



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.*

SCE24.12.01 – Motion to accept the Stuckey Subaru estimate for the sale of the Allegheny Synod car, a 2018 Subaru Forester, of \$13,900 if able to sell before the end of December 2024 or the estimate of \$13,500 if selling in 2025. Motion made by Pastor Becky Horn, seconded by Paula Nihoff, motion carried.

Bill Nihoff was given permission to facilitate the sale on behalf of the Office of the Bishop.

SYNOD COUNCIL Meeting Minutes January 18, 2025, Zoom only

1. The meeting was called to order by VP Ann Ferry at 9:01 am.
2. Devotions – Pr. Ralph Hamer
 - A. Changing water into wine – when God acts and something ordinary becomes something amazing/extraordinary.
 - B. Residents collected hats, gloves, etc. for others in need. Didn't know what to expect and at the end of the collection it far exceeded expectations.
 - C. When it is better than anything ever expected... we can easily overlook how much the simple and ordinary really can be a miracle in our lives.
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 January 18, 2025 agenda.
 - B. Motion to approval the minutes of November 16, 2024 meeting – attached document
 - C. Motion to accept, with regret, Austin Beirlair's resignation from Synod Council, effective December 31, 2024 (His decision is for self-care and potential move out of the state.)
 - D. Motion to approve the transfer of Pr. Paula Lebo from the Allegheny Synod's roster of Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament to the South Eastern PA Synod's roster.
 - E. **SCE25.01.01** – Motion to adopt and approve the Consent Agenda as presented, motion by Pastor Tyler Graham, second by Pastor Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte, motion carried.
4. Mission/Vision/Values discussion
 - A. What gifts/abilities do we feel are needed in a person serving as the synod's Bishop?
 - 1.) Even-tempered and not get easily thrown off
 - 2.) Willing to play-well with others regardless of history
 - 3.) A people person who can provide the care necessary to support the needs of the rostered and lay leaders
 - 4.) A listener
 - 5.) Accepts diversity including women, lgbtqia+, etc.
 - 6.) Collegial
 - 7.) Open minded – willing to learn new things
 - 8.) Diplomatic – don't criticize or come to judgment too quickly
 - 9.) In charge but also

- 10.) Spiritually grounded
- 11.) Discerning and resourceful – no one has all the answers, but we utilize the knowledge and ability of others
- 12.) Good communicator
- 13.) Able to pass the vision and empower others to do the work of ministry
- 14.) Able to delegate
- 15.) Thick skin – not easily offended, keep smiling
- 16.) Theologically grounded – Lutheran
- 17.) Is there a difference of what we need in this Synod and if the Bishop is the one that should fulfill what we need...
 - a) Bishop as pastors' pastor and also ELCA representative
- 18.) Organizer who can distinguish and fulfill the roles
- 19.) People person
- 20.) At least one person in the office must be a good administrator in the office
- 21.) Someone who is aware of and able to appreciate the context of the Synod. For example, some congregations are well staffed others don't use any technology, etc.
 - a) At the very least willing to ask all the questions and listen intently and learn
- 22.) Someone who recognizes their own gifts and those they do not have and raise up those who do.
- 23.) What is the big picture and what is needed in the personality...

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) Net Total has us at \$245,292.51 compared to last year \$138,247.62
- 2.) Budget status (see submitted reports)
 - a) 1.4 million designated funds
 - b) Working on budget proposal – very rough draft
 - c) 4% or 3% increase – try to base on cost of living (2024 cost of living was 2.3%, but recommendation was 4% in trying to make up for previous years where cost of living was over 6%)
- 3.) Startzel Estate – Task Force update
 - a) How about some sort of special music for Synod Assembly? Synod Assembly Worship team is discussing this.
 - b) The Task Force is working on getting a list together on how to distribute.
- 4.) Financial Management – support of rostered and lay leaders training/continuing education
- 5.) Finance Committee Meeting update – Next meeting scheduled for Jan 28th
 - a) Question regarding use of space, copier, etc. by Go Tell It In The Mountain
 - a. What about \$25/month for rent, or minimal, Pastor John Kratz recommended \$350/month. Maybe \$50/month. No more than \$100/month. Will be discussed further with the budget committee.
 - b) AmeriServ letter received stating that if nothing is done, the investments would remain the same.
 - c) Sally Williams was hurt that she was not asked initially to be part of the current finance committee. Paula Nihoff found a list of those who had been on previous finance committee and will contact individuals to see if they would like to be part of the committee again.

- d) Does the finance committee need its own chair that is not the treasurer? Yes, this would make sense. Committee will work on deciding their own chair.
- 6.) Synod Car was sold for \$13,500.00 (*Thanks to Bill Nihoff for delivering the car.*)
 - a) Where do we place this income? Currently in checking account as part of general funds. The money should go to the general fund since it is where the cost of the car originally came from.
 - b) What happened to the license plate – Paula will follow up with Stuckey’s because it was left on the car as the registration was no longer current. It was mentioned that the plate number was unique to the Synod and it is desired to have the plate returned if possible.
- 7.) Mission Investment Fund update
 - a) The account has been closed. Still need final statement to reconcile the information found on the finance reports.
- 8.) DYD account – Pastor Kevin Shock is trying to get officially on the account.
 - a) Currently at Northwest Bank, locations are inconvenient, and this is not the same institution as the checking account.
 - b) Bishop Discretionary account at yet another financial institution
 - c) It is desired to streamline bank accounts at various financial institution into one local financial institution. Paula Nihoff will research the best way to approach this and bring report back to Synod Council for request.

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 has Led worship at Salem, Altoona; Grace, Bellwood; Mt. Olive, Fairhope; St. David’s, Davidsville; St. Luke, Mount Union; and Mt. Calvary, Johnstown. Participated in Pr. Marvich’s Installation at Evangelical, Duncansville; attended worship at First Evangelical, Johnstown as a visitor.
 - b) Pastor Kevin has Led worship at St. John, Summerhill; St. Paul’s, Mundy’s Corner; and Mt. Zion, Glasgow. Preached for Pr. Marvich’s Installation at Evangelical, Duncansville; Attended The Weekend at St. James, Huntingdon. Met with the call committee at Zion, Williamsburg and the council at Mt. Calvary, Johnstown
- 2.) Support partners and their ministries
 - a) ALSM – written report:
 - a. Ongoing programs
 - i. CPE with Claudia Ploughs has concluded.
 - ii. Internship with First Lutheran, Johnstown and Benscreek Lutheran, Benscreek is expected to conclude at the end of February.
 - b. Upcoming event
 - i. Planning is under way for a clergy education day on May 21, 2025. Dr. Allison deForest from ULS will be the presenter for the day. The event will be held at the Lutheran Home in Hollidaysburg. It is co-sponsored by ALSM and the Go Tell It In The Mountains initiative.
 - b) Camp Sequanota – very grateful to receive financial support as designated.

- a. Currently debt free. Director would encourage the Synod to increase giving to Campus ministry prior to increasing giving to Camp.
- c) Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State – very grateful for financial support they receive already.
 - a. Ministry funding is in transition of gaining donor base to individuals because synods and churchwide no longer can support as had historically
 - b. Perhaps look into a % net income at fiscal year-end to designate to partnership ministries. This will need to be investigated further and discussed at an upcoming Synod Council meeting.
- d) KELC
- e) LAMPa
- f) Grace Delivered
- g) United Lutheran Seminary
 - a. Looking for a lay leader of the synod to serve on the Board of Trustees.
- h) Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service/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. Meetings: Lutheran Letter, 4 Go Tell It Grant, 2 Deans, 2 Conferences, The Weekend planning, Sequanota Board, Finance Committee, Reconciliation Committee, DEM review, Mt. Calvary, Johnstown's council, event planning with camp staff, Johnstown Conference vicars and supervisors, and Synod Assembly planning.
 - b. Attended: First Call Theological Education event at ULS, Region 8 Steering Committee event at ULS, and The Weekend event at St. James, Huntingdon.
 - c. Wrote and sent a Pastoral Letter to the members of Mt. Calvary, Johnstown.
 - d. Wrote Christmas message to retired roster and Christmas devotion for ALSM
 - e. Conversations with 14 Rostered Leaders and 8 Lay Leaders
- b) Pastor Kevin Shock (A2B)
 - a. Meetings and Gatherings: First Call Theological Education; Region 8 A2B/DEM Gathering; three intern meetings; met with one Call Committee; met with two lay leaders; The Weekend youth event; Reconciliation Team meeting; preached at Tiffany Marvich Installation; Finance Committee meeting; met with two rostered leaders; Blair Huntingdon Conference breakfast
- c) Sue Ellen Spotts (DEM) – written report:

- a. As I move into the second year as your DEM, I thought it would be helpful to share with you the primary projects with which I am involved, and some opportunities I see on the horizon.
 - b. Clearfield Area: The congregations of the Clearfield area have been involved in a strategy table since July 2024. The strategy table is comprised of 2-3 representatives from each congregation, meeting monthly to discern how they might collaborate as a means to vitality and sustainability. This has been especially critical since only two of the ten congregations in the area are served by a called pastor.
 - c. Laurel Mountain Lutherans: These congregations have been working together for a while. They are raising up a candidate for ordination who will be bi-vocational. We will be exploring what that means for the way in which they will continue in mission, what this means for the roles of clergy and lay people.
 - d. Other opportunities: The situations in Clearfield and Laurel Mountain are not unique. Many, if not most, of the congregations in the synod need to reimagine how to be church, even with challenges of less members and other resources. God still calls us to bear witness to God's love and grace in our communities. I continue to listen and be available to congregations, leaders, groups to assist in discerning and planning for vital mission.
 - e. This month I am also leading a session of the Vital Congregations course offered as part of the Kindling Faith series of United Lutheran Seminary. The session is "Living Among Our Neighbors: Models for Engagement and Transformation." The content of this is something I can offer to congregations in the synod, even if they are not enrolled in the ULS course.
- d) Pastor John Kratz (Director of Go Tell It In the Mountains) – written report: Go Tell It IN the Mountains Initiative Director's Report (This report has been reformatted to follow the three primary goals listed in the grant. Therefore the annual grant report will be based on these Director's reports.)
- 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. January Core 4 ALWL training focusses on 4 areas of development: Content, Context, Delivery, and Digital. Content: we have affirmed the use of Faith+Lead as our primary training resource. This frees up synod time and resources from "re-inventing" the training. This provides year-round start date options for laity to begin their journey of training. This creates a tri-synod uniformity in base

training and allows for specific synod addendums as desired by each bishop.

- ii. Digital tools are being researched with an AI training module in development.
 - iii. Coaches (formerly known as Mentors) are set for Training on “Preaching with Power” by Dilip Abayasekara on April 22nd and May 6th.
 - iv. A tri-synod cohort on “Preaching with Power” is scheduled for September 2025 to August 2026. This will be live streamed for all three synods to participate.
 - 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. A Pericope Training has been set for May 21st with Dr. Allison DeForest. This will be an on-site, streamed and recorded event. It is hoped this beta test provides ongoing opportunities for such trainings.
 - 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 has been contracted and established for Context awareness for all congregations to use (as well as all preachers). An FAQ sheet relating to Mission Insite is being created and will be sent to all synods by January 20th for distribution to local congregations.
 - ii. One congregation has affirmed it is willing to be a pilot site. The Pilot Site program is in development. The first step is Church Council reading and review of “I Will” by Thom Rainer.
 - d. The Assessment subcontractors’ meetings have continued.
 - e. The communications team is meeting Jan 13th.
 - f. The Digital Task Force is meeting Jan 15th.
 - g. The Curriculum Task Force is meeting Jan 22nd.
 - h. Training for the annual assessment program is set for Jan 23rd for the Director to learn the operating system for the annual report.
- 2.) Clergy roster status updates
- a) Pastor Paula Lebo has accepted a call with the SEPA Synod
 - b) Pastor Jim West has concluded his interim with Mt. Calvary, Johnstown.
- 3.) Congregation status updates
- a) Williamsburg Parish Working on MSP
- 4.) Seminarian updates

- a) Christy Harford TEEM, Internship, First, Johnstown and Benscreek, internship to conclude in February 2025.
 - b) Steve Koths TEEM, Shiloh, State College. Internship to conclude in April/May 2025.
 - c) Penny Koontz TEEM, Endorsed 7/10/24. Internship at Good Shepherd, Windber, internship to conclude in August 2025.
- 5.) First Call Group – gathered in Gettysburg (ULS) for the annual event.
- 6.) Conference Deans
- 7.) Portico Benefits
- 8.) Congregational Planning
- D. Faith Formation** (*Provide lifelong Christian nurturing and development*)
 - 1.) Ignite Ministry – ALWL focus is merging with Go Tell It grant work
 - 2.) Faith Formation Team
 - a) It went great this year with higher participation and the stress level was reduced for the second year of the event compared to the first year.
 - b) Ongoing discussion regarding change of location or to remain at St. James, Huntingdon because of location, amenities, and other considerations.
 - 3.) Kindling Faith (ULS)
 - 4.) Lutheran Letter
 - 5.) Allegheny Synod Website
 - 6.) Pericope and Continuing Education for Rostered and Lay Leaders
- E. Planning and Resources** (*Provide strategic planning and resources to guide the Synod*)
 - 1.) Synod Assembly: October 31 and November 1, 2025
 - a) When should terms of newly-elected positions begin?
 - a. **SC25.01.02 – Motion to have newly-elected positions, excluding the Office of the Bishop which constitutionally is three-months following election (February 1, 2026), to begin the term immediately but continue to have the traditional end date for the respective position. Motion made by Pastor Becky Horn, seconded by Tim Albright, motion carried.**
 - 2.) Transition Team
 - a) Appointment of members: Ann Ferry (chair), Spence Garvin, Vicar Christy Harford, Ken McDowell, Ed Reiter, Pastor Rebecca West
 - b) For council discussion: Consideration of using a Pre-Identification Process for the Bishop election.
 - a. Anyone from within the Allegheny Synod could raise up a rostered leader for the transition team to follow up with to gather information for educational purpose.
 - b. At Assembly the names would still need to be nominated via ecclesiastical ballot.
 - c) **SC25.01.03 – Motion to allow for Pre-Identification Process to be used to aid in sharing of information related to rostered leaders who may or may not be nominated by ecclesiastical ballot at the Allegheny Synod 2025 Synod Assembly. Motion made by Pastor Tyler Graham, seconded by Terry Koch, motion carried.**
 - 3.) Committee Personnel Needs/Appointments
 - a) In need of additional lay (priority) and rostered members for Candidacy
 - a. What is this? Candidacy Committee is the group that works alongside those who are working towards rostered leadership from the Allegheny Synod.

- b. People who are helpful could be those who are knowledgeable about education, higher education, those who have served on a call committee or mutual ministry committee, worked closely with rostered leaders, etc.

4.) Congregation Vitality and Innovation Grants

6. Additional Items

- A. Paula Nihoff is working on pulling together terms of various positions as nomination chair.
- B. Onboarding of newly elected council members – need to redevelop policy, information, etc. for understanding the role and position.
- C. Questions for Synod Council members to ask if/when visit congregations. Transition team may be helpful in developing questions, fast-facts, etc.
 - 1.) Provide bullet-point information regarding the transition process and other Office of the Bishop relevant information.

7. Adjournment

- A. VP Ann Ferry called the meeting to a close at 10:56 am.

Next Meeting: March 15, 2025 at 9:00 am at the Synod Office, devotions to be led by Pastor Kevin Shock.

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
 - Member at Large Pr. Nancy Hoover (2024) – present
- 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) – 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
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Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Rebecca L. Horn
Allegheny Synod Council Secretary