



Allegheny Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

916 Hickory Street, 1st 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 September 20, 2025, in Hollidaysburg and on Zoom

1. The meeting was called to order by VP Ann Ferry at 9:01 am.
2. Devotions – Pr. Ralph Hamer offered a reflection and a prayer on how we deny Jesus when we do not follow his loving ways and instead exclude.
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 September 20, 2025 agenda.
 - B. Motion to approve the minutes of the July 19, 2025 meeting
 - C. Motion to accept the formation of the Living Waters Parish (Greenville Evangelical, Meyersdale and St. John, Salisbury) and their extended call to Pr. Tyler Graham.
 - D. **SC25.09.01 – Motion to adopt and approve the Consent Agenda as presented, motion made by Pr. Tyler Graham, second by Tim Albright, motion carried.**
4. Mission Conversation
 - A. Churchwide Assembly actions and constitutional changes
 - 1.) Working on gathering a team for the Constitutional Committee.
 - 2.) Installation of Allegheny Synod Bishop will be February 7, 2026.
 - a) Size of sanctuary, handicap accessible, parking considerations, easy to find, and a congregation that is willing to host since it puts a lot on the congregation as a whole – one who will welcome the team that is planning to help.
 - b) Luncheon before, service, fellowship following – not necessarily a sit-down meal so that it is easier to mingle.
 - c) Mt. Calvary, Johnstown – has parking, space, easy access from the highway, has an airport that goes to Chicago, plenty of hotels in the area for those who want to stay the night before
 - d) Grace, State College – parking could be an issue
 - e) More discussion to follow regarding options
 - 3.) Perhaps put a reminder to have a budget-line-item for transition (probably next time)
 - B. Gaza
 - 1.) At churchwide heard from the Bishop from Jordan, and Justice for Palestine – could we do something synod-wide for support of Gaza; ELCA Sumud
 - a) “Fast” for Gaza – instead of lunch/coffee/etc. set aside and give to Sumud or LDR, Middle East Crisis
 - b) Do it during Thanksgiving – possible since we have time to announce during Assembly
 - c) Check with ELCA regarding programs
 - d) Fasting, Prayer and Alms giving from Thanksgiving through Christmas (Birth of Christ)
 - e) Could make this an annual event to support other places
 - f) This is also an educational opportunity – justice for all, only 1% of Lutherans in Palestine

- g) Need to assign/appoint someone to run the team for this – Ann Ferry, Pr. Kevin Shock will discuss and work on a plan

5. Ministry Updates

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

1.) Balance Sheet and Income (see submitted reports)

- a) \$3.4 million total; about \$2 million is designated
- b) Establish a dedicated account for Pr. Startzel's money
 - a. We have received a few grant applications, three checks have been sent out so far, other applications have been received since the first distribution.

2.) Budget (see submitted reports)

- a) **SC25.09.02 – Motion to approve the Budget with the changes noted below, motion made by Paula Nihoff, second by Tim Albright, motion carried.**
 - a. Increase support for Penn State Campus Ministry of \$5000 to \$17,000 for 2026-2027. Continue to increase by \$5000 each year until we can at least double the current giving of \$1200.
 - b. Increase ALSM to \$10,000
 - c. Increase support to ULS to \$15,000
 - d. Increase support to LAMPa to \$3000
- b) **SC25.09.03 – Motion to affirm the formula to determine the Defined Compensation of the Bishop, motion made by Pr. Becky Horn second by Michele Peese, motion carried.**

a. FORMULA

- i. **(Base Salary from Compensation & Benefit Guideline) + (# of years ordained * \$500) = X**
- ii. **Then X * 1.2 = Bishop Premium**
- iii. **Then Bishop Premium + Social Security Offset (Bishop Premium * .0765) = Defined Compensation**

c) Discussion regarding the algorithm for the Office of the Bishop

- a. **FORMULA:** Synod Compensation and Benefit Guidelines provides the base salary for rostered leaders. We use the base salary plus the years of rostered ministry of \$500/year added together. This number has a 20% premium. Once this number is known, the Social Security offset is determined and added into the determined base salary. This results in the defined compensation.
 - b. **(Base Salary from Compensation & Benefit Guideline) + (# of years ordained * \$500) = X**
 - c. **Then X * 1.2 = Bishop Premium**
 - d. **Then Bishop Premium + Social Security Offset (Bishop Premium * .0765) = Defined Compensation**
 - e. Grid from ordained year of 1980 – present
- 3.) Synod Communicator – was 10 hr/week – this used to be a position, is it still in the budget - no? If not, could we add it in.
- a) **SC25.09.04 – Motion to reinvest in the position of Synod Communicator for 10 hours per week at the same rate of contracted vacancy pastor (\$30/hr). Position to start on October 1, 2025. Motion made by Bishop Barb Collins, second by Terry Koch, motion carried.**
 - b) **SC25.09.05 – Motion to offer the position of Synod Communicator to Pr. MJ Irvin-Stellabotte, motion made by Bishop Barb Collins, seconded by Paula Nihoff, motion carried.**

- 4.) **SC25.09.06** – Motion to amend the previously approved Budget for 2026-2027 (SC25.02) to now include the position of Synod Communicator, motion made by Pr. Ralph Hamer, seconded by Terry Koch, motion carried.
 - 5.) **SC25.09.07** – Motion for all checks to require two signatures. Signers are the Bishop, the Assistant to the Bishop, the Vice President, and the Treasurer, all from the Allegheny Synod. If using a facsimile signature, an email approval must be received for the specific use, motion made by Tim Albright, seconded by Pr. Tyler Graham, motion carried.
 - 6.) Received communication from Beer Ream Co
 - a) See attached.
 - 7.) Mission Investment Fund update
 - 8.) Financial Management – support of rostered and lay leaders training/continuing education
 - 9.) Finance Committee Meeting update – no meeting held
 - 10.) Investment Committee update
 - 11.) Portico guidelines for congregations – discussion, recommendation
 - a) **SC25.09.08** – Motion for the Compensation & Benefit Guideline to be amended to recommend that congregations sponsor one of the two plans at the \$2000 deductible range from Portico Benefits. We encourage congregations to discuss the most appropriate health plan for the congregation and the plan members annually. Motion made by Pr. Tyler Graham, seconded by Pr. MJ Irvin-Stellabotte, motion carried.
- 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: Graef’s; St. Mark, Snyderstown 200th; Faith/First for Pr. Olson Ordination Anniversary and Installation; Trinity, Somerset; Zion, Boalsburg 200th; Living Waters joint service and Pr. Graham’s Installation; outdoor worship with St. Matthew, Martinsburg.
 - b) Pastor Kevin Shock – led worship at St. Paul Pine Grove Mills (x2); Trinity, Somerset; St. Paul’s Mundy’s Corner (x2); St. John, Summerhill; Mt. Zion, Glasgow (4 adult baptisms); Christ, Westmont; Moxham
 - 2.) Support partners and their ministries
 - a) ALSM
 - b) Camp Sequanota
 - c) Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State
 - d) KELC
 - e) LAMPa
 - f) Grace Delivered – being discussed in the Laurel Highlands conference
 - g) United Lutheran Seminary
 - h) Global Refuge
 - i) 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 Barb Collins
 - a. Gatherings: 200th Anniversary of St. Mark, Snyderstown, dinner celebration; virtually sat in on Churchwide Assembly plenary sessions

- and worship services; Synod Day at the Curve; Bishop's Convocation at Sequanota
- b. Meetings: Consultation with Graef's, Anne Whitney, Amity UCC w/Pr. Holliday, ALSM Board, Lutheran Letter, Marianne Brock, Plows Endorsement, Harford CAP, Koths CAP, Staff (x2), Deans' (x3), Christy Harford, Transition Team, Harford Approval, Koths Approval, Sequanota Board, GTIITM (x2), Region 8 Assignment, Cindy Doherty, Assembly Planning (x2), Josh Spangler, Johnstown/Laurel Highlands Conference Assembly
- c. Visits/calls: 5/10 lay; 7/9 rostered
- b) Pastor Kevin Shock (A2B)
 - a. Gatherings: St. Mark Snyderstown 200th Anniversary Dinner; Synod Day at the Curve; Bishop's Convocation at Sequanota
 - b. Meetings: Candidacy w/ Bishop and A. Whitney; pre-CWA Virtual Hearings and Bible Studies; Churchwide Assembly; C. Plows Endorsement Panel; C. Harford CAP; S. Koths CAP; Staff Meeting (x2); Deans Meeting (x2); Candidacy Committee; Deans Resolution Draft Meeting; Reconciliation Team; FCTE Conference Planning; Portico Webinar; Internship Supervision; Assembly Committee; Assembly Worship Planning (x2); J. Spangler Candidacy Consultation;
 - c. Visits/calls: 1/- lay; 3/4 rostered
- c) Sue Ellen Spotts (DEM) – written report from August 2025:
 - a. **Laurel Mountain Lutherans:** Josh Spangler is working on completing his CPE and internship. I continue to stay in touch as needed.
 - b. **Clearfield Conference:** The draft covenant is in process. The five congregation councils will be meeting on 9/27 for a workshop to get through the agreement, allow the individual councils to caucus, and have each congregation council conduct a vote to recommend to their congregation by the end of the day. Ben Hoffman has taken primary leadership in this. I am staying in contact with Ben and Pr. Vicki Beilfuss to support as needed.
 - c. **Feeding Ministries:** Hunger Team met August 28 on Zoom. Eight people from across the synod attended. They will be collecting information and stories from across the synod on what ministries are in place and what the needs are. We will be using bishop's convocation, conference meetings, and synod assembly to share and collect information.
 - d. **Nittany Conference:** The Mission Vitality Workshop has 17 people registered so far, with representation from each of the congregations invited. (Aaronsburg, Millheim, Boalsburg, Centre Hall, Pleasant Gap, Brush Valley, and Spring Mills.) The event will have time for individual congregations to discuss their mission, and for the area congregations to consider ways they might support or collaborate with each other.
 - e. **Grant opportunity:** There is another opportunity to apply for a one-year CaSTLE grant. If there are some opportunities for enriching our lay worship leaders and/or their supervisors, or for developing ecumenical collaborations, I am willing to guide the application process.
 - f. For the calendar
 - i. Oct. 2-9: vacation
 - ii. Nov. 4-6: DEM gathering in Chicago
 - iii. Nov. 20-24: vacation

- d) Pastor John Kratz (Director of Go Tell It In the Mountains) – Has provided an information sheet for the Conference Assemblies.
- 2.) Clergy roster status updates
 - a) Pr. Tyler Graham called to Living Waters Parish, began July 1, 2025
 - b) Pr. Jeff Bassette removed from ELCA roster
- 3.) Congregation status updates
 - a) Mt. Calvary working with Reconciliation Team
 - b) Horner working on shared pastoral leadership with Amity UCC – 5-month contract that started September 7, 2025.
- 4.) Seminararian updates
 - a) Vicars Christy Harford and Steve Koths approved for ordination
 - a. Benscreek and First, Johnstown have begun the conversations about what the process and requirements to call Christy Harford as pastor.
 - i. Benscreek will be the calling congregation, First, Johnstown would have voice at the meeting for call. First Johnstown will affirm the covenant to work with Benscreek.
 - b. Steve Koths would like to remain at Shilo, but will need to be issued a call as pastor from Shilo.
 - b) Vicar Claudia Plows positively endorsed
 - c) Two people are engaging the Candidacy process. One could be M. Div, the other Team.
 - d) The balance of the Seminararian Support Fund $\$523,214.96 \times .05 = 26160/6$ seminararians = \$4360 per active seminararian
 - e) **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.**
- 5.) First Call Group – November 19-21 at ULS, Gettysburg Campus
- 6.) Conference Deans
 - a) **SC25.09.10 – Motion to recommend the Conference of Deans Resolution, “Resolution to Continue the Collaborative Work of the Allegheny Synod Begun During the 24-25 Transition,” to the Allegheny Synod Assembly on October 31-November 1, 2025 as presented along with the Synod Council to affirm and endorse as a partner to the Resolution, motion made by Pr. Ralph Hamer, second by Pr. Becky Horn, motion carried.**
 - a. Synod Council Members names will be added to the Resolution
- 7.) Portico Benefits
- 8.) Congregational Planning
 - a) Meeting is occurring this morning in the Nittany Conference with Sue Ellen Spotts, DEM.

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

- 1.) ALWL (Authorized Lay Worship Leader)/GTIITM (Go Tell It IN the Mountains)
- 2.) Faith Formation Team
- 3.) Kindling Faith (ULS)
- 4.) Lutheran Letter
- 5.) Allegheny Synod Website
- 6.) Pericope and Continuing Education for Rostered and Lay Leaders
 - a) The next Dr. Deforest is November 4th
 - b) October 21st is a free continuing education even dealing with grief and bereavement in care.
 - c) Bishop Craig Satterlee November 8th at Juniata College

- d) Mandated Reporter Training offered either Nov 5th or 17th
- 7.) Tend Podcast is ongoing
- E. **Planning and Resources** (*Provide strategic planning and resources to guide the Synod*)
 - 1.) Transition Team
 - a) Preparations for bishop election process
 - a. Need to determine the final questions for the Assembly
 - b) 5 Rostered leaders were raised up
 - c) Planning for Bishop-elect Transition
 - a. Need to determine where the Installation will be on February 7, 2026
 - b. Reminder to care for the person in the transition with support for moving, etc.
 - 2.) Committee Personnel Needs/Appointments
 - a) Nominations are still needed for open positions.
 - a. Need all, but the following do not have any nominations,
 - i. Synod Council – 1 lay male and 1 lay female,
 - ii. Discipline – 3 rostered, 2 lay
 - b) Received nominations for:
 - a. VP – Ann Ferry
 - b. Rostered Synod Council – Regina Holiday
 - c. Youth – Netta Horn
 - d. Young Adult – Burton Peese
 - e. Consultation – Terry Koch, Pr. Rebecca West
 - f. Discipline – Traci Naugle, Peggy Thatcher
 - 3.) Synod Assembly October 31 and November 1, 2025
 - a) Offerings designated for LDR for flooding and Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State
 - b) ELCA Churchwide Representative is to be Treasurer Lori Fedyk
 - c) **SC25.09.11 – Motion to affirm the formula to determine the number of voting representatives from each congregation to be sent to the Allegheny Synod Assembly, motion made by Terry Koch, second by Michele Peese, motion carried.**
 - a. Formula is as follows:
 - i. Using the 2024 Congregation Report to the ELCA
 - 1. Congregations up to 499 baptized members – 2 voting members (one female, one male)
 - 2. Congregations 500-899 baptized members – three voting members (one female, one male, and one either male or female)
 - 3. 900 or more baptized members – four voting members (two female, two male)
 - ii. In addition, each congregation may elect one additional voting member who is a youth or young adult at the time of the election and one additional voting member who is a person of color or person whose primary language is other than English.
 - iii. Each congregation is strongly encouraged to have equal representation of female and male voting members.
 - d) Next Assembly is scheduled for June 20, 2026 at the Blair County Convention Center.
 - 4.) Congregation Vitality and Innovation Grants
 - 5.) Additional items for future meeting
 - a) Develop policy manual for Synod Council Members

- b) Develop policies/guidelines for use of synod funds: potential committee members – Pr. Ralph Hamer and Pr. MJ Irvin-Stellabotte
 - c) Region 8 Archives annual fee of \$5000.00 to United Lutheran Seminary
 - a. Bishop Barb Collins will look into this further.
- 6. Upcoming Events:
 - A. September 22 – Clearfield Conference Assembly, St. John's, 7:00 pm
 - B. September 23 – Nittany Conference Assembly, New Hope, 7:00 pm
 - C. September 24 – Blair-Huntingdon Conference Assembly, Hollidaysburg Home, 7:00 pm
 - D. September 25 – Bedford Conference Assembly, St. Peter's, 7:00 pm
 - E. October 31/November 1 – 37th Allegheny Synod Assembly
- 7. Adjournment
 - A. VP Ann Ferry called the meeting to a close at 12:20 pm.

Will need to take the following action via email once the document is ready:

- 8. **SC25.09. – Motion to recommend and send the Rules and Procedures for the Synod Assembly to the 37th Assembly of the Allegheny Synod, motion made by _____, second by _____, motion carried.**

Next Meeting: November 15, 2025; Devotions by _____

Synod Council members in attendance... 13 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) – present
 - Treasurer Paula Nihoff (2024) – present (Zoom)
 - Member at Large Pr. Nancy Hoover (2024) – present (Zoom)
- Council Members (*3-ordained, 5-lay*)
 - Timothy Albright (2023) – present (Zoom)
 - Pr. Tyler Graham (2024) – present
 - Pr. Ralph Hamer (2023) – present
 - Pr. Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte (2024) – present
 - Terry Koch (2024) – present
 - Joyce Long (2022) – present
 - 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 – present
- Guests

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

September 15, 2025

To the Council Members
Allegheny Synod ELCA
916 Hickory Street
Hollidaysburg, PA 16648

We are engaged to audit the financial statements of Allegheny Synod ELCA for the year ended January 31, 2025. Professional standards require that we provide you with the following information related to the risk assessment and planning for your audit. We can be available to meet with you to discuss this information further if you would prefer.

Significant risks, which include fraud risks, are those risks that we believe require special audit consideration because of the nature of the risk or the likelihood and potential magnitude (including quantitative and qualitative considerations) of related misstatements. When considering if an identified risk is a significant risk, we consider (1) significant economic, accounting, or other developments needing specific attention; (2) complex transactions; (3) significant related-party transactions; (4) measurements that are subjective or uncertain, especially estimates with a high degree of uncertainty; or (5) significant unusual transactions.

We have identified the following significant risk(s) of material misstatement as part of our audit planning:

- Improper revenue recognition
- Grant compliance
- Management override of controls

This information is intended solely for the use of the Synod Council and management of Allegheny Synod ELCA and is not intended to be, and should not be, used by anyone other than these specified parties.

Sincerely,
Beer Ream Co.

Kyla L Pritts CPA