

**INDIANA-KENTUCKY SYNOD COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES**

**January 20, 2024 + 9:30 a.m. ET/8:30 a.m. CT – 12:30 p.m.
ET/11:30 a.m. CT
via Zoom
Indianapolis, IN**

Synod Council Members Present: Bishop Bill Gafkjen; Vice President Ted Miller, Secretary Julie Slavens, Treasurer Chris Walda, Pastor Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar; Pastor Ryan Bailey; Pastor Joshua Penumaka; Pastor Vicki Garber; Pastor Tim Graham; Pastor Jane Rothman; Pastor Ladona Webb; Deacon Jody Winter; Mike Hoover; Debbie Zehr; Dee Ann Daniels; Nicole Lee; Dianna Hunsinger; Betsy Kirk; Tina Snith, WELCA Liaison.

Staff Members present: Nancy Nyland, Susie Swanson, Dan Forehand, and Cory Driver.

Synod Council Members Absent: Pastor Bimen Limbong, Conrad Rapley, Ella Engelau, and Noah David Smith.

Guest: Karl Biermann, ELCA Regional Gift Planner

The meeting began at 9:35 am with Bishop Bill reading Psalm 62 and leading the group in prayer.

Julie Slavens referred to the minutes in Dropbox from the November executive committee meeting and the synod council meeting. She asked if there were any corrections and none were made.

SC 2024/01: Chris made a motion to accept the November meeting minutes as presented and LaDona second. The motion was approved unanimously.

Vice President Report – Ted Miller

Ted thanked the council for prayers for his surgery that went well. He referenced his written report in the Dropbox folder for this meeting. He went over the positions open on the Synod Council and noted the vacancies as well. He also noted in placed the Gifts and Priorities Report in the Dropbox for our review. He received 62 responses compared to 44 the last time we had a bishop election. The Report summarizes the responses. He stated this will go out to conferences and ministries before March and he will include an invitation for conferences to submit names of rostered persons who would fit the criteria in the report. These people will be sent a biographical form to fill out. He then went over the biographical information form. He asked if there were any questions about the form. There were not. He asked the Council to approve the form.

SC 2024/02: LaDona moved to accept the biographical information form and Nicole seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Executive Committee – Julie Slavens

Julie reported the committee has been thinking about a way to honor Bill and Janet upon their retirement. She explained that Ted had received a suggestion for an endowment from Karl Biermann.

Ted brought the idea to the committee for consideration. Julie briefly explained the purpose of the endowment and that Bill and Janet knew of this idea. Karl then explained in more detail about the endowment. Karl reported friends of Bishop Bill – Alice and David Miller – donated money to create an endowment fund in honor of Bill and Janet upon the Bishop’s retirement. The donation will be seed money to start the fund and communications will be made to members of the Synod for the opportunity to donate to the fund. The executive committee met with Karl Biermann about the endowment fund. Karl reported that the purpose of the fund, which was vetted to Bill and Janet, would be for leadership and development for lay person and for pastors. The idea of making the grants available to an entity would be beneficial as well. Karl stated the planning committee would be tweaking the purpose of the fund with input from Bill and Janet Gafkjen. The goal was to have enough money to provide for grants in Spring 2025. The minimum amount to do this would be \$25,000.

SC 2024/03: The executive committee recommended to the Council to approve the establishment of the endowment fund as presented. The Council unanimously approved the recommendation of the Executive Committee.

Treasurer and Finance Committee – Chris Walda

Chris reported that to date mission support from congregation is down \$300,000 as of the end of 2023. He also went over the income and expenses and the balance sheet. There were some savings in expenses with staff leaving and in other areas. The Finance Committee met earlier in the week and the committee discussed moving accounts to another bank from PNC, which is a nationwide bank and was not easy to work with on maintaining accounts, including numerous and expensive fees. The committee wanted to go with a bank that has a footprint in the Synod. The committee is recommending to the Council the Synod move its financial assets to Old National bank which is an Indiana bank out of Evansville and has branches in both Indiana and Kentucky. The transition of all Synod assets will take about two months to complete.

SC 2024/04: The Finance Committee recommended the Synod move from PNC to Old National Bank for its financial accounts. The Council unanimously approved the recommendation of the Finance Committee.

Chris reported the audit went very well and there is only one year that needs to be audited. He reported there will be no need for a management letter but we do need to verify that there are no legal issues outstanding that would affect the financial health of the Synod. Vicki said she would verify this with the Synod attorney and talk with the auditor about this matter.

Office of the Treasurer Nomination Task Force – Jody Winter

Jody reported on the work of the Task Force and reported it is recommending Harry Albers being appointed Synod Treasurer. If approved, Harry will be vetted just like any other officer of the Synod. Bishop Bill explained the process and what is involved as it includes a criminal background check and a reference check as well.

SC 2024/05: The Office of the Treasurer Nomination Task Force recommended to the Council to appoint Harry Albers to the Office of Treasurer effective September 1, 2024, for a four-year term. The Council unanimously approved the recommendation of the Task Force and appointed Harry Albers to be the Treasurer for the Synod.

Nominations Committee Report – Julie Slavens

Julie reported on the work of the committee with respect to the voting members for the Synod to the

Churchwide Assembly (CWA) in Phoenix, Arizona in 2025. She referenced the Nominating Committee's report and meeting minutes which were in the Dropbox folder for this meeting and gave a summary of the content of the report. She reported that since the Treasurer will be a Lay Male, Grid 1 is the recommendation of the committee for representation of the Synod at CWA. She noted even though the Synod was allowed only 12 voting members, all conferences will be represented through the Lay Male treasurer and vice president officers. She thanked Ted for his help in developing the grid.

SC 2024/06: The Nominating Committee recommended to the Council Grid 1 as set out in the committee's report for the representation of the voting members of the Synod at the 2025 CWA. The Council unanimously approved the recommendation of the Nominating Committee.

Bishop Election Committee appointment – Ted Miller

Ted reported that Mike Anderson has agreed to be the chair of the committee. He is a past member of the Synod Council and has served on the committee for previous Bishop elections. Mike is in the process of contacting people to be on the committee, which will be former Synod Council members as a general rule. The remaining members of the committee will be appointed by the Council at the April 2024 meeting.

Bishop Transition Task Force – Ted Miller

Ted reported the Council needs to form this task force soon as work needs to be done on the transition plan soon after the election of the Bishop. This committee will oversee the transition of the Synod and Synod office to the newly elected Bishop. Bishop Bill provided additional information on what this committee will be responsible to do over the summer months as the Synod prepares for the new bishop.

Bishop Installation Task Force – Ted Miller

Ted reported this task force should be formed soon as well as planning needs to begin soon especially the place for the installation needs to be secured. After some discussion on the size of the building needed, it was decided St. Luke's Methodist church would be contacted to see if it is available. Bill and April will do this. The plan is to have the installation on October 12. If St. Luke's is not available, there are other options. Once the place for the installation is secured, then the task force should be formed as it is responsible for planning the event in its entirety. This should be done at the April meeting. Bishop Bill also mentioned some of the Episcopalian priests in the territory covering Indiana and Kentucky are available to attend the installation as there is a requirement for an Episcopalian priest to lay hands on the new bishop.

Bishop Report – Bishop Bill

Bishop Bill spoke of the planning of transitions, including Synod staff members, and the Synod Assembly. The focus for the next weeks would be on gathering information for the Call to Assembly to go out the first week of February, and then in planning the Synod Assembly. The various tasks usually handled by one staff person are now being handled by all staff with the help of the event coordinator. The staff will be saying goodbye to Susie on the Wednesday following this meeting. He mentioned he is realizing he is doing things for the "last time" as bishop of the Synod and is beginning to realize his time as Bishop is coming to an end. Due to the shorthand situation of the synod staff and the election and transition to a new Bishop, the executive committee has determined the synod will not make any long term commitments that continue past September 1.

He reported there are issues with emails going out with yahoo, AOL, and Bellsouth addresses. The

Synod has contracted an IT person to work on the issue. They have contacted people using these addresses as email addresses about the problem.

Synod Assembly:

- Offering Designations –

Bishop Bill reported the staff, himself, and the executive committee recommend to the Council the offerings from the two Synod Assembly service go to the Gafkjen Endowment Fund and to the Synod Disaster Relief Fund. The offerings from the opening worship service will go to the endowment fund and the offerings for the closing service to the Synod disaster fund.

SC 2024/07: The Bishop and staff recommended to the Council the offerings from the first worship service at the 2024 Synod Assembly be donated to the Gafkjen Endowment Fund and the offerings from the second worship service go to the Synod Disaster Relief Fund. The Council unanimously approved the recommendation.

- Registration Fees for Synod Assembly

Bishop Bill reported to the Council he is recommending the Registration Fees for the 2024 Synod Assembly be as follows:

Early Bird: \$200/After Early Bird: \$225/At Synod Assembly \$250; Retired Rostered: \$100

He noted an early bird deadline has not been set yet but will be before the Call to Assembly is sent out in February.

SC 2024/08: Bishop Bill recommended the Registration Fees for the 2024 Synod Assembly as \$200 for early bird, \$225 after early bird date, \$250 at the Synod Assembly, and \$100 for retired rostered person. The Council unanimously approved the recommendation.

Draft schedule – Bishop Bill presented a draft schedule for the Synod Assembly and he welcomed input. An abbreviated schedule will be prepared for the Call to Assembly. The detailed schedule will be finalized and voted on by the Synod Council at its April meeting.

- More Synod Assembly Information

Bill is working closely with Stephanie Dillion, the conference planner, on electronic voting and securing other hotels in the area for overflow. He mentioned the room rates will be \$149 per night for the Crown Plaza hotel when the Synod Assembly will take place.

He reported three of the five bishops from Region 6 have completed their video on the life of a Bishop. Three of the six Bishops will be keynote speakers with each addressing the three parts of the Synod Assembly theme. All Region 6 Bishops will be attending the Synod Assembly although some cannot be there for the entire Assembly. Bishop Satterlee from the North/West Lower Michigan Synod will be giving the sermon at the Sunday worship. He has contacted a musician from Louisville for the Synod Assembly and is waiting to hear from him. The musician and Nancy Nyland will be planning the worship services for the Synod Assembly.

Roster Concerns – Bishop Bill

Call: Deacon Candidate Emily Michaelis, Chaplain, Eskenazi Hospital, Indianapolis: This will be on the night shift and she is enjoying the job although she sees some gruesome situations. Her letter and report are in Dropbox,

SC 2024/09: Bishop Bill recommended the Council approve the Call to Chaplain for Emily Michaelis at Eskenazi Hospital, Indianapolis. The Council unanimously approved the recommendation.

Pastor Joshua Penumaka from Synod Council call to congregational call. Joshua was called to Trinity in Lebanon in December 2016. Due to immigration laws, the ELCA was the fiscal agency for his employment and that shifted to the Synod in March 2022. Due to the immigration issues being cleared the fiscal agency will transfer to Trinity as of February 1, 2024. Since the congregation has already called him, Bishop Bill is not recommending a call to Trinity but a recognition and reaffirmation of the congregation's call. To do otherwise would cause confusion for the congregation as it already voted to call him. Bishop Bill after consulting with the executive committee drafted a resolution for the Council to approve and he read it to the Council.

The resolution reads as follows: With gratitude for his ongoing ministry with Trinity Lutheran Church, Lebanon, Indiana, the Indiana-Kentucky Synod Council recognizes and reaffirms Pastor Joshua Emmanuel Penumaka's call from Trinity, effective December 12, 2016.

SC 2024/10: Bishop Bill recommended the Council accept the resolution reaffirming and recognizing Pastor Joshua Penumaka Call to Trinity Lutheran Church in Lebanon, Indiana. The Council unanimously approved the recommendation and resolution with Pastor Penumaka abstaining.

On Leave from Call:

Pastor Elizabeth Lee, Family Leave, effective 2/1/24 for up to six years, renewal annually; Pastor Lee requested the leave to address and take care of family issues. She is not planning to leave the ministry. Bishop Bill has not yet received the letter from Pastor Lee but will have the executive committee via e-mail approve it when he gets it as it is anticipated it will be effective February 1.

Pastor Carolyn Lesmeister, extension (requires Conference of Bishops approval): Bishop Bill recommends the Council petitions the Conference of Bishops for her extension of Leave from Call for up to 2 years. It was for family leave and her original six years is up.

SC 2024/11: Bishop Bill recommended the Council request the Conference of Bishops to approve the extension of Leave from Call for Pastor Lesmeister for up to 2 years. The Council unanimously approved the recommendation.

Pastor Aaron Stamper, extension (requires Conference of Bishops approval) for On-Call as he is open to being called to a congregation. The original term of the Leave from Call of 3 years is expired. He lives in Columbus, Ohio and Bishop Bill has been in contact with the bishop there and they will be in communications about his status.

SC 2024/12: Bishop Bill recommended the Council request the Conference of Bishops to approve the extension of On Call to Pastor Aaron Stamper. The Council unanimously approved the recommendation.

Wellness Grants for Rostered Leaders, Round 2 – Bishop Bill announced wellness grants are available for rostered ministers for \$500 per person. The total amount of grant money available is \$26,000. This

money is from the Portico grants for wellness the synod received a couple of years ago that was not used in its entirety. These are restricted funds to be used for the wellness grants. The grant money can be used for anything that addresses the wellness of the rostered person, such as books, retreats, relaxation trips. The grants are available for the synod staff as well. Bishop Bill and Dan Forehand will review the applications for the grant. Information will go out in February.

Housing Allowance:

Bishop Bill reported on the housing allowance for the synod staff which must be approved by the council for IRS purposes.

ACTION SC/2024/13:

WHEREAS the Indiana-Kentucky Synod is a religious non-profit institution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and, whereas the Synod employs Bishop William Gafkjen, Pastor Cory Driver, and Pastor Dan Forehand, and whereas the Internal Revenue Service has advised the necessity of annual official action by the official body of the employing religious institution to exclude from the gross salary of clergy the estimated cost of renter payments for the purchase of a house, including down payment, mortgage principal, interest and taxes; garage rent; utilities; insurance; repairs and maintenance; furnishing; housing expenses as set forth; and

WHEREAS the following estimate of housing costs has been submitted to the Synod for the taxable year 2024 and included in the budget for the year 2023-24: Pastor Dan Forehand, \$35,000.00; Pastor Cory Driver, \$18,000.00; and Bishop William Gafkjen, \$42,000.00;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED by the Synod Council that the above amounts be designated as housing allowance, excludable from the gross salary paid for tax purposes, up to the extent they are used for said actual housing, and that any other allowance specifically designated and allocated by the Synod Council in this resolution may also be excluded for tax purposes up to the extent that any or all of them are actually used for such specific purpose. Passed unanimously. (Note: Pr. Nancy Nyland's housing costs are included in her deployed-staff contract with ELCA)

Staffing:

The Synod Disaster Relief Director will be named in the following week. This is funded by a three-year grant for Lutheran World Relief which will begin the day the Director starts employment per agreement with Lutheran World Relief. A posting for an interim part-time administrative assistant will be done next week along with the posting of an interim Storyteller.

Designation of \$20,000 gift from St. Mark, Butler IN after closure: Per the gift policy of the Synod, 15% of the money will go to the ELCA (\$3000), 5% will go to the Leaders fund for scholarships (\$1000), and another 5% will go to the candidacy fund (\$1000), for a total of \$5000. The remaining \$15,000 is recommended the finance committee to be used as follows: \$5000 to the pivot grant fund and \$10,000 to the costs for the Bishop transition which was not budgeted for in the Synod budget.

SC2024/14: The Finance Committee recommended \$15,000 of the gift from St. Mark, Butler, Indiana be distributed as follows: \$5000 to pivot grants and \$10,000 to the bishop transition fund. The council unanimously approved the recommendation of the Finance Committee.

- Other Staff Concerns

o Pastor Cory Driver: nothing to report outside of his report in Dropbox.
o Pastor Dan Forehand: He led a discussion about the fall retreat for rostered persons especially to consider whether to postpone it or not have it this fall given there will be a new bishop. Members of the synod council expressed pros and cons. A place and date have been reserved in case it does take place. Staff will take the suggestions under advisement and discuss them further and report back at the April meeting. This is referred to as the Professional Leaders Gathering.

o Pastor Nancy Nyland, Director for Evangelical Mission

• Annual renewal of Synod Authorized Ministries: Nancy asked the Synod Council to renew the following ministries that are continuing as Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities (SAWC) or Synod Authorized Outreach Ministries (SAOM) in 2024:

- Mara Evangelical Church in Indianapolis (MECI) (31390) – SAWC; Leader: Mr. Khai Cho
- So Much More Ministries (31306) – SAOM; Leader: Pr. Amy Beitelschees-Albers

and to rescind the mission field for the following Synod Authorized Worshipping Community:

- Grace and Hope Fellowship (31298); Leader: No current leader

and to authorize the following ministries that are continuing as Strategic Ministries in 2024:

- Bethel Lutheran Church (02278); Leader: Pr. Joy Heine
- Grace and Glory Lutheran Church (30307); Leader: Pr. Karleen Jung
- The Apple Tree Center – Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church (02237); Leader: Cynthia Clark, Executive Director
- Roots of Life (31085); Leader: Pr. Teri Ditslear
- Trinity Lutheran Church (02224); Leaders: Pr. Emmanuel Penumaka

SC 2024/15: Dee Ann Daniels made the motion to authorize the ministries presented by Nancy Nyland and to rescind the ministry of Grace and Hope Fellowship. Tim Graham second. The motion passed unanimously.

o Susie Swenson, Synod Storyteller: Thanked everyone for their well wishes and spoke of how much she enjoyed working with the staff and Synod Council over the past three years. Bishop Bill thanked her for the services and talent she provided to the Synod.

§ Committees, Task Forces, and Tables

• Constitution Committee: Julie Slavens reported the committee met in January and approved three congregational constitutions. Letters have been sent to those congregations. The committee will meet again in March or April.

• Racial Justice Task Force: The task force would like an opportunity for an educational space at the Synod Assembly. Bishop Bill reported there will be some time for breakout sessions and the task force should be given a space at that time. Pastor Evangeline also reported she will be on a panel at the United Nations conference on the Status of Women as part of Lutheran World Relief.

Women of the ELCA: December meeting was postponed and they will have one in March.

The meeting ended with prayer lead by Bishop Bill with a prayer for the Epiphany season.