



# Allegheny Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

916 Hickory Street, 1<sup>st</sup> Fl., Hollidaysburg, PA 16648

814-942-1042

**MISSION:** *Inviting people to love each other.*

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

## **SYNOD COUNCIL Meeting Minutes November 15, 2025, in Hollidaysburg and on Zoom**

1. The meeting was called to order by VP Ann Ferry at 9:03 am. She welcomed our new synod council members and turned the meeting over to Interim Bishop Barb Collins to run the meeting since she was on Zoom.
2. Devotions – Michele Peese led the devotion based on cake mix and the parts that need to be added – it is not complete until you add additional ingredients, but there are ways to use different ‘gifts’ than what is prescribed.
3. Interim Bishop Barb Collins had each council member and person present introduce themselves and share a little about who they are and their ties to the church.
4. Consent Agenda: *with one motion, all four items can be adopted/approved; or, any item can be removed from the consent agenda for further conversation and consideration.*
  - A. to adopt the November 15, 2025 agenda.
  - B. to approve the minutes of the September 20, 2025 meeting
  - C. to affirm the synod council actions via email and zoom since the September 20, 2025 meeting.
    - 1.) SC25.09.12 – Motion to recommend for adoption the Amendment changes from the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly for the non-required amendments in the *Model Constitution for Synods*. Motion made by Rev. Becky Horn, seconded by Tim Albright, motion carried.
    - 2.) The minutes labeled SC25.10 email and SC25.10 include the following motions that have been carried: SC25.10.01, SC25.10.02, SC25.10.03, SC25.10.04, SC25.10.05, SC25.10.06 and SC25.10.07.
  - D. **SC25.11.01 – Motion to adopt and approve the Consent Agenda as presented, motion made by Michele Peese, seconded by Tim Albright, motion carried.**
5. Mission Conversation
  - A. Synod Assembly 2025 Review
    - 1.) Larger dais so that people don’t feel like they will fall off.
    - 2.) Bulletin positions for the morning worship – not at all entries, or blocked by rostered leaders who were processing
    - 3.) Any conversation regarding elections should be discussed away from others.
    - 4.) Passing the baskets for the offering was beneficial.
    - 5.) There were a lot of positive comments regarding how well the assembly ran, time was kept, and people were respected.
  - B. Resolutions passed by the Assembly
    - 1.) The Deans’ resolution – keep forward thinking, inclusion and open communication. Connecting and building relationships are critical for having effective ministry.
    - 2.) Rural Ministry – support and lift up the ministry that is specific to rural ministry and consider how we can help to put forth the resolution to the Churchwide Council.  
Including
      - a) Need to contact the ready bench for Rural Ministry – Bishop Regina Hassanally
  - C. Action for Synod Council for January’s meeting – what are your ideas for where assistants to the bishop to focus on areas of ministry.

## 6. Ministry Updates

### A. Treasurer's Report and Financial Management (*Provide financial planning and resources to guide the Synod*) Note: that youth members under the age of 18 who serve on Synod Council are not to vote on financial matters due to liability.

- 1.) Balance Sheet and Income (see submitted reports)
  - a) Paula Nihoff offered her phone number to the council members to contact her anytime to ask questions regarding the finances.
  - b) Must include Go Tell It In The Mountain on our reports because we are financially responsible for the grant.
    - a. This means that the income on the Synod Statements reflect the income for the Lilly Grant, so in order to understand what the Synod has, these lines need to be accounted for (removed from the totals).
  - c) Explained the restricted and dedicated accounts and what is available (though if council were to spend all available the Synod would have no remaining funds).
  - d) Instruct the finance committee to develop reports that help to explain the use and policies of restricted accounts and to show specific money in and out of each account.
- 2.) \$5050 for Audit – Would it be permissible for GTIITM to contribute for the extra costs associated with the need for the Lilly Grant to be audited with the Allegheny Synod finances?
  - a) **SC25.11.02 – Motion to request that the GTIITM Lilly grant cover \$500 toward the cost of the audit due to the needed extra time that was required to establish the grant into the Synod audit. Motion made by Paula Nihoff, seconded by Peggy Thatcher, motion carried. (youth abstention)**
- 3.) Funds – candidacy expense - \$700 per each psychological assessments (budget for \$2400) – this will need to be addressed in future budgets
  - a) Related to this we will need to find a new person to perform assessments as the one who had been doing it for years fully retired.
- 4.) **SC25.11.03 – Motion to accept the Treasurer's report as presented. Motion made by Paula Nihoff, seconded by Terry Koch, motion carried.**
- 5.) Finance Committee Meeting update – appointments
  - a) **SC25.11.04 – Motion to approve the appointment of Rev. Traci Marriott as the Finance Committee Chair. Motion made by Interim Bishop Barb Collins, seconded by Rev. MJ Irvin-Stellabotte, motion carried.**
- 6.) Budget (see submitted reports)
  - a) Updated to include the Bishop-elect's compensation
    - a. Bishop-elect Kevin Shock would like to discuss how the premium is currently structured. In conversation with – 15% premium, the other 5% of the premium be designated to the Leadership Support line item in the budget. The total line item for the bishop's compensation would remain the same, however the salary for the bishop would decrease by 5% and this amount would be applied directly to Leadership Support.
- 7.) **SC25.11.05 – Motion to amend the budget for one-year to allow for 5% of the premium of the Bishop's salary to be designated to the Leadership Support line item on the budget for fiscal year 2026-2027. Motion made by Rev. Ralph Hamer, seconded by Gretel Kaltenbaugh, motion carried. (youth abstention)**
- 8.) Mission Investment Fund update
- 9.) Financial Management
- 10.) Investment Committee update
- 11.) Other

- B. Worship and Service** (*Actively conduct worship and service ministries providing Word and Sacrament in accordance with Lutheran traditions throughout the Synod*)
- 1.) Congregational visits and worship
    - a) Bishop Collins – worship with: St. John’s, Farmers Mills and New Hope, Spring Mills for Rev. Dietrich’s ordination anniversary; St. John’s, Clearfield 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary; First/Faith Parish on the death of Rev. Jaime Olson; Zion, Hollidaysburg for Rev. Wolfinger’s funeral; St. Stephen’s, Petersburg
    - b) Rev. Kevin Shock – led worship at Zion, Boalsburg; St. Paul’s, Mundy’s Corner (x2); First, Philipsburg; and Faith United, Houtzdale; E. Zimmerman Memorial
  - 2.) Support partners and their ministries
    - a) ALSM – Pericope studies have been offered, Mandated Reporter Training, Gingerbread House Contest, Advent Devotional (digital to be printable by congregation), working to partner for a faith grant for awareness program related to racism, bias, etc., and Angel Tree.
    - b) Camp Sequanota – The end of year appeal begins in the next couple of weeks. Will be starting summer camp planning for 2026.
    - c) Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State
    - d) The ELCA Foundation
    - e) LAMPa
    - f) United Lutheran Seminary
    - g) KELC – this is something to be reestablished as our companion church.
    - h) Global Refuge
    - i) Grace Delivered
- 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*)
- 1.) Staff engagement
    - a) Bishop Barb Collins
      - a. Gatherings: Pre-Assembly Conference Gatherings (x4); Installation Service for Presiding Bishop Curry; St. John’s, Clearfield 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner; Authorized Lay Worship Leaders Quarterly Gathering; ALSM Halloween Party with Residents; Taco Tuesday with St. Matthew, Martinsburg; Synod Assembly
      - b. Meetings: ALSM Board, Lutheran Letter, Staff, Deans’, Transition Team, Clearfield Colleagues, Conference Meetings (x2), Synod Council (x2), Synod Finance, Assembly Planning (x1), Conference of Bishops’ Meeting, Installation planning meeting, GTIITM
      - c. Visits/calls: 5/4 lay; 11/5 rostered
    - b) Pastor Kevin Shock (A2B)
      - a. Gatherings: Pre-Assembly Conference Gatherings (x4); ALWL Gathering; Synod Assembly, Deans’ Lunch; Preaching as Art Event; Veterans Day Luncheon at Faith United; Blair-Huntingdon Conference Gathering.
      - b. Meetings: Shiloh Council; Internship Cluster; Deans’ Meeting (x2); Assembly Committee; Finance Committee; Synod Council Budget; Assembly Voting Practice; Countering Christian Nationalism Retreat Planning; Staff Meeting; Installation Planning; First Call Theological Education Conference Planning; GTIITM Steering Committee.
      - c. Visits/calls: 4/10 lay; 7/7 rostered
      - d. Created a professional page on Facebook “Bishop Kevin Shock”
    - c) Sue Ellen Spotts (DEM) – written report below

- a. **Laurel Mountain Lutherans:** Nothing new here.
  - b. **Clearfield Conference:** Those who have continued in the conversation regarding the cooperative are getting ready to take it to their congregations for a vote. The conference is feeling the grief and anxiety surrounding the death of Rev. Jaime. I am staying in contact with Ben Hoffman and Rev. Vicki Beilfuss to support as needed.
  - c. **Feeding Ministries:** Rev. Ted Williams is coordinating the information that has been collected so far about congregation feeding ministries and local resources. There were several conversations at synod assembly about feeding ministries and people interested in participating in the hunger team. The action and support this group can provide will be especially important with the unprecedented events increasing food insecurity for more people.
  - d. **Nittany Conference:** I sent a synopsis of the September event to the participants, along with the roster of who attended so they can communicate directly with each other. I will stay in touch and be available for additional support.
  - e. **Grant opportunity:** John Kratz and I completed the application for a CaSTLE subgrant for GTIITM. We will hear before the end of the year.
  - f. **DEM funds:** I have not utilized fully the funds which are sent to the synod for the work of the DEM. I did use some of them this year to send Rev. Regina to the ELCA Works Hunger Leadership Gathering. It is my understanding that these funds are identified in the budget as Mission Support, and that they are folded into the general budget if unused. It would be helpful for me to be able to have a regular report of the funds distribution so I can utilize them better in support of mission in the congregations. I think especially in these times, being able to offer some investment in congregational mission can support the vitality of witness and presence in the community. (052.4051 in budget)
  - g. For the calendar:
    - i. Nov. 4-6: DEM gathering in Chicago
    - ii. Nov. 20-24: Vacation
- d) Pastor John Kratz (Director of Go Tell It In the Mountains)
- a. Goal 1: Ordained and lay preachers will be equipped to utilize traditional and non-traditional techniques including different modes of delivery to develop skills and practices that will communicate the Gospel message in more compelling ways.
    - i. The Large group Cohort began with 25 registrants. 15 from Allegheny, 4 from USS and 6 from NWPA.
    - ii. Our 7 small group format Cohorts started and are now closed groups. Total number of registrations is 27 (9 Allegheny, 2 NWPA, 10 USS, 6 non-identified). Remember there are 7 coaches not counted in this total.
    - iii. Allegheny Synod Lay Ministries Task Force completed stage 1 of their program guide. Two ALWLs have stepped forward to lead this group beginning 1/1/26.
    - iv. We are working on creating a common language model to use when referencing our ALWL ministries throughout our tri-synod area. The second proposal for language affirmation was sent in November. I am working on a draft proposal now.

- v. The Festival of Homiletics for 2026 has been cancelled. I have just recently started looking for digitally accessible options to replace this. Ideas are appreciated.
- b. Goal 2: Aspiring preachers will be recruited and engaged in a variety of compelling preaching strategies that educate, empower, and support competency in their ministry.
  - i. Wartburg has announced its own ALWL program. I am comparing this with ULS and Luther Sem programs. We continue to add trainees to the Faith+Lead program.
  - ii. The preaching training by Bishop Satterlee on November 8th was moved to a zoom only format. There were 21 attendees. ULS has begun working on our spring event. I would like to recommend we connect this work into naturally formed groups within each synod. In other words, request preaching trainings into bishop scheduled events in each synod for rostered leaders and alwl/sams. We would fund the costs and livestream them to other synods. Fees would be charged to the live stream participants.
  - iii. The quarterly pericope training with Dr. Allison DeForest (United Seminary) has 15 registrants for the November event.
  - iv. Continued the development of an online and phone-based app (both android and iPhone) to help connect preachers to pulpits. This app is being launched now in Allegheny Synod. A lay person has stepped forward to be this app administrator.
- c. Goal 3: Existing members of congregations and new community audiences within our 3 Lutheran partner synods will respond to compelling preaching opportunities and content by integrating the gospel message into their attitudes, actions and ministries in daily life.
  - i. “Mission Insite” context awareness reports have been created for all 3 synods. A full mailing which includes Synod specific additions is being sent before Thanksgiving. All the demographic data is digitally stored and will be shared with the DEM/synod office for each synod. Each synod has provided additional materials to be added into this usps all congregation mailing.
  - ii. Three Pilot Sites have been identified, and engagement has begun with the “I Will” text. The three are Faith in Erie, 1st in Warren, and Zion in Williamsburg.
  - iii. The “Ready for Worship” one minute videos concept has been developed and promoted. Clergy have begun to sign up for specific Sundays. The first entry into the storage site has been completed.
- d. OTHER:
  - i. Spent significant time working on the financial reports for the Initiative, the auditor, and refiling with Lilly Endowment. Met with 1st Summit bank reps along with Chairperson Greg Pile to affirm our types of investments and portfolio. See additional finance report attached.
  - ii. I continue to meet monthly with office staff in each of the three synods.
  - iii. I have reached out to Bishop Riegel to begin conversations about inclusion into the Initiative.

- iv. We would like to collect statements or videos of testimonials as to how this ministry has been a blessing. For future meetings, please bring reports in written or video form of people's positive reflections of programs or event held through Go Tell It IN the Mountains Initiative resources.
- v. I continue to recruit through the bishops members for our Listening and Sustainability Task Forces
- e) Pastor MJ Irvin-Stellabotte (Synod Communicator)
  - a. Working diligently to clean up the website regarding outdated information.
  - b. Provided real-time updates for Assembly (92,000 visits) on Facebook and intentionally posting regularly.
  - c. Did press releases after the bishop election
  - d. [AlleghenySynodCommunications@gmail.com](mailto:AlleghenySynodCommunications@gmail.com)
- 2.) Clergy roster status updates
  - a) Deaths of Pastor Donna Wolfinger and Pastor Jamie Olson
- 3.) Congregation status updates
  - a) Mt. Calvary continued work with Reconciliation Team
    - a. Also hosting the Allegheny Synod Bishop Installation on February 7, 2026, at 2:00 pm. Team Lead is Rev. Tyler Graham for the planning of the service and fellowship.
  - b) Christ, Westmont and Moxham, Johnstown forming Living Waters, Johnstown Conference with Rev. Rebecca West.
  - c) Philipsburg/Houtzdale congregations are being supported by Rev. Bob Way and Ben Hoffman following the death of Rev. Jamie Olson.
  - d) Trinity, Confluence has indicated plans to close and have a buyer for the building. The congregation will determine the distribution of the assets.
- 4.) Seminarian updates
  - a) Christy Harford ordination is scheduled for November 29, 2025, at 1:00 pm at St. David's Lutheran Church.
  - b) Steve Koths ordination is scheduled for December 13, 2025, TBA.
  - c) Updated action is required for the dispersing of grants to current students.
    - a. **SC25.09.09 – Motion to distribute \$4360 per active seminarian to be distributed to either the seminary or loan company as determined by each seminarian. Motion made by Tim Albright second by Michele Peese, motion carried.**
    - b. **SC25.10.06 – Motion to amend the previous motion, SC25.09.09, to account for 5 seminarians instead of 6. Distribution will now be in the amount of \$5232 per seminarian to the institution or loan company as determined by each seminarian. Motion Rev. Ralph Hamer, seconded by Michele Peese, motion carried.**
- 5.) First Call Group – November 19-21 at ULS, Gettysburg Campus
- 6.) Conference Deans
  - a) New Deans: Rev. MJ Irvin-Stellabotte with Blair-Huntingdon and Rev. David Pencek with Nittany
- 7.) Portico Benefits
- 8.) Congregational Planning
- D. **Faith Formation** (*Provide lifelong Christian nurturing and development*)
  - 1.) ALWL (Authorized Lay Worship Leader)/GTIITM (Go Tell It IN the Mountains) – gathering quarterly to build and strengthen relationships. Working with Faith Lead out of Luther Seminary.

- 2.) Faith Formation Team
- 3.) Kindling Faith (ULS) – also working with GTIITM to provide more continuing education events.
- 4.) Lutheran Letter
- 5.) Allegheny Synod Website
- 6.) Pericope and Continuing Education for Rostered and Lay Leaders
  - a) GTIITM has been forming cohorts for preachers (lay and rostered)
  - b) ALSM hosts pericope studies
  - c) Zeteo Preaching + Worship – curated resources for preachers – large database to be utilized, still being worked on
- 7.) Tend Podcast is ongoing

**E. Planning and Resources** (*Provide strategic planning and resources to guide the Synod*)

- 1.) Transition Team – well done and much appreciated
- 2.) Committee Personnel Needs/Appointments
  - a. Reaching out to those indicating interest in serving on various synod committees.
  - b. Possibility of Mutual Ministry or Staff Support – the Bishop-elect desires an annual review, who will run the review? Executive Committee, separate committee/team that includes council members and/or others.
- 3.) Bishop-elect Installation Service: February 7<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 pm at Mt. Calvary, Johnstown
- 4.) Congregation Vitality and Innovation Grants
- 5.) Additional items for future meeting
  - a) Develop policy manual for Synod Council Members, standard operation procedures (SOP)
  - b) Develop policies/guidelines for use of synod funds: potential committee members – Rev Ralph Hamer and Rev. MJ Irvin-Stellabotte
    - a. Rev. Ralph Hamer (Chair), Traci Naugle, Rev. MJ Irvin-Stellabotte, Rev. Nathan Pile
  - c) Region 8 Archives annual fee of \$5000.00 to United Lutheran Seminary
    - a. Bishop Barb Collins will investigate further.

7. Upcoming Events:

- A. Synod Assembly June 20, 2026 – one day assembly

8. Adjournment

- A. Interim Bishop Barb Collins called the meeting to a close at 12:05 pm.

**Next Meeting:** January 17, 2026; Devotions by Rev. Ralph Hamer.

Tentative dates for 2026 March 21, May 16, July 17-18, Sept 19, Nov 21

Synod Council members in attendance... 16 of 17

- Executive Committee (*3-ordained, 2-lay*) (election year)
  - Bishop Barb Collins (Interim) – present
  - VP Ann Ferry (2021) – present (Zoom)
  - Secretary Rev. Becky Horn (2024) – present
  - Treasurer Paula Nihoff (2024) – present (Zoom)
  - Member at Large Rev. Nancy Hoover (2024) – absent
- Council Members (*4-ordained, 5-lay*)
  - Timothy Albright (2023) – present (Zoom)
  - Rev. Tyler Graham (2024) – present (Zoom)
  - Rev. Ralph Hamer (2023) – present
  - Manetta Horn (2025, Youth) – present

- Rev. Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte (2024) – present
- Gretel Kaltenbaugh (2025) – present
- Terry Koch (2024) – present
- Burton Peese (2025, Young Adult) – present
- Michele Peese (2023) – present
- Rev. Nathan Pile (2025) – present (Zoom)
- Margaret (Peggy) Thatcher (2024) – present
- Kenneth Weschler (2025) – present (Zoom)
- Synod Staff
  - Assistant to the Bishop (Bishop-elect) Rev. Kevin Shock – present
  - Director of Evangelical Mission Sue Ellen Spotts – present (Zoom)
- Guests

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Rebecca L. Horn  
Allegheny Synod Council Secretary