

SYNOD COUNCIL, Minutes
July 19, 2025

MISSION: *Inviting people to love each other.*

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

SYNOD COUNCIL Meeting Minutes July 19, 2025, in Somerset at Camp Sequanota
Bowersox Center for weekend retreat

1. Call to order

- a. VP Ann called meeting to order around 9:13am

2. Devotions

- a. Lead by Peggy Thatcher with each council member receiving a card with a bible verse, a quote. We each took turns reading our card. Closed out devotions with a small group discussion and prayer. Devotions were purchased as a kit from Etsy for another program

3. 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. Motion to adopt the July 19, 2025 agenda – attached document.
- B. Motion to approve the minutes of May 17, 2025 meeting – attached document
- C. Motion to approve and accept with regret the votes of St. Peter, Luthersburg and St. John, Rockton, which took place on June 22, 2025, to disaffiliate from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and therefore from the Allegheny Synod, and join the North American Lutheran Church.
- D. Motion to accept the dissolution of the Salisbury Parish (Christ, Grantsville; Greenville Evangelical, Greenville; and St. John, Salisbury) which was positively acted upon by all three congregation, effective June 30, 2025.

SC25.07.01 – Motion to adopt and approve the Consent Agenda as presented, motion by Timothy Albright, second by Pr. Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte, motion carried.

4. Ministry Updates

A. Treasurer's Report and Financial Management *(Provide financial planning and resources to guide the Synod)*

1.) Balance sheet and Income

- a. The balance sheet was presented, no questions
- b. The income statement – pointed that on income
 - i. We are \$20,000 below Mission support to budget
 - ii. We are \$20,000 ahead of interest income
 - iii. Reminded that the unrealized loss is only if an investment is redeemed
 - iv. We received \$10,000 for DEM support from churchwide, budgeted \$8,000

- v. Total revenue is \$8,000 above budget (includes the unrealized loss)
 - c. On expenses
 - i. We are below budget for mission support
 - ii. We are over budget on rent, but that is possibly a timing issue, still paying much less at our new office
 - iii. Council is to set a committee to determine how the Leadership account is to be used. Committee may include Ralph, MJ, and the bishop of Upper Susquehanna
 - 1. **SC25.07.02** – MOTION made that anything related to medical, sabbatical, paternal leave will come out of health and wellness; anything related to continuing education, lifelong learning will come out of Leadership Budget which is for both Lay and Worship Leaders with policy being written in the near future. Motion made by Pastor Ralph Hamer and seconded by Terry Koch, motion carried.
 - d. Our net income of income and expenses is negative \$85,010 however that includes all the GTIITM expenses of \$115,000. True net income is \$30,616. Explained that each month Paula transfers at 1st summit Bank out of the Lilly investment to the Synod's checking account to cover their monthly expense that was paid out of the Synod's checking account.
- 2.) Budget
- 3.) Mission Investment Fund update
- 4.) Financial Management – support of rostered and lay leaders training/cont'd
- a. The cash position report was reviewed. Paula was directed to figure out where the dedicated account for undesignated income came from and if we can use it as the council sees fit. Also to see if the Health/Wellness of Rostered leader account can be used for medical or sabbatical or personal leave. There is to be a policy written to spell out how dedicated monies are to be spent.
 - b. The Lilly monthly expense report was presented. Paula is going to see if she can use the spreadsheet that Pastor John uses to make it easier for him. Pastor John must report to Lilly how the funds are spent.
- 5.) Startzel Estate – Task Force update
- Committee wanted to see if it was okay to grant approval for funds that have been requested prior to the original set up of after the Assembly. Deadline for applications is October 31, 2025. Question was raised if grant applications came in higher then the amount of grant could funds come out of vitality and innovation grant monies. Request to add Peggy Thatcher to the committee. Committee will move forward to approving grant applications and distributing monies.

6.) Finance Committee Meeting update

- a. With email approval from full council, change our insurance carrier from Church Mutual to Brotherhood Mutual. Brad from Brotherhood was a very conscientious agent and helped immensely.
- b. The Bishop's Discretionary account has been moved to 1st Summit to make it more convenient for the bishop. Also, there will be no monthly maintenance charge.

7.) Investment Committee update

- a. Paula is still getting an investment committee together

8.) Update on consolidating multiple financial institutions to one main bank

- a. Paula has met with Dom Cagliuso from 1st Summit and moved investments to more conservative areas. Reducing risk.

9.) Treasurer's Report and Financial Management (*Provide financial planning and resources to guide the Synod*)

- The bishop had asked for direction on any support for Rostered leaders for continuing education. This will also be included with the need for a written policy. It was decided that, for this one case, she is to offer up to \$1,500 to the request as a maximum. However, if the person was not looking for that much, a lower amount would be given.

SC25.07.03 – MOTION made by Pastor Ralph Hamer for Bishop to reach out to pastor who made the request for funds to cover preaching course with offer up to \$1,500.00, seconded by Pastor Tyler Graham, motion carried.

SC25.07.04 – MOTION made by Pastor Ralph Hamer for a policy be established for leadership funds on how monies will be distributed in the future, seconded by Pastor Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte, motion carried.

SC25.07.05 – Amendment to the motion SC25.07.04 made by Pastor Ralph Hamer to say Policy will be set by the Synod Council to create a task force to write policy for leadership line money, dedicated health and wellness for rostered leaders' monies, and vitality and innovation grant monies, seconded by Pastor Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte, motion carried.

- A letter was received from United Lutheran seminary regarding an annual amount of \$5,000 to be paid in support of the Region 8 Archives. This amount will help to offset the additional salary needed for an additional staff position. Bishop is going to contact the writers of the letter to speak and then fill Council in at next meeting to get some further explanation and decide then if we would like to contribute.

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 – worshiped with: Christ, Buffalo Mills (baptism and confirmations); St. Paul, Pine Grove Mills (x2); Salem, Aaronsburg; St. Johns, Millheim; St. Davids, Davidsville (Bp. Pile's 50th); ALSM, Hollidaysburg
 - b. Pastor Kevin Shock – St. Paul's Mundy's Corner (x2); St. John Summerhill; St. Paul Pine Grove Mills; St. Mark Syndertown leadership; Salem Aaronsburg, St. John Millheim
- 2.) Support partners and their ministries

- ALSM

Partnering with grant to another clergy presentation with Gettysburg coming out in August

- Camp Sequanota

Golf Benefit:

Information was distributed to members of council to take back to congregations in their area; Need participants and helping hands; Bishop Barb raised the question has council ever sponsored a hole for the golf benefit. The cost to sponsor is \$150.00.

SC25.07.06 – Motion that Synod Council Sponsor a hole for Camp Sequanota Golf Tournament made by Pastor Tyler Grahm and Seconded by Paula Nihoff, motion carried.

Tend Festival:

Planning committee, all went well and will continue to grow. Festival provides for those who are not engaged in congregational life, not onboard with institutional faith and allows them to engage in a way that gives them a feel of a community.

Bishop Barb sends kudos to Camp for the hospitality that has been shown: hosting retreats for the Synod Council, Bishops Convo, and even overnights as needed.

- Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State
- KELC
- LAMPa
- Grace Delivered
- United Lutheran Seminary
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service/Global Refuge
- The ELCA Foundation

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

Gatherings: ALWL, Pericope Event, Clearfield Conference Gathering, TEND event at Sequanota, dinner church at Horner Lutheran, ER visit for Spangler family.

Meetings: ALSM Executive Board, Assembly planning/worship X3, Blair-Huntingdon Conference mtg. and lunch, Nittany Conference mtg. and lunch, Candidacy Committee X2, LAMPa zoom, Deans x2, Go Tell It, Lutheran Letter zoom, Reconciliation Committee, Staff meeting, Transition Team x2, Bishops Election zoom with Churchwide staff, meeting with Josh Spangler and Laurel Highlands congregations, joint council meeting with Pr. Tyler, Greenville and Salisbury (Living Waters Parish), and Brainstorming workday with Pr. Kevin.

Visits/calls with: 8/10 lay; 5/14 rostered

b. Pastor Kevin Shock (A2B)

Gatherings: Clearfield Conference; Tend Festival at Sequanota

Meetings: Internship Cluster; Tend Festival Planning (x3); Finance Committee; Lutheran Letter; Staff Meeting (x2); Deans Meeting (x2); Brainstorming Workday with Bp. Barbara; Reconciliation Team; Good Shepherd Windber Call Committee; First Call Theological Education Conference Planning; Candidacy Committee; Clearfield Conference Strategy with Sue Ellen; Eucharistic Visitation Instruction at Zion Boalsburg; Candidacy Exec. with Seminary Reps; Synod Assembly Worship Planning; Assembly Committee; ongoing Podcast recording
Visits/calls: 0/1 lay; 4/2 rostered

c. Sue Ellen Spotts (DEM)

Has been invited to all meetings, dean's meetings and staff meetings

d. Pr. John Kratz (Director of Go Tell It)

Evaluation has been done and was given a successful rating. Has done a great job and only been here for a year. Is currently covering ¼ in Williamsburg and maintaining responsibilities as Director.

Lay worship leader program is up and running successfully, folks can sign up for free courses, just need to reach out to John to get added to the site.

Has been invited to all meetings, dean's meetings and staff meetings.

2.) Clergy roster status updates

Pr. Jaime Olson called to First Faith Lutheran Co-op 2/3 time; leaves OLFC status.

Will be installed on August 3rd, 23rd year of ordination

3.) Congregation status updates

Mt. Calvary working with Reconciliation Team

Five Clearfield congregations working toward co-op model

First Faith Lutheran Co-op called Pr. Jaime Olson 2/3 time

St. John Clearfield covenanting with Pr. Jaime Olson as 1/3 time Interim
Luthersburg-Rockton disaffiliated

Letters are ready to be sent out on Monday, July 21, 2025

Good Shepherd Windber MSP active

Honor exploring shared pastoral leadership with Amity UCC

Salisbury Lutheran Parish formally dissolved June 30

Graef's first vote to disaffiliate passed

Discussion on upcoming disaffiliating on Sunday, July 19th, Bishop Barb will be in attendance

NOTE: Cross denominations for serving are not appropriate and will not be allowed. It is okay for another synod to send in worship leaders to preach, and those conversations have been happening among the bishops.

Good News: Greensburg and Salisbury Lutheran have separated from Grantville and will be developing a new congregation. Timothy Albright will be going on July 27th to oversee the vote and development of the new congregation. New name will be Living Waters and Pastor Tyler Graham will be called as the pastor to serve.

4.) Seminarian updates

Vicars Christy Harford and Steve Koch are preparing for approval

Vicar Claudia Plows is preparing for endorsement

Can the Rostered Ministers get a list of those seminarians, include who they are and where they are.

5.) First Call Group

a. *Possibility of two more joining the first call group*

b. *Currently includes Pr. Regina Holiday, Pr. Alan Stump, and Pr. Laura Waltermire*

6.) Conference Deans

7.) Portico Benefits

a. *Coming down the line waiting for Churchwide.*

b. *Pastor Kevin has lined up Tara Lynn to come to Bishop Convo for discussion*

8.) Congregational Planning

a. *Question was raised, does this update come in the DEM report or is this more about events coming up in congregations? No decision was made on this question.*

D. Faith Formation *(Provide lifelong Christian nurturing and development)*

1.) ALWL/GTIITM (Authorized Lay Worship Leaders/Go Tell It In The Mountain)

a. *Has taken over for IGNITE*

b. *Website needs to be changed and updated*

2.) Faith Formation Team

3.) Kindling Faith (United Lutheran Seminary)

4.) Lutheran Letter

a. *Always looking for pictures from across the Synod*

b. *Send pictures to Rickn Kazmer*

5.) Allegheny Synod Website

6.) Pericope and Continuing Education for Rostered and Lay Leaders

NOTE: For future add names along with Abbreviations for those who might not have context of what ALWL/GTIITM stands for, etc.

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

1.) Transition Team

- a. Asked one final question to those of the Synod: What is your HOPE for the Allegheny Synod
- b. Created an email address: SynodtransitionTeam@gmail.com
- c. Have invited people to share their voice
- d. Pre-Identification Submission, by August 15, will be requested to submit BIO information
- e. Preparing for Conference Meetings in September, meetings will be at 7:00pm.

2.) Committee Personnel Needs/Appointments

Review synod council terms of office to ensure election slate is correct

3.) Congregation Vitality and Innovation Grants

4.) Synod Assembly: October 31 and November 1, 2025

Offerings designated for LDR for Flooding/Lutheran Campus Ministry PSU

5.) Additional items for future meeting

- a. Develop policy manual for Synod Council Members
- b. Further information for Synod Council Members to share if they visit other congregations

Bullet points for speaking on: Introduce yourself, gearing up for Assembly, voting members, if concerns in congregations are finances reach out to the Office of the Bishop for support, talk about the additional question for What is your Hope for the Allegheny Synod; any questions for me to take back to the Office of the Bishop.

Creating a document must be more than bullet points, might be more than council needs going out to speak. With Council getting out into congregations it gives a face to what is happening across the synod.

Upcoming Events:

July 28-August 2 – Churchwide Assembly

August 24 – Synod Day at the Curve

September 15-17 – bishop's Convocation at Sequanota

September 18 – Johnstown/Laurel Highlands Fall Conference Meeting

September 22 – Clearfield Fall conference Meeting

September 23 – Nittany Fall Conference Meeting

September 24 – Blair-Huntingdon Fall conference Meeting

September 25 – Bedford Fall conference Meeting

October 31/November 1 – Synod assembly

Next Meeting: September 20, 2025

Meeting adjourned at 12:04pm

Synod Council Members in attendance... 10 of 13

- Executive Committee (3-ordained, 2-lay) (election year)
 - Bishop Barb Collins (Interim) – present
 - VP Ann Ferry (2021) – present
 - Secretary Pr. Becky Horn (2024) – absent
 - Treasure Paula Nihoff (2024) – present
 - Member at Large Pr. Nancy Hoover (2024) – absent
- Council Members (3-ordained, 5-lay)
 - Timothy Albright (2023) – present
 - Pr. Tyler Graham (2024) – present
 - Pr. Ralph Hamer (2023) – present
 - Pr. Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte (2024) – present
 - Terry Koch (2024) – present
 - Joyce Long (2022) – absent
 - Michele Peese (2023) – present
 - Margaret (Peggy) Thatcher (2024) – present
 - Vacancies
 - 2 lay male
 - 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 – absent
- Guests
 - None

Respectfully submitted,

Michele Peese

Allegheny Synod Council Member for Rev. Rebecca L. Horn, Allegheny Synod Council
Secretary