

**LOWER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD, ELCA
SYNOD COUNCIL**

**Minutes
March 22, 2018**

The Lower Susquehanna Synod Council met for a special meeting on Thursday, March 22, 2018, in the Dining Room of the Pennsylvania United Church Center, 900 S. Arlington Avenue, Harrisburg, PA 17109. Vice President Lucinda L. Bringman called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Members present:	Bishop James S. Dunlop Joseph M. Stepansky	Lucinda L. Bringman
	Eric N. Anderson Dana Blouch-Hanson Joyce E. Frigm Virgil L. Gibson Brenda D. Hartzell Jered L. Hock	Jennifer R. Lau Christine C. Lowe Jillian E. Riddle Beth A. Schlegel Timothy J. Seitz-Brown Stephanie M. Strauss Allen P. Stump
Staff present:	Robert C. Blezard Sharron R. Blezard Debbie M. Clark	Charlie R. Roberts III Marsha L. Roscoe
Members excused:	Joel S.B. Folkemer Colleen M. Hoffman	Emma L. Johns Jayne A. LeGore Thomas E. McKee

Pastor Beth Schlegel led the members of the Synod Council in opening devotions, reading from John's Gospel, Chapter 13. Jesus is washing the feet of the disciples. Leading by example, Jesus tells the disciples to wash one another's feet and that they should do as he has done for them. Pastor Schlegel shared a reflection from Martin Luther's Easter Book. As Luther reflected on the scripture, Jesus was acting as a servant and gave the example of love, that is to serve and be subject to another. Pastor Schlegel led the members of the Synod Council in prayer.

Vice President Bringman stated that the first action before the Synod Council was to consent to the bishop's appointment of an acting bishop. Section +S8.58. of our constitution reads:

If the bishop is *to be temporarily* absent from the synod for an extended period, the bishop, with the consent of the Synod Council, may appoint as acting bishop for such period an ordained minister of this church. Except as limited by action of the Synod Council, an acting bishop shall possess all of the powers and authority of a regularly elected bishop other than authority to ordain or to authorize the ordination of properly approved candidates for ordination.

Pastor Timothy Seitz-Brown moved and Jered Hock seconded:

That the Synod Council consent to the appointment of the Rev. Thomas E. McKee as Acting Bishop of the Lower Susquehanna Synod while Bishop James S. Dunlop is serving as Acting President of United Lutheran Seminary.

Vice President Bringman explained to the Synod Council that Secretary McKee had previously served as acting bishop three times; twice while Bishop Hendrix was on sabbatical and once while Bishop Hoover was

on medical leave. Pastor Schlegel asked what is the anticipated length of time that Bishop Dunlop will be on temporary leave of absence from our synod. Bishop Dunlop responded that the United Lutheran Seminary Board will meet in May and he is hopeful to have an interim president to recommend to the board at that meeting.

During the meeting, Bishop Dunlop was asked whether or not he would consider serving the seminary as interim or permanent president. The bishop affirmed that he has no desire to serve in either capacity. His primary sense of call continues to be serving our synod as bishop. He explained his willingness to serve as ULS acting president during this time of chaotic transition comes only out of dire necessity. With a serious deficit of church leaders in this area, Lutheranism depends on a seminary in the northeast. He could not stand by and watch it crash. The seminary is critical to leadership in our Lower Susquehanna Synod.

Pastor Dana Blouch-Hanson noted that she spoke with several colleagues in her conference, and they voiced concerns about the bishop taking a leave of absence to serve as acting president of the seminary. Bishop Dunlop responded that he would be happy to talk with or meet with anyone to discuss any concerns about him serving as acting president at the seminary. He noted that our synod will bill the seminary \$2,500 weekly for his time serving as acting president.

Vice President Bringman stated that our synod officers and staff worked diligently to provide full transparency through their communications to our synod and to our rostered ministers specifically. Vice President met with our synod program staff today. She noted that it is helpful to hear the concerns coming from our rostered ministers.

Pastor Beth Schlegel expressed that some anxiety stems from the fact that there is no clear end to the leave of absence as there would be in the case of a sabbatical. Vice President Bringman reminded the Synod Council that the point of the constitutional provision was included, according to former secretary of the ELCA Lowell Almen, so that such an absence could take place with minimum fuss and confusion. Pastor Timothy Seitz-Brown stated that God is calling us to share our bishop's gifts for the sake of the leadership of the whole church.

Vice President Bringman called attention to our ELCA Called Forward Together in Christ (Future Directions) priorities and goals for 2025. The second goal is to be "an equipping church." She commented that the Future Directions conversation has included combining the ELCA seminaries. These are the first two seminaries who have committed to moving forward together.

Virgil Gibson stated that he was happy to hear that there are no plans to "go back to Egypt." Bishop Dunlop responded that the seminary is looking forward not backward. He meets regularly with students, and he had lunch with the seniors at the Philadelphia campus on Tuesday. He walks around campus talking to a lot of people, sometimes randomly joining a meeting simply to talk to people. Bishop Dunlop plans to split his time evenly between the Philadelphia campus and Gettysburg campus. When he is in Philadelphia, he will stay overnight in a dorm room; and when he is in Gettysburg, he will commute from home. Bishop Dunlop announced that ULS was recently informed that they have been accredited by ATS for another two years.

There being no further discussion, the motion was before the council for action.

ADOPTED: That the Synod Council consent to the appointment of the Rev. Thomas E. McKee as Acting Bishop of the Lower Susquehanna Synod while Bishop James S. Dunlop is serving as Acting President of United Lutheran Seminary.

Bishop Dunlop abstained from voting on this motion.

Bishop Dunlop moved and Pastor Timothy Seitz-Brown seconded the second motion before the Synod Council.

That the Synod Council elect the Rev. Dr. Constance L. Mentzer to the Board of Trustees of the United Lutheran Seminary to fill an unexpired term ending July 2019.

Vice President Bringman noted that Pastor Mentzer's biography was distributed to the Synod Council today. Bishop Dunlop explained that the seminary board needs to maintain its balance of male and female and clergy and lay membership. He continued to explain that Pastor Mentzer is not a graduate of either the Gettysburg or Philadelphia seminaries and is trained by the ELCA in conflict resolution. Pastor Mentzer has gifts of peacemaking and conflict resolution. Bishop Dunlop noted that Pastor Mentzer's doctorate was in bi-vocational ministry and he feels that her voice would be valuable for the future of the church. Virgil Gibson expressed his gratitude for receiving Pastor Mentzer's bio in advance of tonight's meeting.

There being no further discussion, the motion was before the council for action.

ADOPTED: That the Synod Council elect the Rev. Dr. Constance L. Mentzer to the Board of SC18.03.02. Trustees of the United Lutheran Seminary to fill an unexpired term ending July 2019.

Vice President Bringman explained that we learned that another synod participating in the mission support pilot project was writing a letter to ELCA Church Council to be presented at its next meeting. After the conversation on the ELCA mission support experiment at our last Synod Council meeting, there was a sense of the council's agreement in favor of continuing the pilot experiment for an additional two years. Because the ELCA Church Council's meeting is in April, we needed to act quickly in order to share our synod's successes in the pilot experiment. A letter addressed to the ELCA Church Council was crafted and then reviewed by the Executive Committee. Along with an addendum of supporting information (including specific statistics), the letter was signed by 21 members and officers of our Synod Council and sent to ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, Vice President William Horne and Victoria Flood, Director of Mission Support. While we understand that the mission support pilot experiment was not included on the Church Council's April meeting agenda, the synods participating in the pilot experiment will present budgets to their Synod Assemblies as if the continuation of the pilot experiment was authorized by ELCA Church Council. We have been informed that the mission support pilot project will be on the agenda for the November 2018 meeting of the Church Council.

Bishop Dunlop added that Victoria Flood will include a cover letter to Presiding Bishop Eaton and Vice President Horne asking them to pay particular attention to our letter and the impact of the pilot experiment on the mission and ministry of this synod.

Vice President Bringman asked if there were any other items to come before the body.

Virgil Gibson asked if this letter to Church Council could be shared. Deacon Marsha Roscoe noted that we captured as much of the success of the pilot experiment as possible and that we are continuing to explore additional success stories to be shared. Bishop Dunlop added that the success stories of the experiment will be shared with our Synod Assembly.

Bishop Dunlop expressed his gratitude for being able to serve as Acting President of the United Lutheran Seminary. He noted that as a member of the Seminary Board it was clear to him that it would be important for someone to step into the breach at the seminary on the day following the board's action regarding President Latini. He pointed out that he spoke with Bishop Eaton, Vice President Bringman, and Secretary McKee before he agreed to make himself available. All expressed concern about his well-being but felt he had the gifts to serve in this capacity. He stated that he could not do it without our synod staff and officers stepping in to cover his absence. He feels truly blessed to work with this team and thanks them. Pastor Beth

Schlegel asked how our Synod Council could assist our synod staff in this time. Bishop Dunlop responded that they will not hesitate to reach out and ask for help.

Jered Hock commented that he felt certain Tom McKee would be widely regarded in our synod as the right person to serve as acting bishop. He also noted that he attended the West Cumberland spring conference assembly where the bishop serving as acting president of ULS was not an issue at all.

There was discussion about the upcoming spring conference assemblies. Vice President Bringman noted that the assembly script from Secretary McKee will be made available as soon as possible.

Vice President Bringman noted that our synod office is now equipped to handle committee meetings via Zoom. After working through some of the obstacles, the Executive Committee and the Bishop's Congregational Mission Fund Committee met recently using Zoom.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m. with the praying of the Lord's Prayer.

Deborah Myers Clark,
executive assistant to the bishop's office, scribe
3/23/18