



MISSION: *Inviting people to love each other.*

VISION: *All creation living in harmony with Christ.*

## **SYNOD COUNCIL Meeting Minutes July 27, 2024**

- A. The meeting was to order by VP Ann Ferry at 9:05 am.
- B. Before welcoming guests from St. John, Sinking Valley an explanation with discussion occurred that included the following information.
  - a) The Office of the Bishop received a written request to disaffiliate through a letter to the Bishop. The Bishop forwarded the letter to the Synod Council prior to the council meeting. The letter written July 17, 2017 and included the results of the congregational vote to disaffiliate from the ELCA.
  - b) In the discussion there were a few questions regarding what could happen in the future including: what if they want to re-affiliate with the ELCA down the line? It would be a process with paperwork and conversations per the ELCA guidelines. Are we able/permitted to support the congregation after disaffiliation? After the disaffiliation the Synod is no longer able to support their ministry because they have operated outside the bounds of the ELCA model constitution. If the current minister leaves, the Office of the Bishop would be willing to answer questions if they want to discuss the reaffiliation process. What about the name “Lutheran,” is it allowed to stay or cause for concern? As an independent church they can retain their name, including designation of “Lutheran” or choose to affiliate with another entity.
  - c) Following the Synod Council’s discussion, Bishop Paula Lebo invited the representatives of St. John, Sinking Valley into the meeting via Zoom at 9:32 am. Those who joined were Marty Williams (council president), Drew Baker (worship leader), Randy Turiano (member).
    - a. During this conversation Marty Williams further explained the desire of the congregation to disaffiliate from the ELCA. The congregation wanted consistent worship and had started working with Drew Baker who is not ordained. St. John’s Congregation has chosen to go independent to keep Drew Baker as the ministry leader and therefore disaffiliate. The disaffiliation vote was held July 14<sup>th</sup> with the following results: 60 votes to disaffiliate, 2 votes not to disaffiliate.
  - d) Bishop Paula Lebo extended appreciation for the work that the congregants at St. John did prior to their disaffiliation vote. Marty Williams offered thanks for the work the Office of the Bishop did to help explain the process, procedures and requirements of the ELCA regarding congregations and affiliation/disaffiliation. The three guests departed the Synod Council meeting at 9:39 am.
  - e) The Synod Council will further discuss and move on the disaffiliation at the appropriate time of the council meeting according to the agenda.
- C. Devotions were led by Bishop Paula Lebo with the reading of 1 John 4:7-21 from the CEB translation. A discussion followed the reading including the following questions and responses.
  - a) What do you hear in this text? Love – we don’t practice this well, to love like God is to love all (and not the “Hallmark” kind of love. There is no fear in love – getting past the fear, letting go of the presumed control.

- b) What are you being asked to do/hear/see? Remain – abide – am I abiding or just going through the motions. When we abide we allow love to transform us. So, what does it mean to abide or remain with God? Judgment Day – a bit intimidating, hard to focus on God’s love and grace. We hear judgment as a bad thing, but we need not fear God’s love and forgiveness.
  - c) What is one action from this text that you could practice consistently? Make decisions on love/ministry/faith not on finances. Remind oneself that no matter what we say, do, think, etc. God loves us no matter what. Reflect upon each day and allow ourselves grace. Judgment allows possibilities – it isn’t all bad or negative. Created to Be... Invitation – ask visitors and everyone if they have questions. Have a 30 second faith statement in general.
- D. VP Ann Ferry presented the agenda for its adoption.
- a) *SC24.07.01* – Motion to adopt the agenda for today’s meeting, motion by Michele Peese, second by Austin Beirlair, motion carried.
- E. The Minutes of May 2024 meeting were unavailable at this time. Tabled until next meeting.
- F. Treasurer Paula Nihoff presented the financial statements and asked for input regarding dedicated accounts, it is unclear if some of the designations are still appropriate, needed, or if the funds are at the indicated levels. We discussed briefly how the Synod’s investments are currently invested and plan to consider if there are changes we might want to make regarding the level of aggressive/conservative portfolios. It is unclear if a thorough yearly audit is required or if a partial might be more appropriate. More information is needed. There is a great need to re-establish the Finance Committee. It was recommended to seek out five people who would be helpful and willing to work with Paula Nihoff regarding the finances.
- G. Ministry Updates were presented and discussed as follows.
- a) **Financial Management** (*Provide financial planning and resources to guide the Synod*)
    - a. Sorting out dedicated accounts – see discussion above in the Report of the Treasurer.
  - b) **Worship and Service** (*Actively conduct worship and service ministries providing Word and Sacrament in accordance with Lutheran traditions throughout our Synod*)
    - a. Congregational visits and worship
      - 1. Bishop Paula supplied in and visited with four congregations since we last met. She presided at Allen Stump’s call vote and ordination, and preached at Synod Assembly worship.
      - 2. Pastor Kevin supplied in and visited with eight congregations since our last meeting. He preached and assisted at All Stump’s ordination and presided at Synod Assembly worship. He led reflections and presided at worship services at Sequanota’s Tend festival.
    - b. Support partners and their ministries
      - 1. ALSM
        - 1. Synod office will move August 7<sup>th</sup>. \$352 quote from Walks Moving and Storage in Altoona to move the things that need to be moved to the Lutheran Home in Hollidaysburg.
          - 1. Have someone who has volunteered to do the scanning of necessary files. The scanner has OCR ability.
          - 2. Still have many items that are available for donation. Come before August 5<sup>th</sup> to come and look. Call ahead of time. Tell congregations that items are still available.
          - 3. Grateful that many items are being used by those who need or have use for them. Worship items that are not claimed will be taken to a worship warehouse.
      - 2. Camp Sequanota
        - 1. Pastor Kevin was on the planning and leadership team for the Tend Festival.
      - 3. Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State

4. KELC
  5. LAMPa – Election Devotional to be coming out. Susan Barclay’s term is finished, there is a new 3-year term beginning September 1, 2024. The Bishop will make contacts and appoint a representative to the LAMPa Policy Council. Bishop Paula Lebo told the Synod Council that the PA Bishops plan to have press conference in September to talk about hope that we can have a peaceful election.
  6. Gloria De Dios
    1. DEM Sue Ellen Spots discussed the status of the ministry review. In the review they have finished local interviews. There is a meeting in the future to contact Rev. Rebecca Erlich to get more background on the origination of the SOWC. There is also a conversation scheduled with a person from ELCA Outreach to consider opportunities that might be a better fit moving forward.
  7. Grace Delivered
  8. United Lutheran Seminary
  9. Global Refuge
  10. The ELCA Foundation
- c. Other
- c) **Leadership and Congregational Support and Development** (*Welcome, develop, manage, motivate and retain a diverse workforce of Rostered and Lay leaders. Provide congregational support in order to conduct God’s work within our Synod*)
- a. Bishop Paula attended an online Conference of Bishops meeting, attended four council meetings, two Dean meetings, six Steering Committee meetings, three candidacy related meetings, a consultation for disaffiliation, two ALSM board meetings, and First Call Theological Education planning, Lutheran Letter, Reference and Council, Staff and a meeting with LAMPa.
  - b. Pastor Kevin met with eight colleagues and eleven councils/call committees/groups of lay leaders since we last met. He continues to supervise Vicar Jen Bobolsky and support her congregations on internship. Other meetings included a disaffiliation consultation, Deans meeting, coaching triad, candidacy meetings, Luther Letter, editing sessions for The Book, Assembly Committee, and Tend Festival planning.
  - c. Clergy update/moves/calls/retirements
    1. Pastor Allen Stump’s ordination was June 2<sup>nd</sup>.
    2. Pastor Doug Knupp moved to WWMD Synod.
    3. Pastors Amanda and Drew McCaffery moved to the DEMD Synod.
    4. Pastor Becky Horn on sabbatical June 16 – September 15
    5. Pastor Sharon Erb will retire April 2025
    6. Clergy Shortage –
      1. There was a lengthy discussion brainstorming ideas that may help the Allegheny Synod with the current clergy shortage especially considering the thirty vacant congregations within the synod. The following ideas were mentioned for further discussion. Would it be helpful to have incentives to help encourage clergy to come to this synod. What about a “sign on bonus” either a one-time gift or distribute over time? Offer grant(s) to congregation(s) to help support calling a fulltime pastor at recommended compensation guidelines. Incentive to raise up leaders from our congregations. The Synod does have a DYD designated account that helps to support those in need of scholarships to take course(s). The individual is to ask for congregational support first.
    7. This brainstorming conversation led to a discussion of the visibility of the Office of the Bishop. Ideas to help in visibility and offer opportunity to show and explain

the role of the Office of the Bishop were to host coffee with the Synod Council and to include the list of congregations that have been visited by the Office of the Bishop and Synod Council Members during the previous month(s).

- d. Congregational updates
    - 1. St. John, Sinking Valley voted to disaffiliate.
      - 1. **ACTION: To accept St. John, Sinking Valley's request to disaffiliate from the ELCA.**
      - 2. *SC24.07.02* Motion made by Bishop Paula Lebo, seconded by Michele Peese, motion carried.
  - e. Seminarian updates
    - 1. Jennifer Bobolsky Sherbine – Internship at Mundy's Corner and Summerhill
    - 2. Penny Koontz TEEM, Endorsed 7/10/24. Internship at Good Shepherd, Windber.
    - 3. Christy Harford TEEM, Internship, First, Johnstown and Benscreek.
    - 4. Steve Koths TEEM, Shiloh in State College. Internship began 1/1/24.
    - 5. Claudia Plows, ULS, TEEM, Trinity, Sidman.
    - 6. Lindsie Hammaker-Struth, Transferred to SWPA Synod
    - 7. Josh Spangler, LSTC, TEEM, Laurel Mountain Lutherans
  - f. First Call Group
    - 1. First Call Theological Education November 20-22 at ULS, Gettysburg. Laura Waltermire, Ted Williams, Allen Stump, and Regina Holliday are our first call pastors.
  - g. Conference Deans
  - h. Portico Benefits
    - 1. New benefit choices are coming for 2025, possibly an a la carte option.
    - 2. One thing they are considering are dropping requirement for spouse and children.
  - i. Congregational Planning
    - 1. Clearfield Conference continues its work toward cooperation.
      - 1. They are establishing a Strategy Table which includes two representatives from each congregation to commit to a six-to-nine-month process with Ben Hoffman's support. In the Strategy Table they will come together and listen to where God is calling us forward in working cooperatively without expectation of what this might look like. They are hoping for ideas and guidance in obtaining sustainability in ministry as well as worship.
- d) **Faith Formation** (*Provide lifelong Christian nurturing and development*)
- a. Ignite Ministry
    - 1. Resolution passed from Synod Assembly. Pastor Kathy Popp and Roger Glad will serve on a task force from our Synod. NWPA and USS Synods will add members.
    - 2. Connect to ULS training – their lay school of theology rebuilding.
    - 3. Synodically Authorized Ministers – only given dispensation at one site for a designated time. We do not currently have anyone in this program.
      - 1. ELCA has updated the SAM requirements in the constitution and in the “Roster Management Guidelines.”
    - 4. Go Tell initiative
  - b. Faith Formation Team
    - 1. A Synod Youth Event, The Weekend, is being planned for December 2024 at St. James, Huntingdon.
    - 2. Two groups from the Allegheny Synod attended the National Youth Gathering. Zion Hollidaysburg and Grace, State College.
- e) **Planning and Resources** (*Provide strategic planning and resources to guide the Synod*)
- a. Lilly Endowment Grant.

1. The Steering Committee recommended Rev. John Kratz as Director. He begins September 1<sup>st</sup>. UMC pastor for 36 years, born Lutheran and went to Lutheran seminary. Going to live in parsonage in Mundy's Corner.
  - b. Synod Assembly
    1. May 31, 2025, Blair County Convention Center. Synod Assembly worship Friday, May 30, 2025, at Evangelical, Duncansville.
  - c. Committee Appointments
    1. Three members were added to the Candidacy Committee. George Fattman, Lyn Horning, and Rev. Ruth Jenson.
  - d. Current Vacancies on Committees, Council, Teams, etc.
    1. Synod Council – 1 1-year clergy, 2 3-year lay male, 1 2-year youth (age 15-21)
    2. Consultation Committee – 1 clergy female, 1 clergy male, 2 lay female
    3. Discipline Committee – 1 clergy female, 2 lay female, 3 lay male
    4. Mission Endowment Committee – 2 2-year clergy, 1 1-year clergy
  - e. Congregation Vitality and Innovation Grants
- H. The meeting was adjourned at 12:25 pm following the below motion.
- a) *SC24.07.03* Motion to adjourn the meeting made by Michele Peese, seconded by Austin Beirlair. Motion carried.

**Next Meeting:** September 21, 2025, at 9:00 am at the NEW Allegheny Synod Office, 916 Hickory Street, Hollidaysburg.

Synod Council members in attendance... 12 of 13

- Executive Committee (*2-ordained, 2-lay*) (election year)
  - Bishop Paula Lebo (2021) – present
  - VP Ann Ferry (2021) – present
  - Secretary Pr. Becky Horn (2024) – present
  - Treasurer Paula Nihoff (2024) – present
- Council Members (*4-ordained, 5-lay*)
  - Timothy Albright (2023) – present
  - Austin Beirlair (2024) – present
  - Pr. Tyler Graham (2024) – present
  - Pr. Ralph Hamer (2023) – absent
  - Pr. Nancy Hoover (2024) – present
  - Pr. Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte (2024) – present
  - Joyce Long (2022) – present
  - Michele Peese (2023) – present
  - Margaret (Peggy) Thatcher (2024) – present
  - Vacancies:
    - 2 lay males
    - 2022 clergy (1-year term)
    - Youth (age 15-21)
- Synod Staff
  - Assistant to the Bishop Pr. Kevin Shock – present
  - Director of Evangelical Mission Sue Ellen Spotts – present via Zoom
- Guests
  - Marty Williams, Council President of St. John, Sinking Valley
  - Drew Baker, ministry leader at St. John, Sinking Valley
  - Randy Turiano, member at St. John, Sinking Valley