



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 March 22, 2025, in Hollidaysburg and on Zoom

1. The meeting was called to order by VP Ann Ferry at 9:01am.
2. Devotions – Pastor Kevin Shock, A2B
 - A. Psalm 63:1-8 (part of lectionary texts for the week) – Oh God you are my God, I seek you...
 - B. What images speak/resonate to/with you?
 - 1.) Image of shadow of your wings – constant presence, not alone
 - 2.) Image of the dry lands – constant dryness
 - C. What words speak to you?
 - 1.) If we could be all of those things
 - 2.) If we could be satisfied
 - 3.) Clinging to God
 - 4.) Waking in the middle of the night – all the things I’ve done not done – why didn’t I pray? A good reminder.
 - 5.) Thirst – I search for water in places other than God; even though we know God is the eternal water source
 - 6.) When I... it means we do it, not if...
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 March 22, 2025 agenda.
 - B. Motion to approve the minutes of January 18, 2025 meeting – attached document (SC25.01)
 - C. Motion to approve the change in roster status for Rev. Sharon Erb from active to retired, effective April 30, 2025.
 - D. **SC25.03.01 – Motion to adopt and approve the Consent Agenda as presented, motion made by Peggy Thatcher, second by Rev. Tyler Graham, motion carried.**
4. Mission/Vision/Values discussion
 - A. We welcomed Sister Marianne Brock, Regional Gift Planner, ELCA Foundation (Marianne.brock@elca.org)
 - 1.) Here to help us and support folks in legacy planning, stewardship/generosity campaigns.
 - 2.) Congregations are feeling a strong sense of longing for what used to be. But God is always doing a new thing and she strongly believes that there is more out there.
 - 3.) Is there a way that Sister Marianne can be of help, part of the conversations, are there specific needs in this synod and our congregations?
 - a) Fear and scarcity – don’t know what to even do, where to go, what it should look like. Everything is focused on survival, not investment.
 - b) Dangers of what we do in the church in business terms – even terms like innovation. Our “economic religion” is so intertwined with our “spiritual religion” we approach all things in business terms. This goes against what the church is – we are not to turn a profit every month, focus on “enough.” We need

gifts to do ministry, but our focus has been less on the mission of Jesus and more on the focus of finances.

- c) There is a need for reimagining what we are, who we are, and how God is calling us to do a new thing.
- 4.) Work with Sister Marianne Brock AND Sue Ellen Spotts, DEM – help vision and think of a new thing through God’s guidance.
 - a) Will help lift up and lead conversations regarding that we are people who cling to Jesus, people of the resurrection – if we truly believe this why are we so afraid of what is to come, of lifespans, of what new life could be.
- 5.) Ministry Growth Fund – through ELCA that would fund ministry
- 6.) Sustainability and growth language – generosity in giving leads to joy and trust in God.
- 7.) Sister Marianne offers a study: The attitude and reframing through a 3- or 4-part book study from the book *Reflections of Faith and Finance* by Charles Lane (excerpts from *Ask, Thank, Tell*). Reminder that all we have is God’s – what changes when our thinking changes to truly believe that all we have is God’s first.
- 8.) Tiered giving system? – Conversation that related the concept that is used by Sequanota for camp attendance. Is there a way to apply the idea to congregational giving, would having this type of conversation help congregations in visioning?
 - a) What it takes in giving to keep going in current trajectory
 - b) What it would take to “make budget”
 - c) What it would take to expand ministry

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)
- 2.) Working on getting an insurance review scheduled by at least 2 meetings. Need to see what we have and if it is adequate. Having trouble getting information from Brotherhood Mutual and make contact. May 22nd is the scheduled meeting.
- 3.) Budget status (see submitted reports)
 - a) Finance Committee present a budget for Synod Assembly
 - b) **SC25.03.02 – Motion to approve the proposed Allegheny Synod Budget for 2026-2027 as presented, motion made by Tim Albright, Second by Rev. Ralph Hamer, the motion carried.**
- 4.) Finance Committee Meeting update
 - a) Reviewed discussion of what rent should be from Go Tell It in the Mountains
 - a. **SC25.03.03 – Motion to accept \$100 per month for rent from Go Tell It in the Mountains as recommended by the Finance Committee, motion made by Peggy Thatcher, seconded by Tim Albright, the motion carried.**
 - b) Compensation Manual has been updated to include a 3% increase for the base salary.
 - a. **SC25.03.04 – Motion to accept the Compensation Manual for 2026 as presented, motion made by Rev. Tyler Graham, seconded by Rev. Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabote, the motion carried.**
- 5.) Mission Investment Fund update (rename as Investment Fund Committee)
 - a) William Lonsinger and Al Ilgen
 - b) Still need a third – maybe Gary McGovern (First English, Tyrone), will be retiring from Thrivent soon
- 6.) Financial Management – support of rostered and lay leaders training/continuing education

- a) Continue to investigate about having a program that reimburses/pays directly to rostered called individuals to offset student loan debt.
- 7.) Startzel Estate – Task Force update
 - a) Working on language to for name of grant/fund/endowment/etc. and to ways to distribute money.
 - b) Josh has a lot of ideas to help churches including microphones, worship resources, etc.
 - c) Looking at how to award, how much per year, stipulation on what happens if recipients' congregation closes, etc.
 - d) Talk to Sue Ellen Spotts and Sister Mariane Brock who recently worked on similar wording for awarding grants in the Upper Susquehanna Synod.
- 8.) Update on consolidating multiple financial institutions to one main bank
 - a) Could still make sense to have one bank – including DYD and Bishop Discretionary Fund
 - b) More discussion among staff and Treasurer to be had.
- 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 was (weather) iced out from leading worship for two Sundays in February. She led worship at Boalsburg, Fairhope, and Claysburg; Ash Wednesday at East Freedom; attended worship at Martinsburg; and will lead a Ministerium Evening Lent service at Mt. Zion, Glasgow on March 23, 2025.
 - b) Pastor Kevin Led worship at Zion, Boalsburg; Mt. Calvary, Johnstown; Ash Wednesday services at Bethany, Altoona and St. Paul's, Mundy's Corner; and assisted with a funeral at St. Mark, Pleasant Gap.
 - 2.) Support partners and their ministries
 - a) ALSM
 - a. May event for preachers partnering with Go Tell It In the Mountains
 - b. Internship and CPE candidates have completed their time.
 - b) Camp Sequanota
 - a. Tend Festival – June 19-22, 2025, registration is open
 - i. A place for people who are really thinking actively about the ministry happening in their communities and their own lives.
 - c) Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State – March Madness support
 - a. Have Deacon Alicia Anderson come tell us more about Lutheran Campus Ministry and make a direct ask for financial support.
 - b. The Office of the Bishop will extend an invitation for the May Synod Council Meeting.
 - d) KELC
 - e) LAMPa
 - a. Virtual Lobby Day is Tuesday, March 25th
 - b. Lutheran Day in the Capitol is May 13th (This is a session day which should enable more visits with representatives and staff.)
 - c. PA Bishops are working on a ministry partner day for the Monday before. Bishop Kurt Kusserow is coordinating.
 - f) Grace Delivered
 - g) United Lutheran Seminary
 - a. Bishop Collins attended the January ULS Board of Trustees Zoom meeting.

- b. Still looking for a lay leader of the synod to serve on the Board of Trustees, having gifts in finance and governance would be helpful.
- h) Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service/Global Refuge
 - a. Being highly affected by the Federal cuts. 60% of the staff was let go.
- i) The ELCA Foundation
 - a. End of 2024 Ministry Growth Fund had a performance rate of 11.4%
 - b. Currently Ministry Growth Fund is doing okay for now. Believe they are well positioned to ride out the current climate and looking forward beyond. They are watching and paying attention, keeping a diverse structure.
 - c. Synod Council would like to look into the ELCA Ministry Growth Fund for our endowments. Paula Nihoff will engage in conversation with Sister Mariane Brock.

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. Led the Rostered Leader's Gathering in January with 43 in attendance (also six scheduled conversations with individuals the day before, and during fellowship the night before and morning after).
 - b. Led "Journey of the Spirit" Covenant Community's Silent Retreat at Sequanota
 - c. Participated in conversation via Zoom about potential joint ministry with Pr. Holliday and Pr. Ackermann (UCC).
 - d. Wrote a Lenten Appeal Letter for Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministry and an article for the Lutheran Letter.
 - e. Meetings: 1 ALSM Executive Board, 1 Assembly planning, 2 Candidacy Exec. Committee, 5 Conferences, 1 Conference of Bishop Zoom, 1 Churchwide Assembly Orientation, 2 Deans, 2 Finance, 2 Go Tell It In the Mountain, 1 Zoom with Pr. Olson and his coop council, 1 Lutheran Letter Zoom, 1 Reconciliation Committee, 1 Sequanota Board Zoom and 1 Board Retreat, 8 Staff meetings/intentional conversations, and 2 Transition Team. Plus meetings/visits with 22 individuals across the synod.
 - f. Attended: Hope in a Divided World lectures at ULS Gettysburg campus, Shrove Tuesday Pancake Dinner at Geeseytown, ULS Governance Committee Meeting (serving as chair).
- b) Pastor Kevin Shock (A2B)
 - a. Gatherings: Rostered Leaders Gathering in January
 - b. Meetings: 2 Finance Committee; 2 Horner/Mt. Laurel Partnership; Mt. Calvary Town Hall; 2 Deans Meetings; 4 Staff Conversations; 2 Reconciliation Team; Mt. Calvary Information Session; Christ Westmont Call Committee; Assembly Committee
 - c. Visits: 5 colleagues; 6 laypersons
 - d. There is a great need to re-evaluate the use of the time of the staff of the Office of the Bishop to be able to better minister to the whole instead of repeatedly focusing on the same thing that isn't changing. What is our capacity as a synod office? The answer is not just more staff, but a re-

establishment/pruning to be strong, effective, and compassionate in our proclamation of Jesus Christ.

- c) Sue Ellen Spotts (DEM) – written report:
 - a. Laurel Mountain Lutherans: I sent some questions to Anne, Betsy, & Josh for the parish council to begin considering the roles of the pastor and the congregation with a bivocational pastor. They might also benefit from working with a coach through the process (both Josh and the congregation; or maybe together). I will be following up with Kevin regarding Josh's candidacy process – Josh had mentioned using the exploration of the shape of bivocational ministry as his internship project.
 - b. Clearfield Conference: Ben has worked on draft covenant. The plan is for the strategy table to receive it prior to the March 10 meeting so they can work through it at the meeting. It will be good to talk with Rev. Jamie Olson prior to that meeting. Two possible distractions to the continuing work and Faith First members coming back to the strategy table after not being there for months, and the Luthersburg NALC vote. I am waiting to hear back from Wartburg regarding participation in their grant on rural ministry models.
 - c. New direction: I am asking the deans for a list of any congregation feeding programs (distribution, pantry, meal) in the conference. I plan to visit them and use that as an opening for discussing the mission and tracking changes and need. The hope is to bring people together around the common mission of feeding, and to be able to track changes in need.
 - d. For the calendar:
 - i. March 10-14: Reading and planning days remote work
 - ii. March 18-20: DEM gathering in Chicago
 - iii. March 25-26: Region 8 DEM/A2B meeting in Gettysburg
 - iv. March 27-30: Word and Service Discernment Retreat
- d) Pastor John Kratz (Director of Go Tell It In the Mountains) – written report:
 - 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 Festival of Homiletics training is being offered free of charge to all rostered leaders and ALWL's in our 3 synods utilizing our Conference structure to aid in fellowship and connection.
 - ii. Information about the "Preaching with Power" trainings offered through ULS are being shared with rostered leaders and ALWL's in all three synods.
 - iii. Followed up with Human Sexuality and Appalachian awareness video creators to keep both on track for our May 2025 timeframe.
 - 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. Outreach materials for ALWL's are being created including business cards, pamphlets, and promotional inserts.
 - ii. All three synods have agreed to using Faith+Lead as their primary ALWL training agent. This is being shared through our communications strategies.
 - iii. Followed up on May 21st tri-synod wide training by Dr. Allison DeForest on upcoming pericope texts.

- iv. Created an agreement for video creation of ALWL testimonials for use to recruit additional ALWL's. Seven ALWLs have agreed to meet with our videographer to create these promotional testimonial videos.
- 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. A digital resource training video has been completed and will be uploaded to our website to aid congregations in learning the basics of digital tools including sound, video, digital prep, and digital distribution.
 - ii. "Pilot sites" are being researched. These Pilot Sites will help create a course of action to enhance preaching delivery and response to compelling preaching.
 - iii. Assessment tools are completed and are being sent to all rostered leaders, ALWL's, and Congregations to identify current needs and attitudes to faith development options.
 - iv. I am being invited to participate in "Tend" event at Sequanota this summer. I will be able to share current options for faith development and newly formed options through our Initiative
 - v. Rolled out "Mission Insite" context awareness tool to all congregations. I continue to promote this free tool to every congregation in our tri-synod region.
- d. I met with Lilly Consultants to discuss grant requirements for annual reporting, "File-invite" tool for annual reporting, and our extension to 12/31/2029. The extension request to move our end date to 12/31/2029 was approved by the Lilly Endowment.
- 2.) Clergy roster status updates
 - a) Pr. Ted Williams call vote scheduled for March 23, 2025
- 3.) Congregation status updates
 - a) Potential partnership between Christ, Westmont and Moxham Lutheran
 - b) Contact from Cassville about possible closure
 - c) Mt. Calvary, Johnstown first disaffiliation vote on April 1
 - d) Rockton and Luthersburg Parish outside of Dubois took their first disaffiliation vote.
- 4.) Seminarian updates
 - a) We have 6 seminarians in the Candidacy process.
- 5.) First Call Group
- 6.) Conference Deans
- 7.) Portico Benefits
- 8.) Congregational Planning
- D. Faith Formation** (*Provide lifelong Christian nurturing and development*)
 - 1.) Ignite Ministry – Authorized Lay Worship Leaders focus is merging with Go Tell It grant work
 - 2.) Faith Formation Team
 - a) Pr. Kevin Shock is working with Tend Festival Planning Team (2 meetings) and leading Lenten study on Bonhoeffer with Pr. Nathan Pile.
 - 3.) Kindling Faith (ULS)
 - 4.) Lutheran Letter – special Go Tell It in the Mountain edition in April

- a) Request for hard copies have been made – for a donation, not more than 10 copies.
- 5.) Allegheny Synod Website – updated resource/contact page
- 6.) Pericope and Continuing Education for Rostered and Lay Leaders
 - a) Pr. Kevin Shock led Eucharistic Visitation Instruction for 6 people.
- E. **Planning and Resources** (*Provide strategic planning and resources to guide the Synod*)
 - 1.) Transition Team
 - a) Current members: Ann Ferry (chair), Michele Peese (recorder), Pr. Scott Custead, Spence Garvin, Vicar Christy Harford, Pr. MJ Irvin-Stellabotte, Betsy Kregar, and Pr. Ron Miller
 - b) Rostered Leader Extended Directory in process
 - c) Plans in process for Conference gatherings in April/May
 - d) “Bishop’s Gifts Inventory” – attached document
 - 2.) Committee Personnel Needs/Appointments
 - a) In need of additional lay (priority) and rostered members for Candidacy
 - 3.) Congregation Vitality and Innovation Grants
 - 4.) Synod Assembly: October 31 and November 1, 2025
 - a) Nomination report from Paula Nihoff
 - a. See attached report
 - b. Needed to update and compile a full list of who/when positions filled and terms. Updated file will be sent out and added to the minutes.
 - b) Synod Assembly Committee recommends the acceptance of Vistacom’s proposal to use VPoll for voting for assembly.
 - a. **SC25.03.05 – Motion to accept the Vistacom proposal of \$3725 to use VPoll to facilitate voting for the October 31 - November 1, 2025 Allegheny Synod Assembly. Motion made by Rev. Rebecca Horn, seconded by Michele Peese, motion carried.**
- 6. Additional Items
 - A. We need to share the positives of who we are, what we are, what we do. We need to avoid trying to counter the attacks we hear or receive. Especially on social media we need to forward the good news of our mission.
 - B. Need to continue and better utilize streamline information from the office of the bishop and churchwide.
 - C. Relationship!!! We all can and need to engage in building relationship with one another.
 - D. Develop policy manual for Synod Council Members
 - E. Thoughts on information for visiting council members to share with congregations?
 - 1.) Michele Peese and Ann Ferry are working on a list to be shared with Council.
 - 2.) Include the Synod Mission and Vision statement.
- 7. Adjournment
 - A. VP Ann Ferry called the meeting to a close at 12:30 pm.

Next Meeting: May 17, 2025, at 9:00 am at the Synod Office, devotions to be led by Peggy Thatcher.

Synod Council members in attendance... 12 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
- Pr. Tyler Graham (2024) – present (Zoom)
- Pr. Ralph Hamer (2023) – present
- Pr. Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte (2024) – present (Zoom)
- Terry Koch (2024) – excused
- Joyce Long (2022) – present (Zoom)
- 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
 - Sister Marianne Brock
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Respectfully submitted,
 Rev. Rebecca L. Horn
 Allegheny Synod Council Secretary