

**LOWER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD, ELCA  
SYNOD COUNCIL**

**Minutes  
June 6, 2020**

The Lower Susquehanna Synod Council met for its regular meeting on Saturday, June 6, 2020, by Zoom, as the coronavirus mitigation measures continue. Vice President Lucinda L. Bringman called the meeting to order at 9:16 a.m., following the adjournment of the 2020 Synod Assembly to the call of the chair due to lack of a quorum during the coronavirus pandemic.

**DEVOTIONS**

Pastor Timothy Seitz-Brown led devotions. He read from Genesis 1 and Psalm 8, and then presented a video that drew upon Psalm 104. He observed that we need a regime change – that we need to be ruled by the Prince of Peace, Jesus. He noted that following the two introductory Psalms 1 and 2, there are five lament Psalms. Psalm 3, reflecting David’s lament of the death of his son Absalom is for Pastor Seitz-Brown his Ahmaud Arbery psalm. Psalm 4, appointed for use in the church for the office of compline or prayer before bedtime, calls to mind the image of Breonna Taylor trying to sleep when gunfire erupted, causing her death. Psalm 5 brings to mind Dreasjon Reed’s untimely death and Psalm 6 is the cry of George Floyd. Where do we see Christ Jesus? We see him on the cross struggling to breathe like George Floyd. We see him like a victim of a lynch mob. June 17, 2020 is the first feast day of the martyrdom of the Emanuel 9. Their killer, Dylann Roof, was a baptized, confirmed Lutheran, but his faith formation did not free him from bondage to the ideology of white supremacy. Psalm 7 cries out with the Emanuel 9. Can we hear these laments as singing the blues? Does the unfathomable Triune God care about us? Yes! As the divine Dance happening in divine Love, yes. God does not respond to chaos as an enemy; God sees potential, beauty, and brings order to chaos. Can we see God as wooing us into new relationship? As God the Spirit hovered over the chaos in Genesis 1, can we silently and without fear attend to the chaos? Pastor Seitz-Brown challenged the church to provide better faith formation for our people so that we can live in God’s realm. He reminded us that we are God’s icons in this world. He led us in prayer with the response: God, may your dreams for healing come to life through us. Vice President Lucinda Bringman thanked Pastor Seitz-Brown for his ongoing witness in our synod and his service on the Toward Racial Justice Task Force.

**ROLL CALL**

<b>Members present:</b>	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
	Jack M. Horner	Jennifer R. Lau
	Stella Ludwig	Zachary J. Weiss
	Daniel P. Picone	Theodore D. Wolfe
	Joel S. B. Folkemer	Gretchen S. Ierien
<b>Staff present:</b>	Robert C. Blezard	Elizabeth G. Martini Dana J. Blouch-Hanson
	Deborah M. Clark	Richard E.T. Jorgensen Charles R. Roberts III
<b>Liaison present:</b>	Lois Griffiths (WELCA)	
<b>Members excused:</b>	Jillian E. Riddle, Carlotta “Chucki” C. Strevig, Dallas Barclift, Jr.	

## CONSENT AGENDA

Vice President Lucinda Bringman introduced the Consent Agenda. She asked if anyone had questions or wanted to remove any items from the consent agenda.

Virgil Gibson moved, and Debra Barrett seconded:

**ADOPTED**     **That the Consent Agenda be adopted:**  
**SC20.06.37.**

**That the Synod Council appoint to the Candidacy Committee the Rev. Shawn Berkebile and the Rev. Richard B. Geib for first five-year terms, expiring 2025;**

**That the Synod Council elect to the board of directors for LutherCare David R. Bradbury, Oneida D. DeLuca, Bernard J. LaPine, Megan Lecas, and Raymond A. Millen for first three-year terms, expiring 4/2023; and James Devine for a second three-year term, expiring 4/2023;**

**That the Synod Council continue on-leave-from-call status for family leave of the Rev. Martine Joseph, until June 19, 2021 and on-leave-from-call status of Deacon David Hope-Tringali, until July 1, 2021; and of the Rev. Jennifer Hope-Tringali, until July 1, 2021.**

## SYNOD COUNCIL ACTIONS

Bishop James Dunlop moved, and Jennifer Lau seconded:

**ADOPTED**     **That the Synod Council call Deacon Kristin A. Vought as Director of Development**  
**SC20.06.38.     for the Gettysburg Hospital Foundation, effective May 30, 2017.**

Bishop Dunlop referred to Deacon Vought's letter in response to his request that she articulate how she sees her work as fulfilling her call as a deacon. He further clarified that the call goes back to 2017 because she was rostered in the Metropolitan Washington D.C. Synod at the time that she began her work. Bishop Dunlop believed that synod had issued her a call, however it was discovered that no call was issued and her roster status was not clear. In conversation with ELCA Secretary Sue Rothmeyer, it was determined that the Lower Susquehanna Synod issuing her a call now would repair her roster status. The motion carried.

Bishop James Dunlop moved, and Debra Barrett seconded:

**ADOPTED**     **That the Synod Council renew its call of the Rev. Linda Shank to serve as pastor of**  
**SC20.06.39.     Christ Lutheran Church, New Bloomfield, under the terms of synod administration,**  
**for one additional year, effective June 3, 2020 until June 2, 2021, or until the**  
**congregation can meet to regularize the call.**

Bishop Dunlop explained that this congregation is under synod administration for renewal and it is an R3 congregation. The congregation would have called Pastor Shank had they been able to meet to do so. Since they cannot meet at this time because of the COVID-19 crisis, we can renew the call until they are able to meet. This sustains Pastor Shank's roster status in the meantime. Vice President Bringman noted that this is the sort of thing we can do as a synod to support congregations during these extenuating circumstances. The motion carried.

Bishop James Dunlop moved and Pastor Matthew Best seconded:

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**ADOPTED**      **That the Synod Council renew its call of the Rev. Joel Folkemer to serve as pastor of Union Lutheran Church, York, under the terms of synod administration, for one additional year, effective September 1, 2020 until August 31, 2021, or until the congregation can meet.**  
**SC20.06.40.**

Bishop Dunlop noted that this situation is like the previous one, being the impact of COVID-19 preventing congregations from conducting congregation meetings. The motion carried. Pastor Joel Folkemer abstained.

Bishop Dunlop moved:

**ADOPTED**      **That the Synod Council affirm the decision of the Barrens United Lutheran Church Congregation Meeting, which voted on February 3, 2019, to close the congregation; the final worship service was held on October 27, 2019.**  
**SC20.06.41.**

Vice President Bringman noted the correction of the date of the closing worship service from October 26 to October 27, 2019. Daniel Picone asked if members of the congregation are attending other churches or are they forming a new church body? Bishop James Dunlop explained that if they were forming a new church body, it would be a different action brought to the Synod Council. Barrens United disposed of its building and the members are going to other nearby churches. The bishop reported that there is another congregation seeking to disaffiliate with the ELCA, however that requires a process of consultations and multiple congregation meetings and would be a different action of the Synod Council. The motion carried.

Bishop James Dunlop moved:

**ADOPTED**      **That the Synod Council affirm the decision of the Second Lutheran Church, Chambersburg, Congregation Meeting, which voted on October 27, 2019, to close the congregation; their final worship service was held January 19, 2020.**  
**SC20.06.42.**

The motion carried.

Virgil Gibson, on behalf of the Audit Committee moved and Stella Ludwig seconded:

**ADOPTED**      **That the Synod Council accept the audit for the Fiscal Year 2019.**  
**SC20.06.43.**

Vice President Lucinda Bringman indicated that the entire audit is included in the packet because the letter from the auditors is addressed to the Synod Council. It is part of our fiduciary responsibility to review the information and take appropriate action. She reported that the auditors profusely commended our Treasurer Joe Stepansky and his staff, Denise Ferguson and Cathy Paul for their work. Ours was the first remotely conducted audit they did in this COVID-19 crisis. Normally, they would meet in the Luther Room at the synod offices where files would be easily accessible. This time, documents had to be electronically submitted as requested. This was a major undertaking for the Treasurer's Office, but they did it well and the audit went smoothly. The motion carried.

Virgil Gibson, on behalf of the Audit Committee moved and Secretary Beth Schlegel seconded:

**ADOPTED**      **That the Synod Council retain RKL as the auditor for FY 2020.**  
**SC20.06.44.**

Vice President Bringman explained that the Synod Council is the legal body that employs auditors. Treasurer Joe Stepansky signs the letter of engagement. The motion carried.

Vice President Bringman solicited prayer concerns from the Synod Council members, as is our custom.

### **REPORT OF THE BISHOP**

Bishop James Dunlop provided a written report. He added that as of yesterday, Governor Thomas Wolf is moving more counties from the yellow phase of coronavirus re-entry to the green phase. York County and Adams County are among those moving to the green phase next week. The bishop will be holding four multi-conference meetings with rostered ministers next week to discuss the impact of this news. He stressed that moving to the green phase does not mean returning to the way things were before the coronavirus pandemic. We are not going back to an old normal. We must still operate according to public health guidelines, e.g. not exceeding 50% capacity of our buildings, maintaining physical distancing, and other guidelines. How will we control the number of people in our space? How can we shift to a hybrid model of providing worship to accommodate those who will not return to the building? Bishop Dunlop said that the decisions congregations make are fundamentally about managing risk. What kind of risk are we willing to live with? He used the analogy of driving a car – there are risks involved and decisions to be made. Some risks are defined by authorities and others by circumstances. A number of churches are planning to worship outdoors or in the parking lot. Outdoor worship poses less risk than indoor worship and remaining in cars is even less risky. Trinity, Mt. Joy is planning multiple neighborhood yard gatherings of safely-distanced small groups to worship. Congregations will need to make decisions about singing; right now, that would be like driving 100 mph without a seatbelt. In the car, the driver decides whether to assume the risk, but with COVID-19, it is putting others at risk. Therefore, he has encouraged congregations to put together a COVID-19 team to assess risk and put together a plan.

Meredith Askey asked if there is any situation in which churches must report their plans? What if someone thinks a congregation is not making the best decisions to protect its members? Bishop Dunlop responded that each congregation must make its own decisions. If someone is not happy with those decisions, then the member must choose to participate in another way. The synod has no authority to tell congregations what to do. We can provide guidance and make recommendations. Most congregations have been taking our advice in this pandemic. The bishop further noted that not all congregations take the advice; regarding the recommendation to refrain from technologically-mediated communion, some have chosen to ignore the advice.

Debra Barrett thanked Bishop Dunlop for the messages and updates that have been a blessing to her as conversation starters in her congregation. The bishop acknowledged the work of the staff on the communications as a team effort. Vice President Bringman affirmed the value of the team and reported hearing feedback that the messaging supports pastors in leading their congregations through this difficult time.

Pastor Joel Folkemer wondered about the authority for decisions not to sing, now that the CDC has omitted such guidance from its resources. Bishop Dunlop referred to a video produced by the Moravian Church, in which a professional demonstrates the science of virus transmission by singing, posted on our Coronavirus Resource Page. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNzGkflAkZQ> Pastor Folkemer wondered if that resource also includes the parameters for resuming group singing. The bishop replied that he did not think so, but that as he sees it, if the virus is active in our communities, there should be no singing until there is a vaccine and herd immunity to make it safe. Pastor Richard Jorgensen referred to the ELCA Guidelines for Reopening Congregations as clearly stating that group singing is one of the riskiest behaviors. Treasurer Joe Stepansky can provide a copy of the original CDC guidelines by request.

Vice President Bringman directed the attention of the Synod Council to the gratitude report of Grace, Camp Hill, a recipient of a LSS Disaster Response Fund grant for their ministry.

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

Vice President Lucinda L. Bringman submitted a written report. She called attention to the fact that the next regularly scheduled Synod Council meeting is on September 26, 2020 at 9:00 a.m., but that under the current circumstances, there is the possibility for meeting in the summer. If such a meeting is scheduled, the Synod Council would be notified as usual.

### **REPORT OF THE TREASURER**

Treasurer Joseph M. Stepansky submitted a written report and a Statement of Operational Activities. Treasurer Stepansky noted that in comparison to last year, mission support is down \$41,000 in May and \$52,000 in April, for a total of \$93,000 during the COVID-19 crisis. He reduced the forecast for mission support giving for 2020 to \$2 million. He further reported that while the current projected deficit is \$184,000, that is likely to be offset by the forgiveness of the PPP loan. Any forgiven amount will offset the currently forecast deficit. He is waiting to hear from the staff regarding projected expenses.

Treasurer Joe Stepansky reported on the Legacy Fund balance that is \$142,000 higher than last year. He further indicated that he is redeeming short-term low-interest CDs in order to improve ability for cash management.

Treasurer Stepansky monitors the legislative process surrounding the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) closely. Yesterday, June 5, 2020, Congress passed the PPP Flexibility Act. This legislation allows for the possibility of extending the length of the loan term from the original 8 weeks to 24 weeks. For us, the 8-week period would end June 15 and the 24-week period would end October 15. This legislation allows breathing room and the opportunity for simplification. He will be extending the loan term. If we use the loan for payroll only, we would use the loan funds completely by September 4; if we use payroll + Portico benefits, we would finish by July 24; if we use payroll + rent, we would finish by August 21. Treasurer Stepansky underscored the reality that this landscape is changing daily.

Vice President Lucinda Bringman commended Treasurer Joe Stepansky on his work as treasurer and said that he is a blessing to our synod. Bishop Dunlop noted that usually, the treasurer is pessimistic and the bishop optimistic, but a few weeks ago, the bishop suggested that the *treasurer* was being “too optimistic”.

### **REPORT OF THE SECRETARY**

Secretary Beth A. Schlegel submitted a written report. She noted that she will do her best to get the minutes of the Synod Assembly and this Synod Council meeting distributed as soon as possible.

### **CONVERSATION REGARDING THE SYNOD ASSEMBLY**

Vice President Lucinda Bringman led us into this discussion by reporting that we had tentatively set aside October 17, 2020, as a possible date for reconvening the 2020 Synod Assembly in one of our larger congregations. There is no specific plan at this time. Will it be possible to put such a large group in a common space at that time? No one knows. So, the question for conversation is this: If we cannot hold the remainder of the Synod Assembly in 2020, how shall we proceed? Vice President Bringman reported that she consulted attorney and parliamentarian Joe Ricci about this, and he responded by indicating that he believes The Pennsylvania Nonprofit Corporation Law of 1988, specifically 15 Pa.C.S.A. § 5509, permits any nonprofit corporation to adopt emergency bylaws during an emergency event. Mr. Ricci will investigate this further. This law provides a mechanism for the Synod Council to act provisionally to do the work of the Synod Assembly. Vice President Bringman noted that the procedure we just engaged for the Synod Assembly had been provided by experts on the ELCA Vice President listserv as appropriate

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for synods whose constitutions mandate an annual assembly. Now that our assembly is effectively postponed, how will the specific business of the assembly be accomplished if we cannot reconvene in October? Matters such as approving a FY2021 budget; elections for vice president, Synod Council, and committees; and establishing minimum salary guidelines for rostered ministers cannot be postponed indefinitely.

Meredith Askey acknowledged that even if we could safely gather in October, there may be voting members who not feel comfortable doing so. Could we provide a Zoom opportunity for them? Vice President Bringman responded by reporting that some synods are doing small group dispersed assembly by Zoom. In Pennsylvania, we must be sure that all participants can hear each other simultaneously. Bishop Dunlop explained that organizing a Zoom assembly is logistically complicated and he is concerned that it may not be feasible for October. He has asked the staff to work with the Assembly Planning Committee to plan for a remote assembly in 2021. He noted that some voting members have no technology and we must determine how will we manage that. He suggested that if we cannot meet in October, we should refer the assembly business to the Synod Council for action. Planning for 2021 gives us time to figure out locations, how to vote, etc. We also need to monitor our income and the projected cost for the technology to run a remote assembly. Bishop Dunlop further explained that we are one of the largest synod assemblies in the ELCA because of the large number of congregations who send 2-3 voting members each. Some synod assemblies are only 200-300 members.

Pastor Tim Seitz-Brown suggested that we simplify the procedures for this year's assembly for the sake of our spiritual wellbeing and that of our synod staff and officers.

Vice President Bringman noted that whenever we hold the Synod Assembly we will need to explain to the assembly the action the Synod Council took and why we took it. She reported that some synods have canceled their 2020 Synod Assembly, and some have extended the terms of current terms for a year; still others have elected incumbents who will be ratified by next year's assembly.

Secretary Beth Schlegel asked whether we need to enact emergency bylaws for the Synod Council to do the business of the Synod Assembly. Vice President Bringman responded by saying that Joe Ricci is looking into our constitution and Pennsylvania law in that regard. She also sent the information to our synod legal counsel. She is awaiting a response. She noted that the Synod Assembly is the highest authority, and the Synod Council is the interim authority. Emergency bylaws enacted by the Synod Council could be repealed by the next Synod Assembly.

Pastor Jack Horner said he agreed with Pastor Seitz-Brown regarding pursuing simplicity as we move forward. Vice President Bringman responded by saying that before the September 26, 2020 Synod Council meeting, we will know whether an October assembly is feasible or not. Members of the Synod Council whose terms would have ended today remain until new elections. Pastor Seitz-Brown observed that there are some strong people nominated and ready to serve; he is looking for the Synod Council to become more diverse.

Vice President Bringman reported that she has been trying to reach Dallas Barclift, who has been absent without communication since the November meeting (he attended both September and November). With regret, she reported that he will be submitting a letter of resignation as a member of the Synod Council for personal reasons.

Virgil Gibson wondered about the possibility of mail-in ballots for elections. Secretary Beth Schlegel indicated that such a procedure would conflict with our constitution +S7.31. stipulating that "proxy and absentee voting shall not be permitted in the transaction of any business of this synod." It would also

conflict with commonwealth law regarding the requirement for simultaneous aural communication for voting members of the assembly.

Pastor Joel Folkemer wondered about making it the responsibility of each conference to designate a location for a group Zoom participation in an assembly. In such a model, each conference Zoom group would be connected to the central assembly and would have a designated person to collect and tally votes and keep records.

Secretary Beth Schlegel reminded us that any decision regarding the reconvening of the assembly needs to be made at least 60 days prior to allow for proper notification and the conducting of Conference Assemblies. A decision for an October assembly would need to be made by midsummer.

Daniel Picone said that he likes Pastor Folkemer's idea. Daniel likes to give lower-level leaders responsibility. And he likes the idea of meeting in conferences. He thinks that such a decentralization and localization may facilitate better participation since there is less driving involved. He also reflected on the question of whether to enact emergency bylaws to authorize the Synod Council to do the work of the Synod Assembly. He understands the rationale but is apprehensive when a governing body decides that the prevailing rules don't matter and allows the people in charge make decisions. It makes him nervous to agree to such a procedure.

Debra Barrett wondered whether the emergency bylaws would expire. Vice President Bringman quoted, "...to be effective during any emergency...in the event of which a quorum cannot be assembled." Bishop Dunlop wondered if we could add an expiration date. Vice President Bringman continued to read, "To the extent they are not inconsistent with the emergency bylaws, the normal bylaws remain in force." Further, when the emergency ceases to exist, the emergency bylaws are no longer effective.

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

The Synod Council Executive Committee provided minutes of its April 1, 2020, meeting and draft minutes of the May 26, 2020, meeting.

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

Lois Griffiths reported that the churchwide WELCA events have all been rescheduled for 2021 and the synod unit has been meeting remotely by Zoom. There were no other liaison reports.

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

Charlie Roberts provided a written report.

Pastor Robert Blezard provided a written report.

Pastor Beth Martini provided a written report.

Pastor Dana Blouch-Hanson provided a written report.

Debra Barrett wondered about the possibility for racial justice training webinars, since the in-person training workshops have been suspended. Pastor Beth Martini responded that the Toward Racial Justice Task Force is planning to set up a Google Classroom for online training. The Episcopal version of the training is already online and a link to register is on our website. Communication will go out soon indicating various opportunities to engage in racial justice training. Pastor Martini noted that June 17 is the commemoration of the Emanuel 9 shooting, and resources to equip congregations to observe that event are being curated now on the website. Pastor Tim Seitz-Brown affirmed that the task force will be ramping up for online versions of the planned training sessions.

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

**The Audit Committee** provided a liaison report.

**The Committee of Conference Deans** provided minutes of its May 11, 2020, meeting.

**The World Hunger Committee** provided a liaison report.

**United Campus Ministries** provided a liaison report. Vice President Bringman called attention to the question raised in Daniel Picone's report regarding the status of funding. Bishop Dunlop explained that since our cash flow is running behind, we have been holding back some grants. This is monitored monthly and at this moment, he cannot say when the United Campus Ministry at Shippensburg University will be receiving grant funds. He further reported that some grants have been partially paid, but the priority has been to fund mission starts and those ministries involving salaries that depend on synod funding. Our ELCA mission support is also reduced by 22%; he reported that across the ELCA, mission support generally is down 25%.

## **REPORTS OF TASK FORCES**

**The Bishop Election Evaluation Task Force** provided a report of its May 4, 2020, and May 18, 2020, meetings. Vice President Bringman noted that the next step of the task force is to develop a survey. She invited our participation in refining the questions, indicating that we should email her if interested.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

There was no unfinished business.

## **NEW BUSINESS: CONVERSATION ON THE NEXT THREE MONTHS IN OUR SYNOD**

Bishop James Dunlop led us into this conversation by reiterating that life has changed irrevocably and we will not be going back to the way things were before – not in our congregations and not in the synod. He shared a helpful video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uAKQXagwms> that reminded us that we face a world that is Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA). Large group gatherings will not be happening in the near future. Online ministry is more important; small group ministry is more important; pathways for discipleship are more important; mission is more important. He raised this question: How is it that we as synod can support our congregations? We have focused on the 3 E's: Equipping leaders (but the needs now are different); Encouraging cooperation (he has seen it in creative ways during this season, but what will it look like going forward?); Engaging in new mission (what needs to be created now that digital worship is engaging more people than in-person worship and some will not want to resume in-person activities?) Bishop Dunlop reported a conversation among Region 8 bishops. The Region 8 bishops want to engage their Synod Councils specifically regarding three questions:

1. Is the Lower Susquehanna Synod open to forming and participating in a new configuration of synods for the sake of mission in this place?
2. What is the primary role of the synod within the 3-expression polity of the ELCA? What does a synod *need* to be doing?
3. Is there a better way, after three decades of three expressions, or at least in the defined work of those expressions, to serve the people of God and God's mission?

Bishop Dunlop noted that the current 3-expression polity is not something that was handed down apostolically – it was the creation of the Committee for a New Lutheran Church (CNLC) in 1987 as the ELCA was emerging. It may no longer be effective in the world we face now. He noted that throughout the ELCA, the number of members and dollars have been shrinking over time. We are one of the largest synods with respect to budget, staff and congregations. The smaller synods are struggling. Allegheny Synod is reducing staff and feeling the strain and stress of this COVID-19 crisis.



Bishop Dunlop reported some ideas that surfaced in the Region 8 bishops' conversation:

1) Consolidate administrative functions into centralized locations while retaining bishops in their current territories. Administrative functions include candidacy and rostering. In this model, the Upper Susquehanna and Allegheny Synods would be administered in the Lower Susquehanna Synod. Such an arrangement would not require major constitutional changes.

2) Redraw the map completely and petition the ELCA to change the structure. This approach is favored by some who believe we need larger, more robust synods. Synods would consolidate to make fewer synods altogether. This would require the approval of each current synod in assembly and the memorializing of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly to change the ELCA governing documents to reflect a new configuration. Such an approach is more complex to accomplish but could be structurally more efficient.

3) Redefine the role of the bishop from administrative/programmatic to pastoral. This approach is favored by some who think the current synods are too large. A bishop can only effectively care for about 100 congregations. In this model, the synods should prioritize pastoral care over programs and administration.

Bishop Dunlop emphasized that no decisions were made in these conversations, and of these ideas, some are simpler to accomplish than others. Some approaches are more technical, e.g. moving administrative functions; others are more adaptive, e.g. redefining the role of the bishop or redefining boundaries.

Virgil Gibson asked if the role of the synod is to serve the ELCA or congregations? Will consolidating synods support our effective relating to congregations? Is it responsive to congregational needs? Bishop Dunlop responded that the synod supports congregations and the ELCA has a role in supporting synods. An advantage to larger synods is an economy of scale, reducing duplication of effort and making efficient use of resources. Discernment involves weighing efficiency and effectiveness. Smaller congregations may see a larger synod as less effective, since they tend to feel more isolated. A larger synod may remind us of the former Central Pennsylvania Synod (LCA) which utilized deployed staff in various territories. However, at that time, current technology was not available; today, staff could connect with outlying congregations using technology.

Pastor Jack Horner stated that the structure of the church must support the mission. The synod provides training and equipping; what structure best accomplishes that activity?

Pastor Matthew Best insisted that we need to stop kicking this can down the road. We have been talking about the need for structural change for more than ten years. Now it is time to act.

Jennifer Lau said it is important that we have this conversation and to look ahead.

Pastor Tim Seitz-Brown asked how larger synods are coping differently than smaller synods with the COVID-19 crisis. Bishop Dunlop responded that our synod is not feeling the same pressures as smaller synods. We have more reserves and depth of staff to equip congregations.

Vice President Bringman noted that the churchwide expression cannot do everything better than synods. The mission support experiment has demonstrated that to be true.

Pastor Richard Jorgensen commented that the churchwide organization will be pivoting to equip synods and there is a movement to decentralize the work of the church.

Bishop Dunlop said that already on the churchwide level, there is reworking of the assignment process to become more regional and local. Since many roster candidates are less likely to want to relocate, the bishops would participate in a regional assignment process for candidates.

The bishop indicated that he was hearing openness to conversation regarding changes to the structure (Q1). He further indicated that he heard in our conversation a consensus that the role of the synod is to equip congregations (Q2).

Pastor Jack Horner expressed gratitude for all the good work the synod does with regard to disciplinary issues.

Secretary Beth Schlegel emphasized the importance of including equipping congregations technologically so that they can continue spreading the Gospel. Virgil Gibson agreed, relating the story of the college student who has facilitated his congregation's worship livestreaming during this crisis but who will leave a vacuum of competence when he returns to college. The congregation will need help to continue that digital presence. It is important for us as a synod to be curating technology resources for our congregations (Who is available and where?) Bishop Dunlop noted that congregations have been creative, and it is important to continue to be creative and to learn to use technology. We may not be doing large in-person events for the foreseeable future.

The bishop refocused the conversation specifically on the question of priorities for the next three months in this synod. He is working on providing guidance for moving into the green phase of re-entry, working on the FY2021 budget, and continuing to manage current resources. Are there other priorities? Pastor Matthew Best requested more resources to equip leaders for dealing with expressions of trauma and how to accompany those affected by crisis.

Charlie Roberts commended Vice President Lucinda Bringman for her exceptional leadership.

Vice President Bringman thanked the staff and assistants to the bishop for their support and excused them from the meeting.

### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

The Synod Council entered executive session at 12:05 p.m.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 12:26 p.m.

Beth A. Schlegel  
synod secretary  
6/17/2020