awareness of the LGBTQ community and how to be intentionally inclusive of all persons.

Bishop's Convocation

The first Bishop's Convocation of Bishop Penman's tenure was held November 21-21 at The Alloy in King of Prussia. This was a new site, and a new format. The responses seem to be positive. It was good to be at a new site, and have time away from the parish, while not being at the same places we have used in the past. It was a fresh start all around.

This year we had a facilitator who used a process of "open-source technology," where we were encouraged to bring to the table the topics most in our hearts and minds as we anticipate, with hope or fear, the future of the Church. The conversations were wide-ranging and powerful. A summary of what was discussed was compiled, so trends can be identified, and follow-up may be more effective.

Candidacy Committee

Bishop's first Candidacy Committee meeting brought forward two approvals for ordination, and two approvals for entrance into the candidacy process. Coincidentally, the two approvals for ordination were for one Minister of Word and Sacrament, and one Minister of Word and Service, and the two approvals for entrance also were for one Minister of Word and Sacrament, and one Minister of Word and Service.

Search Processes

There are several search processes ongoing for staffing positions in the Synod office. Currently we are seeking:

- + A second Director for Evangelical Mission to assist Dr. Moses Suah-Dennis, but this position will also have added to it work in diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- + A Program Director for the Faith Alive grant from Lilly for nurturing children in the faith. The person proposed for this position is Pr. Anne-Marie Cook, who the Council will be asked to affirm this evening.
- + A Mission Interpreter (director of communications), for which we are proposing Paula Lebo, former Bishop of the Allegheny Synod, who has agreed, if affirmed this evening, to serve the Synod $\frac{3}{4}$ time, and United Lutheran Seminary $\frac{1}{4}$ time.

Conference of Bishops

The Conference of Bishops is considering several changes to the management of the Roster of Ministers in light of how the Church is operating now, versus decades ago when these parameters were set. Among the changes being discussed are:

- + Extending On Leave from Call status from 3 years to 6 years of eligibility
- + Establishing a new category of "Supply Pastor" that will allow people to stay on the roster and provide for a greater pool of people available to cover word and sacrament needs in our congregations.
- + A change in the minimum hours of service from 15 to 10 hours per week to qualify for a call rather than a contract.

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Vice President Beasley noted the report of the Executive Committee was in the Council's packet of materials. The Executive Committee is recommending an increase to the Synod Guidelines for Minimum Compensation.

S.C.24.12.26. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council endorses a 2.5% increase in the minimum compensation proposed in the Synod's Compensation Guidelines for the year 2025.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

The Vice President presented the appointments to the various Synod Council Committees for consideration by the Council.

S.C.24.12.27. 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 unanimously adopted the resolution.

Synod Connections

V.P. Beasley stated that she has resumed visiting congregations to make the presence of the Synod felt, and to hear of and affirm the ministry of our various congregations. She has recently visited Good Shepherd, King of Prussia, and St. Mark, Conshohocken. She encourages other members of Synod Council to do the same. She also encouraged members of the Council to participate in upcoming Synod Events, including the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service at United Lutheran Seminary on January 18th, and January 19th will be the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. worship service held at Christ, Oreland, and sponsored by the African Descent Lutheran Association, Philadelphia Chapter, and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church

The Vice President gave a brief update from the Church Council regarding the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church. She noted that the Commission has a great deal of work to do in a very short period of time. Expectations that everything can be fully accomplished before the 2025 Churchwide Assembly should be balanced with an awareness of how hard that will be to accomplish. Pr. Gwendolyn Kiing, also a member of the Church Council, affirmed that the members of the Commission have been working diligently, and have logged many hours of volunteer time. It is possible that much of the work will have to continue after the Churchwide Assembly.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Actions on the Roster

Calls to Synod Staff:

S.C.24.12.28. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the Rev. Annemarie H. Cook as Assistant to the Bishop – Program Director for Faith Alive initiative. This position is funded by a 5-year Lilly Endowment Inc. grant beginning January 1, 2025.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

S.C.24.12.29. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the Rev. Paula J. Lebo as Assistant to the Bishop for Mission Interpretation beginning February 1, 2025. This position is co-terminus with the synodical bishop.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

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

S.C.24.12.30. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves entry rite, Invitation to Extended Service, to the Rev. Teresa A. McNamara as Interim Pastor at Holy Spirit, Secane, PA beginning October 1, 2024, until September 30, 2025. This invitation is eligible for renewal annually by Synod Council.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

S.C.24.12.31. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves entry rite renewal, Invitation to Extended Service, for the Rev. Dr. Anthony Scott at Reformation Lutheran (Mt. Airy), Philadelphia, PA beginning May 30, 2024, until May 29, 2025. This invitation is eligible for renewal annually by Synod Council.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Request for On Leave from Call status:

S.C.24.12.32. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant “On Leave from Call” status to the Rev. Susan M. Lang, 1st year, effective December 1, 2024.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

S.C.24.12.33. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council grant “On Leave from Call” status to the Rev. Dr. Norbert Hahn, 2nd year, effective August 7, 2024.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Request to Move from Active Roster to Retired Roster

S.C.24.12.34. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approves moving the Rev. Ellen Meissgeier to the retired roster, effective January 1, 2025.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Information not requiring action

Removal from the Roster

By death, The Rev. George Harpel, November 14, 2024

Request to Affirm Board Members

Liberty Lutheran Services is one of the Social Ministry Organizations with which we have a shared ministry. While they operate as their own entity, their by-laws tie them to the ELCA, and as such their Board Members need to be affirmed by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

S.C.24.12.35. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council affirms the re-appointment of the following people to serve as board members for Liberty Lutheran Services: Beverly Bortz-Christ’s Lutheran, Orland, Evan Speece-St. John Lutheran, Blue Bell, and David Stettler-St. Peter’s Lutheran-Lafayette Hill.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Renewal of Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities

We have several Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities in our Synod. This authorization requires renewal on an annual basis. To that end:

S.C.24.12.36. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council authorizes the following ministries that are continuing as Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities in 2025:

- + The Welcome Church - The Rev. Violet Little, mission developer
- + The Well - The Rev. Shaunel Steinnagel, mission developer
- + Kairos - The Rev. Robert Fisher, mission developer
- + Mindfulness Plus Church - The Rev. Seminarian, Tom Natalini

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

Strategic Ministries

In like manner to Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities, we have several Strategic Ministries in our Synod, which also need annual authorization.

S.C.24.12.37. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council authorizes the following as Strategic Ministries continuing in 2025:

- + Grace Lutheran, Broomall - The Rev. Kayla Sadowy, developer
- + Iglesia Luterana Nueva Creacion - The Rev. Lyzette Rios-Sanchez, mission developer
- + Mediator Lutheran, Philadelphia - The Rev. Regina Goodrich, developer
- + St. Michael's Lutheran, Philadelphia - The Rev. Dr. Noah Hepler, developer
- + Trinity Lutheran, Philadelphia - The Rev. Eric Allison, developer

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

2024 Housing Allowances for Rostered Ministers on Synod Staff

WHEREAS, Internal Revenue Code Section 107, as well as the associated Regulations and Revenue Rulings, provide that a portion of a minister's remuneration, designated as rental/housing allowance by the employing church or other qualifying organization, is excludable from the minister's gross income under Section 107 of the code; and

WHEREAS, The Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is a qualifying organization, and

WHEREAS, of the compensation paid by SEPA Synod to ministers listed below in the calendar year 2024 the amount stated in each instance is designated as a rental/housing allowance in accordance with the provisions of section 107 of the Internal Revenue Code.

Clergy Name/ Housing Allowance Amount for 2024

Bishop Bryan J. Penman - \$62,512.00

S.C.24.12.38. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the 2024 housing allowance for Bishop Bryan J. Penman, and **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the recipients be reminded that the amounts so designated as rental/housing allowance are excludable from the gross income of the respective recipients only to the extent that said amounts are used to rent or provide a home. Further the amount eligible for the Section 107 exclusion may not exceed the fair rental value of the minister's home (including furnishings and appurtenances) plus the cost of utilities. To the extent a greater amount is designated as rental/housing allowance, the designation will be ineffectual with respect to such amount.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

2025 Housing Allowances for Rostered Ministers on Synod Staff

WHEREAS, Internal Revenue Code Section 107, as well as the associated Regulations and Revenue Rulings, provide that a portion of a minister's remuneration, designated as

rental/housing allowance by the employing church or other qualifying organization, is excludable from the minister’s gross income under Section 107 of the code; and

WHEREAS, The Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is a qualifying organization, and

WHEREAS, of the compensation paid by SEPA Synod to ministers listed below in the calendar year 2025 the amount stated in each instance is designated as a rental/housing allowance in accordance with the provisions of section 107 of the Internal Revenue Code.

Clergy Name/ Housing Allowance Amount for 2025

Bishop Bryan J. Penman – 54,240.00
 Pastor Karen Sease - \$23,000.00
 Pastor Stacy-Kyle Rea - \$34,561.00
[Pending Call Through Synod Council]
 Pastor Annemarie Cook - \$40,430.00
 Pastor Paula J. Lebo - \$12,440

S.C.24.12.39. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve the 2025 housing allowance for Bishop Penman, Pastor Karen Sease, Pastor Stacey-Kyle Rea, Pastor Annemarie Cook, and Pastor Paula J. Lebo, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the recipients be reminded that the amounts so designated as rental/housing allowance are excludable from the gross income of the respective recipients only to the extent that said amounts are used to rent or provide a home. Further the amount eligible for the Section 107 exclusion may not exceed the fair rental value of the minister’s home (including furnishings and appurtenances) plus the cost of utilities. To the extent a greater amount is designated as rental/housing allowance, the designation will be ineffectual with respect to such amount.

The Synod Council unanimously adopted the resolution.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Ms. Janet Neff, Treasurer, shared the following overview of the finances of the Synod.

Statement of Financial Position

	10/31/24	1/31/24
Total Cash & Investments	\$17,626,313	\$12,068,926
Total Assets	\$21,406,176	\$15,859,964
Total Liabilities	\$ 199,571	\$ 235,326
Total Net Assets	\$21,206,605	\$15,624,638
Unrestricted	\$14,531,965	\$10,367,555
With donor restrictions	\$ 6,674,640	\$ 5,257,083

Statement of Activities

Revenue

as of 10/31/24

	Actual	Forecast	2025 Budget
Mission Support	\$1,048,868	\$1,045,293	\$1,500,000
Other Contributions	\$1,808,976	\$ 290,675	\$ 421,817

Registration Fees	\$ 73,776	\$ 85,462	\$ 113,799
Investment Income	\$1,762,183	\$ 556,409	\$ 800,273
Beneficial Interest in Trust	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 60,000
Proceeds from Property	<u>\$3,251,238</u>	<u>\$2,050,000</u>	<u>\$1,000,000</u>
Total Revenue	\$7,945,238	\$4,027,839	\$3,895,899

Statement of Activities

Expenses

as of 10/31/24

	Actual	Forecast	2025 Budget
Operating Expenses	\$1,321,591	\$1,396,095	\$1,941,169
ELCA Proportionate Share (50%)	\$ 524,434	\$ 522,647	\$ 750,000
Property Management	\$ 137,688	\$ 102,700	\$ 61,203
Distributions to Other Agencies	\$ 69,000	\$ 70,500	\$ 93,000
Remit to Designated Agency	\$ 24,472	\$ 9,375	\$ 12,500
Grants to Organizations	<u>\$ 283,801</u>	<u>\$ 153,040</u>	<u>\$ 230,837</u>
Total Expenses	\$2,360,985	\$2,253,656	\$3,088,708

In summary, Treasurer Neff noted the unrestricted current assets and investments total \$13,621,978. Our current liabilities total \$121,410. Therefore, our current ratios are in good order.

Ms. Neff also stated the Executive Committee will be reviewing the disbursement of funds from former congregations to potentially cover perpetual care of cemeteries.

REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Ms. Pia Graham, chair of the Finance Committee, reported that the team has reviewed the financial statements, and received word of the Fund for Mission Disbursements. All is in order.

The Committee is recommending that more information be distributed about the All Saints Appeal. Even with a video on our website, many are not aware of either the video or the Appeal, as many of our parishioners are not on ministrylink.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Investment Committee

Pr. John Heidgerd, chairperson, referred to written report. He noted our Portfolio doing quite well, with assets yielding strong returns of \$1.96 MM and 19.3%, in line with the YTD performance of the S&P 500. Within the portfolio, there is about \$460,000 of immediately liquid capital to fund upcoming Mission budget needs of the Synod.

The Committee hopes to be able to propose a candidate for Investment Manager to the Synod Council by the February meeting. Final interviews with the firms under consideration are scheduled for January.

Nominating Committee

Ms. Emily Valentine, chairperson, reminded the Synod Council that the Nomination Letter for open positions to be elected May 2025 is out. Because the Assembly is going to be at the end of

May, rather than the beginning, the deadline for nominations has been pushed from February 15 to March 15, 2025.

Constitution Committee

Ms. Dorothy Wilson, chairperson, shared that no constitutions are ready for consideration by the Synod Council at this time.

OLD BUSINESS – none

NEW BUSINESS – none

UNFINISHED BUSINESS – none

The meeting was adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

The next meeting of the Synod Council will be held via Zoom on February 13, 2025.

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

Approved by Synod Council, February 13, 2025