

**LOWER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD, ELCA
SYNOD COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes
July 1, 2020**

The Lower Susquehanna Synod Council convened a special meeting on Wednesday, July 1, 2020, by Zoom, to discuss the status of the 2020 Synod Assembly. Vice President Lucinda L. Bringman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Pastor Beth Martini led us in devotions, reflecting on the frequent biblical words “The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”

ROLL CALL

Members present: Bishop James S. Dunlop Lucinda L. Bringman
Beth A. Schlegel Joseph M. Stepansky
Jillian E. Riddle Kay A. Hinkle
Meredith Killian Askey Debra K. Barrett
Virgil L. Gibson Timothy J. Seitz-Brown
Jennifer R. Lau
Stella Ludwig
Daniel P. Picone

Staff present: Elizabeth G. Martini Dana J. Blouch-Hanson
Deborah M. Clark Richard E.T. Jorgensen

Liaison present: Lois Griffiths

Members excused: Matthew B. Best, Dallas Barclift, Jr., Carlotta C. Strevig

Vice President Bringman reminded us of the limitations of the remote technology and encouraged us not to use the chat function, since those on the telephone cannot see those comments and it is difficult to track them for the good of the whole.

CONVERSATION ON THE STATUS OF THE 2020 SYNOD ASSEMBLY

Vice President Bringman reviewed the purpose of this special meeting as a follow-up to the action taken at the Synod Assembly on June 6, 2020, to adjourn the assembly to the call of the chair. She noted that the chair, Bishop James Dunlop, now has the authority to determine when the assembly would be called, but that the advice of the Synod Council was important to have before making that determination. The date of July 1 for making that determination was set with the timeline for notification and Conference Assemblies in mind. The tentative date of October 17, 2020, means that notification is required before the September Synod Council meeting.

Bishop Dunlop indicated that he is leaning toward not calling the assembly to order this year, effectively canceling it. He stated that we cannot know for sure what the situation will be in October. The current increase in positive cases of COVID-19 and the guidelines for being in the “green” phase indicate that it is neither feasible nor wise to gather over 500 persons in a single space. The proposed alternative of separate Zoom hubs throughout the synod is being considered, but the logistics of arranging that technology by this fall are difficult and would require focused staff time now. This means letting go of other projects to accomplish this in such a short time. If we cancel the assembly, then we have to determine what business needs to be done by the Synod Council. The bishop asked for feedback from council members.

Each person present weighed in on the matter. There was a consensus of agreement to cancel the assembly this year, with the following observations:

- the outdoor Adams County Apple Festival was just canceled;
- the WELCA Triennial gathering was postponed to 2021;
- it is the safe and loving thing to do;
- older people attend the assembly and we need to protect them;
- it is better to cancel than to scramble to pull something together;
- when we do a technology-mediated assembly, it should be done right and not thrown together;
- we don't have the skill set on staff right now to arrange the technology quickly and faithfully;
- we can put resources to work in other ways without overwhelming the staff;
- it makes sense to lead by example;
- we have to make the hard decisions;
- it is the right thing to do.

Kay Hinkle inquired regarding the registration fees, but no decision has been made.

Meredith Askey wondered if there could be an agenda for the actions the Synod Council would have to take and whether we could get written input from voting members on those matters. Vice President Bringman said that we have the assembly agenda, and the items that need action would include adopting a FY2021 budget, adopting minimum salary guidelines for rostered ministers, and holding elections. Items such as amendments to the governing documents can be postponed to 2021. Getting written input from voting members would violate the constitution and state laws requiring simultaneous aural communication for deliberation.

Treasurer Joe Stepansky noted a study by Harvard University regarding the occurrence of COVID-19 in counties, which listed among the top 5 counties of increasing cases in Pennsylvania: Lancaster (#1), Lebanon (#2), Dauphin (#3), and York (#5).

Jen Lau and Daniel Picone urged us to over-communicate the actions we are taking and why we are taking them. Vice President Lucinda Bringman summarized by saying that she and Secretary Beth Schlegel would work together on communications indicating that the Assembly Chair will not be further calling the 2020 Synod Assembly to order in 2020.

OTHER MATTERS

Treasurer Joe Stepansky shared the good news regarding mission support: the June forecast was for \$157,000 and we received \$181,000. We are also in a good cash position because of the PPP loan. He has been attending webinars related to the PPP forgiveness process, which is still in flux. Bishop Dunlop said that we don't know what effect the coronavirus will have on 2021 mission support, which makes developing the budget challenging. Vice President Bringman indicated that a budget is a plan that can always be adjusted.

Pastor Tim Seitz-Brown asked about the deadline for responses to the letter from the Region 8 bishops. Vice President Bringman indicated that since we already had conversation about those questions at our last meeting, we are ahead of the other synods. Further responses should be sent to Bishop Dunlop within the next month.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Beth A. Schlegel
synod secretary

Special Synod Council Minutes/July 1, 2020/page 2

7/3/2020