Report of the Synod Council

In 2020 the Synod Council, like our congregations, had to respond to the COVID 19 pandemic that developed in February. They did this by first moving meetings to an online platform. As the pandemic wore on, the Synod Council adopted grant programs to assist congregations and rostered leaders that might suffer economic distress related to restrictions on gatherings and reduced income opportunities. The Synod Council found the first to postpone and then cancel the 2020 Synod Assembly. The council took steps to keep the synod functioning, by adopting a provisional budget and seating new members of the council. In November, the Synod Council made the decision to hold the 2021 Assembly online and tasked the Assembly Planning Committee with making all the appropriate plans.

In 2020 we saw three congregations leave our synod. Two – St Peter’s, Aristes, and Trinity, Sunbury – disbanded and the third – Canby, Bloomsburg – through disaffiliation. We also saw the retirement of three of our pastors – Rev. Ron Montgomery, Rev. Melody Sell, and Rev. Cinda Brucker – and one deacon – MaryLou Byerly. In November, Rev. Tom Glasoe, our synod Secretary submitted his resignation as he moved with his family to Erie, PA.

The Synod Council will recommend to the Assembly several amendments to the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions. Many of these will bring our document in line with amendments adopted by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly, while others are part of an ongoing effort to clean up our Constitution. In addition, amendments will be proposed to reduce the size of the Synod Council to make it a more efficient and effective deliberative body.

Actions of the Synod Council in 2020 are reported below.

January 25, 2020 Synod Council

SC20.01.02. To adopt the minutes of November 23, 2019.

SC20.01.03. To receive the Executive Committee minutes of December 19, 2019 and January 16, 2020.

SC20.01.04. To approve the termination of the relationship Canby Lutheran Church, Bloomsburg, PA with ELCA in accordance with C6.05.g. Passed by voice vote.

SC20.01.05. To approve the appointment of Mr. Joseph Fischer to the Advocacy Team, and the Rev. Tormod Svensson to the Implementation Team.

SC20.01.06. To approve the proposed amendments to the Fiscal Year 2021 budget.

SC20.01.07. To establish a task force that will explore synod structure and function in order to recommend changes that will align better with the strategy and mission of the synod.

March 19, 2020 Executive Committee

EC 20.04. To establish as policy that the Upper Susquehanna Synod will provide medical/dental insurance coverage for eligible employees. Employees may include spouse and children in this coverage through a voluntary salary reduction in the amount of 10% of the additional cost of insurance. In addition, employees, spouses and children who choose coverage under another ACA qualified plan (including those offered by a spouse’s employer) will be granted additional monthly compensation of $100 for the employee, $150 for spouse, and $150 for children. This policy will become effective July 1, 2020 and continue until a new policy is adopted.

EC 20.06. To establish a Communications Team with the following charges
• Develop and oversee implementation of a synod communications strategy
• Review and recommend changes to the synod website
• Review and recommend changes to monthly synod communications
And to appoint the Director of Communications, Rev. Rick White, Mr. Mark Giesen, Ms Devon Shepis, Ms Sara Mattern, and Mr. Ty Turner to serve on the Communications Team.

EC 20.08. To establish a Leadership Formation Ministry Team, in collaboration with members of the Lay Ministry Institute, with the following charges:
• To develop or coordinate opportunities for continuing education of rostered leaders and Authorized Lay Worship Leaders, including identification of presenters for said events.
• To coordinate opportunities for rostered leaders and Authorized Lay Worship Leaders required training events (such as Boundary Training and Anti-Racism Training) and identify presenters for said events.
• To develop or coordinate leadership training events and, as appropriate, identify presenters for said events.
• To consider opportunities for collaboration with other ELCA Synods and Institutions, and with Ecumenical partners for such events.
• The Leadership Formation Ministry Team will include one or two members of the Lay Ministry Institute board, at least one member of the synod council, and three to five additional individuals.

April 4, 2020 Synod Council

SC20.04.08. To postpone the 2020 Upper Susquehanna Synod Assembly, scheduled for June 19-20, and to look toward August or September of this year (2020) to schedule a one-day event for the purpose of conducting essential business and committee presentations.

April 18, 2020 Synod Council

SC 20.04.10. To adopt the consent agenda.

To adopt the Minutes for the following meetings of the Synod Council:
  a. January 25, 2020
  b. February 25, 2020 – Unanimous written consent vote
  c. April 4, 2020 – Special meeting for Synod Assembly postponement

To receive the Minutes of the Executive Committee for the March 19, 2020 meeting.

To recommend amendments to the Constitution, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the Upper Susquehanna Synod for adoption by the Synod Assembly, and to accept editorial amendments, as recommended by the Constitution Committee.

To authorize a Small Church Grant of $1,000 to Trinity Lutheran Church, McAlisterville in the 2020 calendar year for their Faith Connection Coordinator. The grant will be paid in one lump sum.

To authorize a Small Church Grant of $2,000 to St Paul’s Lutheran Church (Erdley’s), Middleburg, in the 2020 calendar year for their congregation discernment and renewal processes. This grant will be paid in two installments in May and September.

To approve change of call status for Deacon MaryLou Byerly to Retired, effective March 30, 2020.

SC 20.04.11. Whereas, the synod council on May 4, 2019 extended a call to the Rev. Kate Drefke “to serve as Redeveloper for the St Paul’s (Erdley’s) Lutheran Church, Middleburg, and Faith Lutheran Church, Lewisburg, for a term of three years beginning July 1, 2019, in accordance with the Proposal for a Synod Council Term Call for Redevelopment dated May 2, 2019;” and

Whereas, the contract for call states under Termination of Contract, “This contract may be terminated by the congregation with sixty days’ notice after consultation with the office of the bishop, or by the bishop or pastor with thirty days’ notice”; and

Whereas, Faith Lutheran Church has given notice to Bishop Collins that on April 11, 2020 the congregation council voted to terminate their contract with the Rev. Kate Drefke effective sixty days from their vote; therefore it is

Resolved, the synod council accepts the decision of Faith Lutheran Church, Lewisburg, to terminate the contract with the Rev. Kate Drefke with regret and amends her call accordingly.

SC 20.04.12. To authorize grants to congregations in the amount of up to $5,000 per congregation to support temporary financial need, such as mortgage debt coverage or payroll, caused by the COVID 19 pandemic.

- Congregations will have to provide a description of the need along with financial reports from 2019 and 2020 (year to date) showing monthly expenses.
- The Executive Committee will determine whether to initiate this grant program and will have responsibility for review and approval of grants.
- Funding for the grants will come from the Faith Church Loan Fund.
- No more than $45,000 will be expended for these grants.

SC 20.04.13. To Authorize grants to individual rostered leaders in the amount of up to $3,000 per individual, to cover temporary loss of income – for items such as mortgage or rent, loan payments, including credit cards – caused by the COVID 19 pandemic.

- Applicants will have to provide a description of the need and a statement of monthly compensation.
- Payments will be made directly to the holder of debt or biller.
- The bishop and Vice President will have responsibility for review and approval of grant applications.
- Grants will not exceed monthly compensation.
- Total funding for grants will not exceed $65,000 and will come from the Student Loan Fund of the synod.

SC 20.04.14. To authorize expenditure of restricted funds from the Support/Sabbaticals (LB Grant) account to cover the costs of a respite retreat for rostered leaders.

SC 20.04.17. Motion to postpone action on the compensation guidelines until the next meeting of synod council in July or a special meeting called for that purpose.

May 5, 2020 Executive Committee

EC 20.08. to approve for distribution grant applications for synod COVID-19 relief funds for congregations and rostered leaders. Adopted
EC 20.09. to cancel 2020 synod assembly. Approved.

EC 20.10. to freeze rostered leaders salary guidelines for 2021 at 2020 levels.

EC 20.11. to amend the compensation guidelines regarding healthcare to recommend congregations offer medical insurance benefits through Portico Benefit Services at the Gold+ level or Silver + with a fully funded HSA.

EC 20.12. The Executive Committee endorses the Bishop’s recommendation that congregations in the Synod not resume in-person worship until June and that authorized lay worship leaders and retired pastors be discouraged from accepting invitations to conduct worship.

June 23, 2020 Executive Committee

EC 20.06.15. To approve the Minutes of the meeting May 4, 2020 and May 26, 2020.

EC 20.06.16. To deny to fund the grant request by Elysburg Parish.

EC 20.06.17. To receive the funds from the Charitable Remainder Trust in the name of Kenneth Kahler with gratitude and direct these funds as regular operating income.

EC 20.06.19. Whereas, Trinity Lutheran Church, a congregation of the Upper Susquehanna Synod located in Sunbury, Pennsylvania, on March 15, 2020, upon sale of its property to the Sunbury Community Church, in a special meeting of the congregation, voted to disband effective March 21, 2020; and

Whereas, in a vote of the congregation February 2, 2020 that included a plan to disband, a resolution was adopted to disburse all remaining assets after legal fees 60% to Camp Mount Luther, 30% to ELCA World Hunger, and 10% to “the Lutheran Seminary in Gettysburg; therefore, it is

Resolved, the Executive Committee of the Upper Susquehanna Synod authorizes Bishop Barbara J. Collins or any other synod officer to sign a Consent and Joinder stating that the Upper Susquehanna Synod consents to the dissolution of the congregation and to the distribution of funds according to the resolutions of the congregation as stated above.

EC 20.06.20. To receive the audit report and letter to the synod council as an accurate representation of the financial position of the synod.

July 8, 2020 Synod Council


SC 20.07.20. (Collins) To approve appointments of Holly Fry, John Riley, Chad Hebrink (advisory), Donald Main (advisory), Jonathan Moser, Kevin Cunningham and Noah Roux to the Structure & Function Task Force.

SC 20.07.21. to approve the minutes of the meeting of April 18, 2020.

SC 20.07.22. to receive the minutes of the Executive Committee meetings May 5, May 26, June 23, 2020.

SC 20.07.23. To adopt the Investment Policy [attached] for the Upper Susquehanna Synod.
SC 20.07.24. to appoint Mr. Lucas Bingman to serve as a member of synod council until the next synod assembly at which elections take place.

SC 20.07.25. to appoint the Rev. Chad Hebrink as Treasurer for a four-year term

SC 20.07.26. To elect the Rev. Rick White and Mr. Ray Huff to the Executive Committee.

SC 20.07.27. To appoint Mr. Jonathan Moser to the Nominating Committee.

September 19, 2020 Synod Council

SC 20.9.29. To adopt the Consent Agenda
   1) To approve the Synod Council Minutes for the July 8, 2020 meeting
   2) To receive the Executive Committee Minutes for the August 25, 2020 meeting
   3) To approve the following Roster Changes:
      a) Rev. David Byerly from the Active Roster to the Retired Roster effective September 1, 2020
      b) Rev. Kate Drefke from the Active Roster to On-Leave-From-Call effective October 1, 2020
      c) Rev. Christopher Mathiason from the Active Roster to On-Leave-From-Call effective September 7, 2020

SC 20.9.30. To appoint Karen Sigler to fill the synod council lay female seat nominated by Juniata Valley Conference until the next synod assembly.


SC 20.9.32. Resolved, that effective February 1, 2021, Bishop Barbara J. Collins receive annual cash compensation in the amount of $79,629.18, of which $18,465.02 shall be designated as the annual housing allowance. The housing allowance to be so designated in the official records; AND

   that effective February 1, 2021, The Reverend Craig A. Miller receive annual cash compensation in the amount of $33,586.27, of which $8,224.36 shall be designated as the annual housing allowance. The housing allowance to be so designated in the official records.

SC 20.9.33. Resolved, to continue offering the Gold+ health care option in 2021 for employees sponsored in the Portico Benefits plan.

SC 20.9.34. that Synod Council establish a COVID appeal to congregations and individuals to get funds in these uncertain times and that the Vice-President make the appeal on behalf of Council.

November 21, 2020 Synod Council

SC.2020.11.36. To approve the minutes of Synod Council meeting September 19, 2020

SC.2020.11.37. the minutes of the Executive Committee November 4, 2020 were received.

SC 2020.11.38. To adopt the Consent Agenda
   1) To renew approval of On-Leave-From-Call status for the Rev. Mark Galbraith.
   2) To approve the change in roster status from Active to Retired for
      a) The Rev. MarthaSue Moll, effective October 30, 2020
      b) The Rev. Cinda Brucker, effective December 31, 2020
3) To approve the change in status for Deacon Shelby Wyland from Active to On-Leave-From-Call, effective November 16, 2020.

SC.2020.11.39. To appoint Tawny Mummah to Constitution Committee.

SC 2020.11.40. That the Upper Susquehanna Synod Assembly Planning Team be directed to plan a virtual synod assembly for June of 2021, and to help the six conferences of the synod provide instruction for their voting members in how to access online reports and participate in virtual voting.

SC 2020.11.41. Whereas, concerns for representation across the synod territory have lessened since the founding of the synod; and

Whereas, the synod wishes to seek individuals with specific gifts to serve on synod council; and

Whereas, with a smaller number around the table, the council could be more productive; therefore, it is

Resolved, the synod council directs the Constitution Committee of the Upper Susquehanna Synod to draft amendments to the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Upper Susquehanna Synod for adoption by the 2021 Upper Susquehanna Synod Assembly that will reduce the size of the synod council voting membership to no more than 16 members with 6 lay leaders, 4 rostered leaders, a young adult lay leader, a youth lay leader, and the four officers.

SC 2020.11.42. WHEREAS, ST. PETER’S LUTHERAN CHURCH (St Peter’s) located at 3633 Aristes Highway, Aristes, Pennsylvania, has been a member congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church In America (ELCA) rostered with the UPPER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD (SYNOD); and

WHEREAS, the Constitution of the SYNOD, Section 13.24 provides that if any congregation of this synod has disbanded, the Synod Council, itself or through trustees appointed by it, may take charge and control of the property of the congregation to hold, manage and convey the same on behalf of the SYNOD; and

WHEREAS, St. Peter’s, at a legally called meeting on October 4, 2020, at which a quorum was present, voted to disband effective at the conclusion of that meeting; and

WHEREAS, it is necessary for the SYNOD to take charge and control of the property of the congregation to hold, manage and convey the same on behalf of the SYNOD; Now therefore, it is

RESOLVED, that for the reasons set forth above, all of which are included and incorporated herein and made a part hereof as if fully set forth, the SYNOD, pursuant to Section 13.24 of its constitution does hereby take charge and control of the property of St. Peter’s to hold, manage, and convey the same on behalf of the SYNOD, and it is further,

RESOLVED, that the following are hereby appointed as trustees, with the full power to hold and manage the property of St. Peter’s on behalf of the SYNOD in all regards relating directly or indirectly to the taking charge and control of the property of St. Peter’s and in holding, managing and conveying such property of St. Peter’s on behalf of the SYNOD, to wit: Rev. Craig Miller, Mr. Robert Lex, and Mr. R. Craig Rhoades; and it is further

RESOLVED, that the signature of any two of the Trustees acting to take charge and control of the property of St. Peter’s and to hold, manage, and convey the property of St. Peter’s on behalf of
the SYNOD shall be binding upon and considered as the act of all of the Trustees. No person or party acting in reliance of the signature of one such Trustee as binding upon all Trustees shall be charged with notice of any revocation or change of such authority unless he, she or it shall have received actual written notice thereof. No person or party shall be required to look behind the signature of such Trustee; and it is further

RESOLVED, that the synod council authorizes the Trustees to take steps to sell the property of St. Peter’s, including as deemed appropriate, listing the property with a realtor, and negotiating terms of sale with a potential purchaser. No sale will be final until approved by the synod council.

SC 2020.11.43. WHEREAS, on February 16, 2019, the Upper Susquehanna Synod Council adopted a resolution imposing synod administration on Grace Lutheran Church, Mt Carmel, PA, in accordance with S13.24 of the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, and appointed trustees to act on its behalf; and

WHEREAS, the Upper Susquehanna Synod Council, in imposing synod administration, took control of the property of the former Grace Lutheran Church; and

WHEREAS, the Upper Susquehanna Synod Council does not wish to retain ownership of the property of the former Grace Lutheran Church; therefore, it is

RESOLVED, that the Upper Susquehanna Synod Council ratify the decision of the Trustees to offer the property located at Mount Carmel, PA for sale to; and it is further

RESOLVED, that the Upper Susquehanna Synod Council approve the agreement of sale of the property located at 140 W Mt Carmel Avenue, Mt Carmel PA, formerly known as Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mt Carmel, to Twisted Pith, LLC, for the sum of $1,200; and that the Rev. Craig Miller as duly appointed Trustee of the property is empowered to sign the contract for sale.

SC.2020.11.44. Resolved, the synod council receives the resignation of the Rev. Tom Glasoe from the office of Secretary with regret and directs the Executive Committee to “arrange for the appropriate care of the responsibilities of the office until an election of a new Secretary can be held” (Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Upper Susquehanna Synod); and it is further Resolved, the synod council directs the Nominating Committee to seek at least two nominees for the office of Secretary for election at the next Synod Assembly.

SC.2020.11.45. Resolved, the synod council receives the resignation of the Rev. Gretchen Johanson from synod council with regret and expresses its appreciation for the service of Pastor Johanson; and it is further

Resolved, the synod council opts not to fill this or any unexpired terms until after the next synod assembly decides on proposed amendments to bylaws related to size and makeup of the synod council.

SC 2020.11.46. Resolved, to authorize the bishop to

(1) Seek an appraisal of the synod office building and property at a cost not to exceed $1,500; monies to come from synod reserve funds.
(2) Approach Diakon to ascertain their level of interest in purchasing the property (most likely for the value of the building alone, with the land returned for the original one-dollar sale).

(3) If Diakon is interested, solicit their offer for purchase.

(4) If Diakon is not interested, engage a real estate agent to list the property.

(5) Through synod Structure & Function Task Force, explore properties to determine a suitable location(s) for necessary operations (such as files/archives storage, printing/copying, in person meetings, resource room), including the possibility of shared space and resources.

SC 2020.11.47 To adopt the Budget for Fiscal Year Ending January 31, 2022 as a provisional budget for the Upper Susquehanna Synod until it can be ratified at the 2021 Synod Assembly. This includes the additional line for the COVID appeal. A change from the September version.
Purpose. The intent of this document is to set forth guidelines for the management and investment of monies held by the Upper Susquehanna Synod. The synod has restricted, unrestricted and operating funds that are maintained for different purposes. Policies within this document that apply to only one type of fund, or only to certain funds within a category, are specified. If not otherwise noted, guidelines are intended to apply to each of the separately maintained synod ministries.

Investment Objectives.
A. Restricted Accounts. The investment objectives for the synod’s restricted accounts are to:
   1. Produce long-term growth in the corpus while managing the risk of substantial long-term loss through appropriate diversification.
   2. Minimize investment expenses.

B. Unrestricted Accounts. These investments are used for operating funds.

Asset Allocation Guidelines. The synod’s fund accounts are invested in the ELCA Foundation Endowment Fund Pooled Trust Fund A, which in 2019 had a target asset allocation of 65 percent equities, 30 percent fixed income assets, and 5 percent real estate investments.

Unrestricted funds will be invested in cash, cash equivalents, and short-term fixed income securities with no allocation to equities. However, it is acknowledged that equity assets may be acquired from time to time within the unrestricted funds through gifts or bequests. In such cases, the donated equity assets handled through guidance of the Gift Acceptance Policy.

The synod will not actively seek to invest in real estate in any of its funds, except in an incidental way through participation in the ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust. However, it is recognized that temporary and/or long-term real estate assets may be acquired directly from time to time through gifts, bequests, or the dissolution of congregations. In such cases, the acquired real estate will be treated as described in the synod’s Gift Acceptance Policy and will not be subject to the investment guidelines included within this document.

Permitted Investments. The investments described below are approved for inclusion in synod investment portfolios. These permitted assets may be commingled among synod ministries to achieve economies of scale, provided that each ministry is credited with its proportionate share of income, gains, and losses (see Allocation of Investment Earnings below). Potential investments that are not included in the list of permitted investments must be approved by the Synod Council prior to their inclusion in synod portfolios.

a. Cash and Cash Equivalents. All cash and equivalent investments shall be made with significant concern for quality and safety. Permitted investments in this category include: commercial bank deposits; short-term certificates of deposit insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC); U.S. Treasury bills; and low-cost money market mutual funds investing primarily in high quality short-term monetary instruments.

b. ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust Fund A. Fund A allows for the collective long-term investment of funds belonging to the ELCA and its affiliated ministries. Fund A follows, to the extent practical, the ELCA’s guidelines for socially responsible investing, which discourage investments in companies that profit from the production of alcohol, military weapons and pornography, for example. Instead, it seeks positive social investments, directing capital to underserved markets, such as community development and renewable energy.

c. ELCA Mission Investment Fund. Intermediate-term and long-term certificates of deposit, as well as savings and checking accounts.

Allocation of Investment Earnings. Investment earnings will be allocated on a quarterly basis, based on the average month end balance for the preceding quarter. Any fund that has an
average fund balance of less than $2,500 at the end of a quarter will not be allocated investment earnings.

**Limitations on Certain Types of Investments.** In managing cash within commercial bank accounts, significant effort will be made to maintain an effective balance (defined as the account’s cash balance if there were no outstanding checks) that does not exceed the limit insured by the FDIC. It is recognized that this limit may sometimes be exceeded if a large income event occurs, such as pass-through gifts to special missions, but effective balances should not routinely exceed the FDIC limit.

**Fund Liquidity Needs.** The interest and dividend income generated within the synod’s investment funds may not always be sufficient to meet each year’s spending authorization. Thus, it is anticipated that assets will be sold periodically to meet liquidity needs. Investment sales over a multi-month period may be prudent in some market circumstances to fulfill a fund’s need for liquidity.

**Policy Implementation and Review.** Responsibility for implementation of the synod’s investment policy is vested in the synod treasurer, who may authorize investment transactions and open and close bank and investment accounts as deemed necessary, provided that such transactions are consistent with the guidelines set forth within this document. At the discretion of the treasurer, various duties and tasks may be delegated to appropriate persons.

Investment balances shall be updated at least quarterly and shall be made available to Fiscal Management Team members within the synod’s regularly issued financial statements. The most recent investment balances shall also be reported through the financial statements at each regular meeting of the Synod Council.

The Fiscal Management Team shall annually review investment performance and asset allocation for all synod funds. It is recognized that fluctuating rates of return are a characteristic of investment markets. Therefore, as part of the Fiscal Management Team’s annual review, investment performance will be compared to the appropriate weighted average return for the following indices:

- **Cash and Cash Equivalents:** 90-day U.S. Treasury bills
- **Fixed Income Assets:** Barclays U.S. Aggregate Bond Index
- **Equity Investments:** Dow Jones Wilshire 5000 Index

The Fiscal Management Team will also periodically review the synod’s investment policy as set forth in this document. Any recommendations for policy changes shall be communicated to the Synod Council.