

**LOWER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD, ELCA  
SYNOD COUNCIL**

**Minutes  
April 18, 2020**

The Lower Susquehanna Synod Council met for its regular meeting on Saturday, April 18, 2020, by Zoom, as the coronavirus mitigation measures of stay-at-home orders continue. Vice President Lucinda L. Bringman called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

**DEVOTIONS**

Virgil Gibson led devotions. He read Psalm 16, the appointed Psalm for this coming Sunday, which begins, “Protect me, O God, for I take refuge in you.” Virgil reflected that those who take refuge in the Lord are a blessing to others – true heroes – in faith and in service. He reminded us of the power of personal invitation in involving others in ministry. He noted that refuge comes in a variety of ways and we must beware of things that become refuge that are not God: e.g. relying on the things we do, the things we have, or church busy-ness. It is important that we remind one another that the Lord is our refuge, our inheritance, and he is faithful to his promises. Virgil closed us in prayer.

**ROLL CALL**

**Members present:**

Bishop James S. Dunlop	Lucinda L. Bringman
Beth A. Schlegel	Joseph M. Stepansky
Matthew B. Best	Kay A. Hinkle
Meredith Killian Askey	Debra K. Barrett
Virgil L. Gibson	Timothy J. Seitz-Brown
Carlotta “Chucki” C. Strevig	Jennifer R. Lau
Stella Ludwig	Zachary J. Weiss
Daniel P. Picone	Theodore D. Wolfe
Joel S. B. Folkemer	Gretchen S. Ierien
Jillian E. Riddle	Jack M. Horner

**Staff present:**

Robert C. Blezard	Elizabeth G. Martini	Dana J. Blouch-Hanson
Deborah M. Clark	Richard E.T. Jorgensen	Charles R. Roberts III

**Liaisons present:**

Lois Griffiths (WELCA)	Noah Roux (ELCA Church Council)
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**Guest present:**

**Members excused:**

Dallas J. Barclift, Jr.

**Staff excused:**

**SPECIAL ORDER**

Vice President Lucinda Bringman provided instructions for the Zoom meeting and thanked Charlie Roberts and Debbie Clark for acting as hosts and managing the flow of conversation.

She then welcomed and introduced Noah Roux, who was elected in 2019 as a member of the ELCA Church Council for a six-year term. He is from the Upper Susquehanna Synod because the role of communicator from the Church Council alternates between the Lower Susquehanna and Upper Susquehanna Synods.

Noah reported on the last Church Council meeting, where he met Bishop Dunlop. It was the first joint meeting of the Church Council and the Council of Bishops. The focus was on working cooperatively toward the future. The most important thing was the interaction between the Council of Bishops and the Church Council. The significant activity was updating the Portico health plans, repealing *Vision and Expectations*, updating the Candidacy Manual and *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*. There was also approval for future movement on climate change action. Noah reported great generative discussions regarding how we can be innovative as we look to the future. There was also discussion on this church's response to COVID-19.

Vice President Bringman reminded us of the language used in the church for the various legislative bodies: Congregation Council, Synod Council, and Church Council. Some people hear the term "Church Council" and think it means the congregation when it properly refers to the churchwide organization.

Noah is a member of Zion Lutheran Church in Turbotville, PA, and was on staff at Camp Mount Luther for four summers. He is looking forward to making it summer #5, but it is unclear what form this year's program will take.

Vice President Bringman thanked Noah for being here and invited his written report as well as his presence for future Synod Council meetings.

### **CONSENT AGENDA**

Vice President Bringman introduced the Consent Agenda. She noted the minutiae of the recommendations for amendments to the governing documents and that if we approve the consent agenda, we are sending those recommendations to the Synod Assembly. She asked if anyone wanted to remove any items from the consent agenda.

Virgil Gibson moved, and Kay Hinkle seconded:

**ADOPTED**     **That the Consent Agenda be adopted:**  
**SC20.04.24.**

**That the Synod Council approve the minutes of the February 15, 2020, Synod Council meeting.**

**That the Synod Council appoint to the Audit Committee Jeff Fagan for a first three-year term, expiring 2023.**

**That the Synod Council appoint to the Candidacy Committee the Rev. Nancy Easton and the Rev. Keith Fair for first five-year terms, expiring 2025; and the Rev. Nicole Wachter to a second five-year term, expiring 2025;**

**That the Synod Council elect to the Consultation Committee the Rev. Karen Larson to an unexpired term expiring 2020.**

**That the Synod Council grant on-leave-from-call status to the Rev. Robert W. Moore, effective February 17, 2020, until February 17, 2021;**

**That the Synod Council grant the Rev. Adam T. Morton on on-leave-from-call for graduate study status effective March 31, 2020 until March 31, 2021;**

That the Rev. John G. Largen be granted the request for retirement, effective June 30, 2020;

That the Synod Council recommend to the 2020 Synod Assembly the amendment of S10.01.01. as follows:

*S10.01.01. The Synod Council, in addition to the four officers, shall consist of fifteen (15) adult members and one (1) youth member and one (1) young adult member. Said membership shall conform to the standards of representation of the ELCA Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in †S6.04. Therefore, there shall be six (6) ~~clergy ordained ministers, of Word and Sacrament members,~~ at least four (4) of whom shall be ministers of Word and Sacrament; nine (9) lay adult members; one (1) youth member; and one (1) young adult member. All other members shall be elected as members-at-large.*

That the Synod Council recommend to the Synod Assembly that S9.05. be amended as follows: S9.05. The Synod Council shall nominate at least ~~two~~ one person[s] for vice president; additional nominations may be made from the floor.

That the Synod Council recommend to the Synod Assembly that S9.06. be amended as follows: S9.06. The Synod Council shall nominate at least ~~two~~ one person[s] for secretary; additional nominations may be made from the floor.

That the Synod Council recommend to the Synod Assembly that S9.07. be amended as follows: S9.07. The Synod Council shall nominate at least ~~two~~ one person[s] for treasurer; additional nominations may be made from the floor.

That the Synod Council recommend to the Synod Assembly that S16.02.01. be amended as follows:

**S16.02.01.** *The following process for determining persons entitled to indemnification under this synod's constitution †S16.02. shall be used:*

- 1. Any person who desires the benefit of indemnification under †S16.02. shall make written application setting forth the name of the other organization, whether or not this other organization is incorporated, the position in the other organization that the applicant held or holds ~~or will hold~~, a brief statement as to why the applicant's holding of this position in the other organization was or is in the interests of this synod; and a statement that no claim has been asserted against the applicant that would or might entitle the applicant to indemnification under the indemnification ~~right~~ being requested.*
- 2. The application must be signed by the applicant and must be endorsed by either the ~~unit~~ organization executive or the ~~unit~~ organization board or committee chair.*
- 3. The applicant may be requested to supply additional information such as the other organization's policy on indemnification, information on the other organization's insurance coverage and financial responsibility, and a description of the responsibilities that the applicant had or has with relation to the other organization.*
- 4. The application and any requested additional information should be submitted to*

*and will first be reviewed by an administrative committee consisting of the bishop, the secretary, the treasurer, and the synod's legal counsel.*

- 5. The administrative committee shall recommend to the Executive Committee of the Synod Council whether the application should be approved. The Executive Committee will decide on behalf of the Synod Council. The action of the Executive Committee will be recorded in its minutes. The applicant will be notified of the Executive Committee's decision.*
- 6. No member of the administrative committee or the Executive Committee shall participate in decisions ~~as to which such~~ if that member is an applicant.*
- 7. Approval may be granted on a limited basis, examples of which include but are not limited to: the approval may cover the applicant's service as a director but not as an officer of the other organization; the approval may be limited in period of time; the approval may cover civil but not criminal liabilities; the approval may be conditional upon the applicant first seeking indemnification or reimbursement from the other organization or its insurance carrier. Unless otherwise specifically provided by the Executive Committee of the Synod Council, approval will not entitle any person to indemnification with respect to a claim asserted against her/him prior to such approval.*
- 8. If the other organization is not a corporation, indemnification under †S16.02. shall be provided only in exceptional cases.*

**That the Synod Council amend S11.01.r.C16. as follows:**

**S11.01.r.C16. Consonant with the provisions of S11.01.15. these ministries may include:**

- 1) ABX (Alpha Beta Christos), which shall be a ministry of the bishop's office of this synod in collaboration with the Region 8 Office of the ELCA to gather newly rostered leaders during the initial ~~two~~ three years of their first call for the purpose of support, collegiality, and disciplined reflection on ministry in accord with ELCA First Call Theological Education requirements. The bishop shall designate an assistant to the bishop to provide this ministry.*
- 4) The ~~Congregational~~ Leadership Resource Support Team (CLRST), which shall be composed of 8 to 12 persons, both ministers of Word and Sacrament and lay. A chairperson/convener shall be appointed by the bishop. This team shall work with congregations and leaders of the Lower Susquehanna Synod to achieve positive responses to change, anxiety, and conflict. Members of this team shall possess skills and willingness to assist congregations in healthy communication and leadership patterns, as well as addressing conflict management, mediation, and resolution.*

### **SYNOD COUNCIL ACTIONS**

Bishop James Dunlop moved, and Meredith Askey seconded:

**ADOPTED** That the Synod Council call the Rev. Eric N. Anderson as the

**SC20.04.25. intentional interim pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, York Springs, (on behalf of Garden of Grace Community of Churches), effective February 24, 2020, until February 23, 2021.**

Bishop Dunlop clarified that they are still working with Garden of Grace Community of Churches regarding their future. Kay Hinkle noted that several pastors had served those congregations previously and asked if additional pastors would be serving. Bishop Dunlop replied that Pastor Richard Michael is currently serving as an interim pastor, so with this call, there would be two pastors serving. Work continues other possibilities. The motion carried.

Bishop James Dunlop moved, and Kay Hinkle seconded:

**ADOPTED SC20.04.26. That the Synod Council call the Rev. Timothy J. Seitz-Brown as the intentional interim pastor of Benders Evangelical Lutheran Church (and by contract to St. Paul Lutheran Church), Biglerville, effective April 1, 2020, until March 31, 2023.**

Bishop Dunlop explained that we do not normally call an intentional interim pastor unless the person has received intentional interim ministry training. He said that Pastor Seitz-Brown has been serving this parish since 2017 and was scheduled to receive training, which was canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic. His on-leave-from-call status will expire soon, and Bishop Dunlop believes that a call in this instance is appropriate. The motion carried. Pastor Timothy Seitz-Brown abstained.

Regarding the recommendations coming from the Executive Committee, Vice President Lucinda Bringman referred to the proposed postponement procedure and reminded us of the bylaw that stipulates that we must have an annual assembly held between May 15 and June 30. The following recommendations help us to honor that bylaw while managing the COVID-19 uncertainties.

Pastor Joel Folkemer, vice chair of the Executive Committee, moved:

**ADOPTED SC20.04.27. That the Synod Council postpone indefinitely the Edification Days scheduled for May 16, 2020, and May 30, 2020.**

Vice President Bringman noted that the events were already unofficially postponed, and we hope to be able to do them at some point. Bringing together 300-400 people is something we cannot do at this time and we don't know when they could be rescheduled. This recommendation leaves things flexible. The motion carried.

Pastor Joel Folkemer moved:

**ADOPTED SC20.04.28. That the Synod Council change the location of the June 6, 2020, Synod Assembly from Messiah College to the corporate headquarters of the Lower Susquehanna Synod at 900 S. Arlington Ave., Ste. 220B, Harrisburg, PA 17109.**

Vice President Bringman explained that Pennsylvania law regarding incorporated entities mandates an annual meeting to be held at the corporate headquarters unless the board of directors, which for us is the Synod Council, changes the location. Normally, we do change the location to Messiah College, for reasons of space. In the current circumstances, when we anticipate a remote meeting, we must act to change the location to our synod offices. The motion carried.

Pastor Joel Folkemer moved:

**ADOPTED**     **That the Synod Council, following the determination of quorum at the June 6, 2020, SC20.04.29. Synod Assembly, move to adjourn, in order to postpone the assembly.**

Vice President Lucinda Bringman explained that on June 6, 2020, Bishop Dunlop will gavel the meeting to order, but there will not be a quorum. Then the motion to adjourn would follow. If at that time we know the date and location of a rescheduled assembly, the motion will reflect that; if not, the motion will be to Adjourn to the Call of the Chair. We are planning to reschedule the May Synod Council meeting to the June 6 date so that the Synod Council will be present for the Synod Assembly on that day. One person will be physically present at the synod office. This procedure will satisfy the requirement of the bylaw. The motion carried.

Pastor Joel Folkemer moved:

**ADOPTED**     **That the Synod Council archive the 2010 and 2014 stewardship strategies. SC20.04.30.**

Vice President Bringman explained that these two strategies had been posted on the website, but the Committee on Stewardship and Mission Support was doing current work, under Pastor Rob Blezard's leadership. The motion carried.

Chucki Strevig, chair of the Constitution Committee moved:

**ADOPTED**     **That the Synod Council adopt continuing resolution S10.01.r.B20. *The term of office of Synod Council members shall begin at the close of the Synod Assembly at which they are elected and conclude at the close of the Synod Assembly held three years later or two years later in the case of a youth member. When a person is elected to fill an unexpired term on the Synod Council, the term shall begin upon election and conclude at the close of the Synod Assembly when the term would have ended had there been no vacancy.***

Vice President Bringman indicated that the Executive Committee had asked the Constitution Committee to look at this, since our governing documents did not specify the start and finish of terms. In practice, we have understood Synod Council terms to run from Synod Assembly to Synod Assembly, but the governing documents are silent. This would make that clear. She noted that, in the current circumstances, that means that Synod Council members whose terms would have ended in June will now be extended until assembly elections are held. The motion carried with Virgil Gibson and Timothy Seitz-Brown abstaining.

Kay Hinkle, chair of the Gifts Discernment Committee, moved:

That the Synod Council nominate to the Synod Assembly Jennifer Lau for the office of Synod Vice President.

Vice President Bringman indicated that she did not think it was appropriate for this action to be taken with the current term not expiring until 2023. She asked to table this motion until after the report of the vice president.

Secretary Beth Schlegel moved, and Pastor Joel Folkemer seconded:

That this motion be tabled until after the report of the vice president.

**ADOPTED**     **That the motion to nominate to the Synod Assembly Jennifer Lau for the office of Synod Vice President be tabled until after the report of the vice president.**

**DISCUSSION ON THE REPORT OF THE BISHOP ELECTION EVALUATION TASK FORCE**

Vice President Lucinda Bringman summarized the purpose of the task force to review the processes and evaluations from the 2013 and 2019 bishop elections and indicated the task force report and the previously distributed notes from the January meeting of conference deans and secretaries. She explained that as a synod, we have experienced the Preliminary Identification Process Leading to the Election of a Bishop (**S9.04.r.A18**) both with a clean slate of candidates in 2013 and with a sitting bishop open to election in 2019. The task force is looking at how the process went in both cases and is exploring the possibility of changes. The report lists eleven brainstorming ideas – not proposals—and is seeking input regarding them. Four of them in particular were identified by the task force for discussion by the Committee of Deans and the Synod Council.

She called attention to idea #2, the elimination of the ecclesiastical ballot in favor of the Conference Assemblies generating the fixed slate of nominees. Meredith Askey wondered if there would still be nominations from the floor. Vice President Bringman indicated that as she understood that idea, there would not be floor nominations at the Synod Assembly. Pastor Joel Folkemer suggested that the Conference Assemblies could be considered the ecclesiastical ballot, allowing time for those identified as having gifts for the office of bishop to be vetted. Then those names would form the first ballot at the Synod Assembly. There would be more names than usual, but more opportunity in advance for people to talk with those candidates. Secretary Beth Schlegel wondered if the omission of nominations from the floor would be permissible under *Robert's Rules of Order*. Vice President Bringman responded that this procedure was used in other synods. She clarified that in her research among other synods, there are four ways of electing a bishop: 1) do nothing in advance of the Synod Assembly; 2) do all the nominating in advance; 3) identify potential names for the office of bishop but not name any nominees until the assembly holds the first ballot (which includes our process); and 4) variations on the above. Pastor Jack Horner urged that we not get away from the ecclesiastical ballot. He has no problem with doing some of the process in advance. His observation is that the people who rise to the surface are the ones expected to do so. Pastor Matthew Best reminded us of the importance of remembering why we are looking into this process. Is it to streamline the process? Is it to ensure the inclusion of all possible candidates? Vice President Bringman indicated that in the last election, one of the final seven candidates had not been identified at the Conference Assemblies. Pastor Tim Seitz-Brown said that while people like the ecclesiastical ballot, starting the nomination process at the Conference Assemblies would streamline the Synod Assembly. Vice President Bringman wondered if that meant that biographical information would be posted from all the names receiving votes at the Conference Assemblies, which could be a large number. Pastor Richard Jorgensen relayed information he received from former ELCA Secretary David Swartling regarding the principles of an ecclesiastical ballot: a) it takes place at the Synod Assembly where all are gathered; b) it is a written ballot. Vice President Bringman noted that various ELCA secretaries interpret things differently. Pastor Jorgensen responded that he hopes we do not abandon our intention to allow the Holy Spirit to work at the Synod Assembly. Vice President Bringman acknowledged that some people feel strongly that the Holy Spirit works at the Synod Assembly and others believe just as strongly that it can also work in the Conference Assemblies. Pastor Joel Folkemer suggested that we not only want to consider streamlining the process, but also get to know the candidates before electing them. Bishop James Dunlop stated that the reason the preliminary process was developed in the first place was out of concern that many voting members did not know the candidates. The process hoped to give people a chance to discern who was available and who had gifts for the office. Therefore, as he sees it, moving the nominating ballot to conferences has merit.

Vice President Lucinda Bringman moved the conversation to consider idea #3, which suggests that a confidence vote be held in year five of the term of a bishop who is open to serving another term. This idea

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comes from our companions in Tanzania. She indicated that in this process, we determine what percentage of the assembly vote constitutes confidence and if the vote reaches that level, then there is no preliminary process for the election year; the Synod Assembly simply ratifies the confidence vote. She said that one of the painful realities of the 2019 election was the lame duck year which hampered ministry. Because of the uncertainties the upcoming election posed for the bishop and the staff who are employed at the bishop's pleasure, it was difficult to move forward with ministry such as new initiatives and staffing changes. Pastor Joel Folkemer countered that if the vote was one of no confidence, that, too, would result in a lame duck year. Vice President Bringman noted that in the current preliminary process, the sitting bishop must declare openness to serve another term by November of the year prior to the election. A confidence vote at the Synod Assembly in year five would assist the bishop in that discernment. Meredith Askey said that she liked the idea of a confidence vote but wondered if the vote indicated no confidence in the sitting bishop, how would nominees be prepared for election? Vice President Bringman indicated that in that case, we would move directly to the preliminary process for lifting up names.

Vice President Bringman moved the conversation to consider idea #5, which proposes a change to the constitution to eliminate the names from the nominating ballot who do not reach a pre-determined threshold of votes. Currently, she explained, once a name is nominated on the ecclesiastical ballot, unless it is removed by the person receiving the nomination, it remains on the second ballot. In addition, each person nominated who is not in attendance at the Synod Assembly must be contacted for permission to continue on the ballot, causing delays in the balloting. This past year, attempts to contact nominees in Europe and Chicago were difficult due to time differences and delayed the balloting process. This suggestion would eliminate those who did not receive a certain percentage of votes on the nominating ballot; many on that ballot receive only 1 or 2 votes. Pastor Matthew Best wondered if there has been any instance of someone being elected to the office of bishop who did not meet such a threshold. There was no such recollection. Pastor Jack Horner said that he saw the practicality of such an idea, perhaps even making the threshold lower than 2%. Pastor Joel Folkemer wondered how many names would have been affected in the last election. Based on a 1% threshold of votes cast on the nominating ballot (479), eighteen names receiving 4 or fewer votes would have been eliminated, leaving ten names for consideration on the second ballot.

Vice President Lucinda Bringman directed the conversation to consider idea #7, which suggests adding to the current preliminary process a series of Listening Posts in the fall prior to an election to reflect on the synod's mission before moving into the process of discernment of persons with gifts for the office. She indicated that prior to the 2019 election, three task forces were formed: 1) to develop the Mission Site Profile and Synod Snapshot; 2) to develop the profile of a bishop based on the Mission Site Profile and Snapshot; and 3) to develop mission questions for the Conference Assemblies. According to this suggestion #7, those documents would be prepared on the bases of the Listening Posts. She reminded us of the fourteen conference Listen Posts that were conducted in fall 2012, the Year of ReFORMATION. There were fourteen meetings in eight weeks, which was exhausting for officers and staff, but were well-attended, garnering 40-50 people at each event. Those events helped to feed into the 2013 election process but were a lot of work. Pastor Joel Folkemer asked who would run these meetings, since if done by the current staff, it would be perceived as campaigning. Vice President Bringman acknowledged that possibility and suggested that the Synod Council would take the lead. She noted that in 2012, the bishop did not attend any Listening Posts and those staff who did attend did not actively participate, but just listened. Pastor Jack Horner said he thinks Listening Posts are a great idea, since anytime people are gathered to talk about mission and what we need to accomplish it is time well spent. Bishop Dunlop agreed that getting input is valuable and if we are electing a new bishop it is helpful for people to be engaged in that process.

Vice President Bringman called our attention to the other ideas and invited our input. She said the task force is being deliberate because we have time. If we decide to change the constitution, that requires two years, so amendments would need to be ready for 2023; a change to the Preliminary Process would need to be approved by 2024; the election is slated for 2025. She invited us to submit additional thoughts regarding these suggestions.

Debbie Clark asked about the communication of conference Zoom meeting information, expressing concern about the security of passwords. Vice President Bringman said that all four links to the upcoming meetings should be sent to the Synod Council members, so that they could attend as able.

### **REPORT OF THE BISHOP**

Bishop James Dunlop provided a written report, including a report on the recent Conference of Bishops. He said that he has been working with Glenn Beard regarding use of the synod Disaster Response Fund, which has a balance of about \$82,000. As indicated in the fund policy, we can spend 20% of the fund before seeking Executive Committee approval. So far, \$8700 has been granted: \$5000 to St. Stephen, New Kingstown, for homeless ministry; \$1700 to St. Paul (York Street), Hanover, for the feeding of children; and \$2000 to Grace, Camp Hill, to continue their community meal program through a pick-up distribution process.

The bishop reported receipt of a letter from the Konde Diocese indicating the presence of COVID-19 in Tanzania. While it is not as prevalent as here, most on the eastern coast, once it does hit them they will not have sufficient resources to handle it. Bishop Dunlop reported sending \$25,000 to the Konde Diocese to be used as needed. Bishop Edward Mwaikali's response of gratitude was conveyed to us in a letter. Vice President Bringman referred us to the Disaster Fund Policy.

Bishop Dunlop reported that he and Treasurer Joseph Stepansky have been meeting regularly and developing financial contingency plans. He referred us to the breakout of the budget on a monthly basis and the need to set priorities. He reported that the ELCA churchwide organization has established a COVID-19 Relief Appeal and will be making grants of \$5,000 -\$10,000 to synods, with an emphasis on ministry to those impoverished and to struggling congregations. Although we will apply for such funding, we probably will not qualify at this time, since we have our own disaster fund. Some synods are in worse shape and are worried about next month's payroll. Right now, the COVID-19 hotspot is South Dakota, where there are many Lutherans.

### **REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT**

Vice President Lucinda L. Bringman submitted a written report. She indicated that we have kept the Synod Assembly registration open because the Synod Council has not met to decide what action to take. We have canceled the contracts with Messiah College and with Quizdom, who provides the voting machines. When we can conduct elections, we will use paper ballots counted manually. Quizdom costs \$8000 per day. When it comes to questions of registration refunds, we are not doing anything right now because we don't know yet what will happen. We are hoping to reschedule Edification Days and the Synod Assembly in a church building, but with the coronavirus mitigation measures, all such plans are still uncertain.

Vice President Bringman tendered her letter of resignation, as she had said to the 2019 Synod Assembly that she would. This action aims to prevent the future concurrence of elections for bishop and vice president.

Pastor Timothy Seitz-Brown moved, and Debra Barrett seconded:

**ADOPTED That the Synod Council accept with regret the resignation of vice president**

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**SC20.04.33. Lucinda L. Bringman effective August 30, 2020, or the last day of the second month following the conclusion of the 2020 Synod Assembly, whichever is later.**

The motion carried with Bishop Dunlop voting no.

Pastor Joel Folkemer moved, and Pastor Tim Seitz-Brown seconded:

**ADOPTED That the motion to nominate to the Synod Assembly Jennifer Lau for the office of SC20.04.34. Synod Vice President be taken off the table.**

Pastor Joel Folkemer, on behalf of the Executive Committee, moved to amend the motion to add “for a term ending in 2024.” Vice President Bringman indicated the intent of this amendment being to clarify that this is a new term, not the filling of a vacancy. Since the election will be at the 2020 Synod Assembly, the term will end in 2024. The motion to amend carried, with Jennifer Lau abstaining.

**ADOPTED That the motion to nominate to the Synod Assembly Jennifer Lau for the office of SC20.04.35. of synod vice president be amended to add “for a term ending in 2024”.**

The main motion was adopted with Jennifer Lau abstaining.

**ADOPTED That the Synod Council nominate to the Synod Assembly Jennifer Lau for the office of SC20.04.36. of synod vice president for a term ending in 2024.**

Vice President Bringman indicated that this nomination will move to the Synod Assembly along with the proposed amendments to the constitution that allow the presentation of a single name for nomination, as recommended by the ELCA Model Constitution for Synods. She thanked the Gifts Discernment Committee for their hard work of calling potential nominees and inviting them to serve.

### **REPORT OF THE TREASURER**

Treasurer Joseph M. Stepansky submitted a written report and a Statement of Operational Activities. He reported that we are in a fairly good cash position, since April mission support came in better than expected at 70%-80% of what was forecast. He is monitoring the situation daily. Investments have changed. The current balance is \$2.138 million, which is \$122,000 less than last year at this time but we also withdrew \$125,000 following the action by the Synod Council at the February meeting for the Legacy Fund distribution. Taking that withdrawal into account, we are close to last year’s balance at this time. The current balance is similar to what we had between 2015 and 2016.

Treasurer Stepansky further reported that the audit is complete and there was indeed a \$1200 surplus in 2019 despite a \$50,000 reduction in mission support.

He is still getting inquiries regarding the state sales tax exemption certificates for congregations. The letter of extension of tax exemption was distributed to congregations for use with the expired certificate and is also available on the synod website <https://www.lss-elca.org/sales-tax-exemption-certificate-extension-letter/>. New certificates will be issued by the PA Department of Revenue once the COVID-19 crisis is resolved.

Treasurer Joseph Stepansky indicated that the synod has been approved for a line of credit from Members 1<sup>st</sup> Federal Credit Union. We don’t need it currently, but it is available if we do. He further reported that we applied early for the federal coronavirus stimulus Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan, but then on April 6, the form changed, and the processing of applications was transferred to a third party. The new form was completed on April 7, and on April 14 we were notified that the application had been processed

and was awaiting approval by the Small Business Association (SBA). By then, the SBA had run out of money. So, we are now in line if/when Congress frees up additional funding for this program. The amount of the forgivable loan would be \$234,000.

Treasurer Stepansky noted that the audit was completed, and he will modify his reporting to correspond to that of the auditors. Our accounting software, MIP, was unavailable for three weeks, which was frustrating for the entire office. He said that other synods use Accounting and Information Systems (ACIS), as well as Raiser's Edge Donor Management Software and QuickBooks. Treasurer Stepansky will continue to explore other possibilities carefully. He would like to see a change, but it will not happen overnight, since the process of data conversion takes time once a vendor decision has been made.

### **DISCUSSION ON THE CURRENT FINANCIAL STATUS AND PLANNING FOR OUR SYNOD**

Vice President Lucinda Bringman led us into this discussion by reporting that the officers conducted a conference call on March 15, as the COVID-19 mitigation measures were unfolding and congregations were ceasing in-person worship, to talk about the possibility of reduced offerings and mission support and how to prioritize expenses. Bishop James Dunlop reported on the things we did as an immediate response: a) we applied for a \$100,000 line of credit as a tool, if we need it; b) we applied for the PPP loan and are in the queue for consideration; c) he went to the LSS Mission Fund Committee with a request for allocation of money from that fund to the operating fund to preserve our cash position; thus, we have \$200,000 in cash for mission and \$40,000 owed from the LSS Mission Fund, and the Mission Fund Committee granted \$25,000 immediately for budget items, with reassessment in a month; d) he talked with our external ministry partners and made decisions based on those conversations: We held back mission support from the ELCA for two months, but in light of April mission support we will send one month and make decisions from month to month; we held back grants to campus ministry and the Lutheran Camping Corporation; we sent grant money to United Lutheran Seminary because they are in a tight cash position. Bishop Dunlop underscored that he and Treasurer Stepansky talk weekly regarding which bills to pay with the goal of managing cash flow. He asked, "Are these the right strategies?" He outlined four broad areas for our spending: 1) New Mission in our synod, which is primarily payroll for rostered ministers; 2) Operations, which is largely staff payroll; 3) Partner Support, those agencies and ministries with whom he was in conversation; and 4) ELCA Mission Support. He noted that his conversation with ELCA mission support director Victoria Flood indicated that the churchwide organization is also anticipating a decline in revenue. We are trying to balance all of this, Bishop Dunlop said. Therefore, we want Synod Council input on our priorities.

Virgil Gibson said that for him, the priorities are keeping our pastors supplied and trim items not directly affecting our people.

Gretchen Ierien inquired about the status of the camps and campus ministry. Bishop Dunlop said he had spoken with Mike Youse, who indicated that the camps are currently in good financial shape, though that could change depending on what happens with the summer program. Their board of directors has not yet made a decision. The bishop further reported that most of our campus ministry funding is allocated for Penn State University, but last year they did not cash our checks for four months, so we are holding back that grant. Dana Blouch-Hanson said that the Lutheran Camping Corporation Executive Committee has met twice to discern the direction of the camps in light of COVID-19 and that the full board of directors will meet in late April. Vice President Bringman indicated that the camps are currently proceeding as if there will be summer camp.

Kay Hinkle acknowledged the difficult decisions the bishop and staff have been making and affirmed that the current approach of managing cash flow makes sense to her. She reiterated the principle of taking care of people first. Vice President Bringman recognized a sense of affirmation of the measures taken and that we should stay the course. Pastor Tim Seitz-Brown asked if we will communicate these actions to the

wider synod to be transparent. Vice President Bringman accepted that good idea and suggested that the Zoom meetings would be opportunities for that communication. He also noted that it was an opportunity to invite people who don't need their personal stimulus funds to give to the LSS Disaster Response Fund. Pastor Gretchen Ierien asked if we need to be nimbler in making decisions under the current circumstances. Vice President Bringman responded that we feel confident in the steps we have taken. We canceled the March Finance and Budget Committee meeting regarding the proposed 2021 budget because we didn't know how the COVID-19 situation would unfold and we anticipated the postponing of the Synod Assembly. Now that decisions have been made, it is a good time to schedule a meeting. Bishop Dunlop said that because of the uncertainties of COVID-19 and its impact on congregational worship and offerings, we cannot accurately forecast mission support and thus do not know at this time what sort of budget we will need. Nevertheless, at the same time as we are facing these uncertainties, Deacon Marsha Roscoe and Pastor Richard Jorgensen are in the process of applying for a \$1 million Lilly Foundation grant to extend the R3 Renewal Process collaboratively with the Upper Susquehanna and Allegheny Synods. The letter of intent was sent this week. It is a strong proposal, targeting the foundation's desire to fund initiatives that have a direct impact on the revitalization of congregations. We are waiting to see the outcome of this effort. Treasurer Joseph Stepansky added that the other wild card is the PPP loan, for which we hope to qualify if Congress authorizes a second round of funding. Amounts used from a Small Business Administration (SBA) PPP loan for payroll and benefits, utilities, and rent can be forgiven by the SBA.

#### **REPORT OF THE SECRETARY**

Secretary Beth A. Schlegel submitted a written report. Vice President Bringman acknowledged the challenges of this being the first Synod Assembly for this new secretary, and the whole timeline being disrupted. She thanked Secretary Schlegel for her fine work.

#### **REPORT OF THE SYNOD COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The Synod Council Executive Committee provided draft minutes of its April 1, 2020, meeting.

#### **REPORT OF THE CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE**

The Synod Council Constitution Committee provided draft minutes of its March 16, 2020, meeting.

#### **REPORT OF THE GIFTS DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE**

The Synod Council Gifts Discernment Committee provided draft minutes of its February 17, 2020, meeting.

#### **REPORTS OF THE CHURCHWIDE ORGANIZATION LIAISONS**

**ELCA Church Council** liaison Noah Roux brought greetings and a report earlier in the meeting. There were no other liaison reports.

#### **REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE STAFF**

Deacon Marsha Roscoe provided a written report. Vice President Bringman called attention to the Review Document of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Collaborative Mission Center as descriptive of this emerging outreach ministry of our synod.

Charlie Roberts provided a written report.

Pastor Robert Blezard provided a written report.

Pastor Beth Martini provided a written report.

Pastor Richard Jorgensen provided a written report.

Pastor Dana Blouch-Hanson provided a written report.

### **REPORTS OF COMMITTEES FOR THE MINISTERIUM AND MISSION**

**The Committee of Conference Deans** provided notes from its March 9, 2020, meeting.

**The Congregational Leadership Resource Team** provided a written proposal.

**The Stewardship Education and Mission Support Committee** provided minutes of its March 12, 2020, meeting.

**The World Hunger Committee** provided minutes of its March 23, 2020, meeting.

### **REPORTS OF TASK FORCES**

**The Bishop Election Evaluation Task Force** provided minutes of its February 20, 2020, meeting.

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

There was no unfinished business.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Vice President Lucinda Bringman referred to a letter from Pastor Jeffrey Compton who expresses dismay at the registration charge for retired rostered ministers to attend the 2020 Synod Assembly. He had indicated his strong feelings at the last meeting of the deans and has had extended conversation with her in the intervening time. She had invited him to attend today's meeting, but he chose not to since we were not making any decisions relating to registration fees. He will be attentive to any future decisions on the matter.

Vice President Bringman encouraged Synod Council members to be in regular contact with assigned conferences. She expressed gratitude at the attendance at this meeting and the opportunity for prayer check-ins.

The Synod Council May meeting is canceled, and the Synod Council will meet, as scheduled, on June 6, 2020, by Zoom. The date for a rescheduled Executive Committee meeting prior to that time has not yet been determined.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 12:43 p.m.

Beth A. Schlegel  
synod secretary  
4/20/2020