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 January 17, 2026, in Hollidaysburg and on Zoom

1. The meeting was called to order by VP Ann Ferry at 9:05 am. Rev. Rebecca Horn requested that the meeting be recorded so that minutes could be kept accurately if she needs to step out.
2. Devotions – Rev. Ralph Hamer
    A. We are called to be loving creatures, when we struggle to love others, we have the opportunity to learn more patience, more love, more compassion.
3. **Consent Agenda:** *with one motion, all items can be adopted/approved; or, any item can be removed from the consent agenda for further conversation and consideration.*
    A. To adopt the January 17, 2026 agenda.
    B. To approve the minutes of the November 15, 2025 meeting.
    C. To approve the roster change for the Rev. Barry Folmar from active to retired, effective January 21, 2026.
    D. ***SC26.01.01*– Motion to adopt and approve the Consent Agenda as presented, motion made by Rev. Tyler Graham, seconded by Peggy Thatcher, motion carried.**
4. **Mission Conversation**
    A. Moving into a future structure:
        1.) Affirm updated committee structure – attached. If we notice that there are errors or omissions, please send an email to the Office of the Bishop.
        2.) Bishop-elect Kevin Shock's plans moving forward
            a) Staffing
                a. Idea of spreading the staff among rostered leaders serving in congregations.
                b. In a rut of "Triage" – allow the Office Administrative Assistant to help direct emails to designated people.
                c. There will be 4 assistants, who will work ¼ time – approximately 10-hours a week. There are working draft Job Descriptions. Assistants would mainly work remotely, but there would be a work room for when Assistants to the Bishop are on site.
                    i. Assistant to the Bishop of Communications – Rev. Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte
                    ii. Assistant to the Bishop of Formation – Deacon Alicia Anderson
                        1. Primarily Candidacy
                        2. Talk on those interested in Candidacy, Authorized Lay Worship Leader, committee work, etc.
                        3. How do we gather laity in formation.
                    iii. Assistant to the Bishop of Transitions – Rev. Tyler Graham
                        1. Engage with all committees and councils of churches in transition, review MSPs and process, assist with RMPs and Rostered Ministers in transition, explore ways to invite candidates into this Synod

2. Connect with vacant churches routinely and share communication/meetings as necessary

iv. Assistant to the Bishop of Engagement (working title) – Rev. Traci Marriott (Still working with St. Matthew, Martinsburg to accommodate the hours.)

1. VP for building capacity, stewardship
2. Working with finance items, mission support and pledges, etc.
3. Work with Nominations Committee.
4. Gift assessments – help find ways for folks to engage in the ministry in this synod.

d. How would benefits work? Each ministry site would give a "bill" of ¼ of defined compensation and benefits (total compensation) which would be purchased by the Synod. The 5% premium would be paid directly to the Assistants to the Bishop.

i. Caution in a pure purchase of service there can be a tax liability, however, since we are a non-profit, the exchange of money is through non-profits, and we are already engaged in exchanging funds. Also, by paying the 5% premium we are already showing they are employees.

e. Questions

i. Conflicts of Interest – two are on Synod Council
ii. Who is the supervisor – Bishop is the supervisor, but Synod Council Executive Committee would help provide oversight, and serve as staff/personnel support.
iii. Give report for Synod Council Meetings but not be required to attend meetings unless requested. They would have voice but not vote.
iv. What is the cost comparison between the 4-assistants versus the 1-assistant model? With the estimate of 20 years' experience, this would not be a concern.
v. It is a team system where if any of the Assistants to the Bishop are present, it is an extension of the Office of the Bishop. There will certainly be times where the Bishop is the "right" one to be present, but times where others would be more suited for the topic.
vi. For the two Synod Council Members who are currently on Synod Council and have agreed to be Assistants to the Bishop, they will resign their positions on council after acceptance/start of Assistant to the Bishop position, we will bring names to the March Synod Council meeting to be appointed, until the next Assembly where their partial terms would be up for election.

f. ***SC26.01.02*– Motion to approve the presented structure of four part-time Assistants to the Bishop, with the working designations of Assistant to the Bishop of Communications, Assistant to the Bishop of Formation, Assistant to the Bishop of Transitions, and Assistant to the Bishop of "Engagement." Motion made by Rev. Ralph Hamer, and seconded by Rev. Nathan Pile, motion carried.**

b) Communications (using same email, **cell # 814-204-2128)**

a. Set up a Google Voice number and this is the number to be shared and used for official communication.

c) Office hours and notes
    a. This will be a working schedule while figuring out what will be most helpful and practical.
    b. Michelle Bossler should be able to truly manage the offices as her job title and description reflect, Office Manager. Bishop-elect Kevin Shock will work with Michelle to give her autonomy.
    c. Would it be helpful to have a volunteer to answer?
        i. Have stated "public" office hours where the phone will be answered.
    d. Noted that there are redundances and inefficiencies of items on the website – for instance to schedule a meeting with the Bishop, the website link is not effective.
    e. In process of making a descriptive list of who to call for what context. Making Standard Operating Procedures, fixing the structure and communicating are imperative.

5. Reports of Staff and Officers

A. Bishop:
1.) Congregational Worship and Visits – Ordinations of Christy Harford and Steve Koths; Funeral of Rev. Rebecca West; worship at Zion, Williamsburg and fellowship; Mt. Calvary, Johnstown; St. Peter, Osterburg (Joint Parish service) and fellowship; St. Mark, Howard and fellowship; closing out with First Altoona on January 25th.
2.) Meetings – 2 Staff, 2 Deans, 1 Lutheran Letter, 1 Finance, 1 GTIITM, 1 Executive Committee, 1 Nittany Conference, 1 Reconciliation, planning meetings with Bishop-elect.
3.) Events – First Call Theological Education
4.) Visits/Calls – 9 Rostered and 7 Lay

B. Bishop-elect
1.) Congregational Worship and Visits – Mt. Olive, Fairhope; Moxham, Johnstown; Christy Harford Ordination; St. David's, Davidsville; Stamm Wedding, Mt. Zion, Glasgow; Living Waters Lutheran Parish (x2); Rev. Rebecca West Funeral; Salem, Aaronsburg; St. John, Millheim; Mt. Zion, Glasgow; St. James, Altoona; St. Matthew's, Marklesburg (Old Stone Epiphany)
2.) Meetings – Mandated Reporter Training; ELCA Community Portal Training; First Call Theological Education Conference; Region 8 Steering Committee (x2); Region 8 Bishops Bench; New Bishops Zoom; Roster Manual Overview; Finance Committee; Legal Intro for Bishops; Staff Meeting (x2); Deans Meeting (x2); Reconciliation Team; FCTE Planning; Josh Spangler Endorsement; Intern Supervision; Synod Planning with Bishop Barb Collins; Lay Worship Leader Task Force; GTIITM Bishops; GTIITM Steering Committee (x2); Synod Executive Committee; Nittany Conference; St. Matthew's Martinsburg Council
3.) Visits – In-person: 8 Rostered, 4 Lay; Remote: 14 Rostered, 13 Lay

C. Synod Vice President – update on Transition and Bishop's Installation
1.) Discussion regarding dinner with out-of-town visitors for the night before the Bishop's Installation. "Dignitaries?"
    a) Presiding Bishop and executive will arrive the afternoon before the installation and would be available for a dinner.
    b) Sequanota for dinner? Dining Hall would be available.
    c) Review the RSVP list to determine who to invite.
    d) Rev. Nathan Pile and VP Ann Ferry will work on details for dinner with Bishop-elect Kevin Shock and Rev. Tyler Graham.

2.) Installation planning is going well, the order of service has been approved by Churchwide.

D. Secretary
1.) Old wording of **S.7.27.A25.** All Ministers of Word and Sacrament on the roster of a church body with which the ELCA has declared a Full-Communion partnership (relationship), serving calls and/or interims to congregations of this synod, shall be given voice and vote as voting members of the Allegheny Synod Assembly.
2.) Recommended wording for S7.27.A26. is:
3.) All ministers of Word and Sacrament on the roster of a church body with which the Churchwide Assembly has declared a relationship of full communion, serving under a Letter of Invitation to Service in a congregation of this synod, shall be given voice and vote as voting members of the Allegheny Synod Assembly.
4.) ***SC26.01.03*** **– Motion to approve the new wording of Continuing Resolution S7.27.A25 to "S7.27.A26 All ministers of Word and Sacrament on the roster of a church body with which the Churchwide Assembly has declared a relationship of full communion, serving under a Letter of Invitation to Service in a congregation of this synod, shall be given voice and vote as voting members of the Allegheny Synod Assembly." Motion made by Rev. Ralph Hamer, seconded by Rev. Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte, motion carried.**

E. Treasurer
1.) Balance Sheet and Income, Budget – see submitted reports
2.) **Action Request:** Signers for accounts, we need to add Bishop-elect Kevin Shock
a) Lily Fund – Bishop-elect Kevin Shock, Paula Nihoff (Treasurer), Rev. John Kratz (Director of GTIITM)
b) Reserve Account at First Summit, Investment Account, Checking Account – Bishop-elect Kevin Shock, Paula Nihoff (Treasurer), and Ann Ferry (Vice President)
c) Discretionary Account – Bishop-elect Kevin Shock
d) ***SC26.01.04*** **– Motion to remove Interim-Bishop Barb Collins from and to add Bishop-elect Kevin Shock as a signer to the following accounts: Lily Fund, Reserve Account at First Summit, Investment Account, Checking Account, and the Bishop's Discretionary Account. The Lily Account signers, requiring two signatures, are Bishop-elect Kevin Shock, Treasurer Paula Nihoff, and Rev. John Kratz, Director of Go Tell It IN The Mountains. The signers for the Reserve Account at First Summit, Investment Account and Checking Account, all requiring two signatures, are Bishop-elect Kevin Shock, Treasurer Paula Nihoff, and Vice President Ann Ferry. The signer for the Discretionary Account is Bishop-elect Kevin Shock. Motion made by Rev. Nathan Pile, seconded by Tim Albright, motion carried.**
3.) **Action Request:** to move unused money from DYD Account to First Summit
a) ***SC26.01.05*** **– Motion to designate the former DYD Account Funds of $78.86 to a new dedicated account designated as DED Lay Worship Ministry Expenses. Motion made by Rev. Nathan Pile, seconded by Gretel Kaltenbaugh, motion carried.**
4.) Startzel Fund Discussion
a) Currently $75,000 is in the Reserve Account at First Summit, but the interest has not been proportionally designated back to the Startzel Funds.
b) Synod Council would like to see a list of distributions. Also need to announce the continued acceptance of application requests. Information is on the website under "News," but will need to have the deadline date removed or extended.

c) ***SC26.01.06*** **– Motion to keep the Startzel Fund money in the Reserve Account at First Summit. Starting January 1, 2026 to attribute the proportional amount of interest that is earned by the Startzel Fund in the Reserve Account to the dedicated account for the Startzel Fund. Motion made by Rev. Ralph Hamer, seconded by Rev. Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte, motion carried.**

5.) Mission Investment Fund

6.) Finance Chair report – see submitted report

a) Financial Management

a. Investment Account risk distribution discussion. Paula Nihoff apologized for having moved funds without consulting the current Financial Management Policy that is on file. Apology accepted. We are working on restructuring and building proper management of the gifts we have received.

b) Endowment (Investment) Committee

F. Sue Ellen Spotts (Director for Evangelical Mission) – see submitted report

1.) Approved for reinstatement to the Deacon Roster through the Upper Susquehanna Synod. Paperwork is in process.

G. Pr. John Kratz (Director of Go Tell It IN The Mountains – GTIITM) – see submitted report

1.) GTIITM Initiative Day in Congregation and survey question – February 1st

2.) New hire is in process under the Lilly Grant – administrative and communication duties, part time.

6. **Reports of Partner Ministries**

A. ALSM – basic renovations ongoing in the building; open positions: Social Worker; Life Enrichment Manager

1.) Oaks is building two cottages

B. Camp Sequanota – Staff transitions, starting to hire for summer staff

C. Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State

D. The ELCA Foundation

E. LAMPa – had to cancel Countering Christian Nationalism in PA Retreat due to low registration

F. United Lutheran Seminary – need to connect with Region 8 Archives about fee, then discuss what ways to cover the fee.

G. KELC (Kenya global companion)

H. Global Refuge

I. Grace Delivered

7. **Leadership and Congregational Support and Development**

A. Clergy Appointment updates

1.) Rev. Jim West serving as Interim of Living Waters Lutheran Parish, Johnstown Conference

a) Cindy Daugherty – considering entering candidacy; Rev. Jim West possible supervisor

b) Would provide consistency for the new parish following the death of Rev. Rebecca West

2.) Call vote on January 25, 2026 for the Rev. Regina Holliday to Amity UCC Meyersdale (10 hours/week)

B. Congregation status updates

1.) Trinity, Confluence is working on selling their building.

C. Committee Updates

1.) Assembly

2.) Candidacy

3.) Constitution

4.) Finance Team (Committee) – question regarding the constitutionally required Audit Committee; currently no formal Audit Committee and will need to rectify. Finance Team will recommend people for the Audit Committee to be elected by Synod Council (S11.05). Do we need two committees/teams? Finance Team is functioning as the Audit Committee; Synod Council could elect people from the Finance Team to serve on the Audit Committee.
    a) Ask the Finance Team give three names for the Synod Council to elect for rotating 3-year terms for the Audit Committee.
5.) Hunger Team
6.) Nominations
    a) Ballot is needed for the Spring Pre-Assembly Conference Meetings
7.) Reconciliation

D. Portico Benefits
E. Congregational Planning

8. **Faith Formation**
   A. Authorized Lay Worship Leaders
      1.) Preaching Assignment Application Training Zoom – 3:00 pm, January 25, 2026
      2.) **Action request:** from the Lay Ministries Task Force to approve the Operating Principles for Authorized Lay Worship Leaders of the Allegheny Synod – see submitted document
          a) ***SC26.01.07*** **– Motion to approve the Operating Principles for Authorized Lay Worship Leaders of the Allegheny Synod as presented from the Lay Ministries Task Force. Motion made by Rev. Ralph Hamer, seconded by Rev. Tyler Graham, motion carried.**
   B. Faith Formation Team
   C. Allegheny Synod's Lutheran Letter
   D. Pericope and Continuing Education opportunities
   E. Tend Podcast
   F. Book study with Bishop Kevin Shock and Pr. Nathan Pile Tuesdays in Lent *By Heart: Conversations with Martin Luther's Small Catechism* edited by R. Guy Erwin, Mary Jane Haemig, and Ken Sundet Jones, with contributions from Martin J. Lohrmann, Derek R. Nelson, Kirsi I. Stjerna, Timothy J. Wengert, and Hans H. Wiersma.
9. **Planning and Resources**
   A. Congregation Vitality and Innovation Grants
   B. Development of Policy manuals → **Tabled until March**
      1.) Continue work on creating policies/guidelines, especially for use of funds.
      2.) Action request: to add the following to the Employee Handbook:
          a) Cyber Safety Protocols as an Addendum at the end of the Internet/Email section – see submitted document
          b) "When the Altoona/Hollidaysburg School Districts announce a closure due to inclement weather or" to section I-16, just before the phrase about a state emergency.
          c) To allow two weeks of vacation to carry over from one year to the next, rather than just one week.
      3.) ***Tabled until March*** **– Motion to add the following policies and statements to the Allegheny Synod Employee Handbook: Cyber Safety Protocols as an Addendum at the end of the Internet/Email section – see submitted document. "When the Altoona/Hollidaysburg School Districts announce a closure due to inclement weather or" to section I-16, just before the phrase about a state emergency.** ***And*** **To allow two weeks of vacation to carry over from one year to the next, rather than just one week.**

C. Ongoing Tasks
    1.) Resolutions passed at 2025 Synod Assembly:
        a) To Continue the Collaborative Work of the Allegheny Synod
        b) Rural Life and Ministry
    2.) United Lutheran Seminary – to seek someone to serve on the Board of Trustees

10. Upcoming Events:
    A. Preaching App Training – January 25, 2026 at 3:00 pm on Zoom
    B. GTIITM Initiative in Congregations with survey question – February 1, 2026
    C. Bishop's Installation – February 7, 2026; 2:00 pm at Mt. Calvary, Johnstown
    D. Pericope Study – February 11, 2026 8:30 am - 3:00 pm at Lutheran Home in Hollidaysburg
    E. Conference of Bishops – March 3 – 7, 2026
    F. Chrism Mass – March 24, 2026 at 10:00 am at Trinity Lutheran, Altoona
    G. Lutheran Day at the Capital (LAMPa) – April 21, 2026
    H. Pre-Assembly Conference Meetings scheduled at 7:00 pm for
        1.) April 28 Nittany Conference
        2.) April 29 Clearfield at St. John's
        3.) April 30 Blair-Huntingdon
        4.) May 6 Laural Highlands and Johnstown
        5.) May 7 Bedford
    I. Synod Assembly – June 20, 2026
11. Adjournment
    A. V.P. Ann Ferry called the meeting to a close at 12:05 pm.

Next Meeting: March 21, 2026; Devotions by Bishop Kevin Shock
Tentative dates for 2026 May 16, July 17-18, Sept 19, Nov 21

Synod Council members in attendance... xx of 17

- Executive Committee *(3-ordained, 2-lay)* (election year)
    - Bishop Barb Collins (Interim) – present
    - VP Ann Ferry (2021) – present
    - Secretary Rev. Becky Horn (2024) – present (Zoom)
    - Treasurer Paula Nihoff (2024) – present (Zoom)
    - Member at Large Rev. Nancy Hoover (2024) – present (Zoom)
- Council Members *(4-ordained, 5-lay)*
    - Timothy Albright (2023) – present (Zoom)
    - Rev. Tyler Graham (2024) – present
    - Rev. Ralph Hamer (2023) – present
    - Manetta Horn (2025, Youth) – present (Zoom)
    - Rev. Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte (2024) – present
    - Gretel Kaltenbaugh (2025) – present
    - Terry Koch (2024) – present
    - Burton Peese (2025, Young Adult) – present (Zoom)
    - Michele Peese (2023) – present (Zoom)
    - Rev. Nathan Pile (2025) – present
    - Margaret (Peggy) Thatcher (2024) – present
    - Kenneth Weschler (2025) – present (Zoom)
- Synod Staff
    - Bishop-elect Rev. Kevin Shock – present
    - Director of Evangelical Mission Sue Ellen Spotts – present
- Guests

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