

**THIRTY SIXTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY
of the Upper Susquehanna Synod,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Weber Chapel
Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, PA
June 16-17, 2023**

MINUTES

“Baptized into Christ: United, Supporting, Serving”

“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Ephesians 4:1-3

Friday, June 16, 2023

The assembly opened at 8:30am with worship in Weber Chapel, including Thanksgiving for Baptism, a reading from Ephesians (4:1-6), and a message from Bishop Craig Miller.

Following worship, Bishop Miller called on Dr. Jonathan Green, president of Susquehanna University, to bring greetings.

Bishop Miller welcomed members to the assembly and asked first time members and youth and young adult members to stand and be recognized. He described the online voting application that would be used during the assembly and asked voting members to make sure they were prepared to use it. He then called for the report of the registrar.

Report of the Registrar: Amber Ellis reported that as of 9:00am, 59 rostered ministers and 114 lay members were registered and received credentials for a total of 173 voting members. She reported 21 registered visitors and guests. Bishop Miller announced that a quorum was not present. With the absence of a quorum, Bishop Miller stated that no business could be conducted; however, the assembly could continue with certain reports and activities.

Bishop Miller introduced assembly personnel listed in the Bulletin of Reports, Bible study leader, Dr. Gilson Waldkoenig, and ELCA representative, Rev. Dr. Philip Hirsch. Following this, he introduced Ministers of Word and Sacrament who had been ordained since the previous assembly: Rev. Sam Leister, Rev. Troy Spencer, Rev. Jodi Ellis, and Rev. Carol Johnson. He noted that Rev. Wayne Muthler had recently returned to the roster of the synod.

Bishop Miller called on Ms. Holly Fry for her report. Ms Fry concluded her report by presenting a certificate recognizing the Rev. Barbara Jeanne Collins for her term as Bishop of the synod and conferring on her the title Bishop Emerita.

After a break, Bishop Miller invited the Rev. Dr. Larry Pickens to bring greetings from the Pennsylvania Council of Churches. A short video from the Lay Ministry Institute followed.

Rev. Tara Lynn reported on behalf of Portico Benefits Services.

Bible Study

Bishop Miller introduced the Rev. Dr. Gilson Waldkoenig who led the assembly in a Bible study on Ephesians.

Bishop Miller again called for a report of the registrar.

Report of the Registrar: Amber Ellis reported that as of 10:30am, 73 rostered ministers and 120 lay members were registered and received credentials for a total of 193 voting members. Visitors and guests totaled 24. Bishop Miller announced that a quorum had been reached and the assembly could proceed with business.

Adoption of Agenda

Bishop Miller called for a vote to approve the agenda as presented in the Bulletin of Reports with appropriate adjustments made necessary by the earlier lack of quorum.

Detailed Agenda June 16-17, 2023

Friday, June 16, 2023

8:30 Opening worship with Opening of an Assembly
Welcome from Susquehanna University President: Dr. Jonathan Green

Plenary One

Weber Chapel

9:00 Introductions & Welcome
Report of the Registrar
*Adoption of Agenda
*Adoption of Rules of Procedure
*Adoption of Minutes from the 2022 Synod Assembly
Introduction of Assembly personnel
Introduction of Guests
Introduction of New Rostered Leaders in the synod
Introduction to Reference and Counsel: Noah Roux, Chair
*Report of the Nominating Committee
Introduction of candidates for Vice President
Report of the Vice President: Ms. Holly Fry
Report of the Treasurer: Rev. Chad Hebrink
10:00-10:15 Break
Bible Study: Rev. Dr. Gilson Waldkoenig
Report from Diakon Lutheran Services, Inc.: Scott Habaecker, CEO
Greeting from faith partners: Rabbi Nina Mandel
11:15 Recess for Lunch / Workshops

Plenary Two

Weber Chapel

1:30 Devotions with Installation of Camp Mt. Luther Summer Staff
Report of Camp: Chad Hershberger, Director
ELCA Foundation: Sister Marianne Brock
Greetings from Ecumenical partners: Rev. Dr. Thomas Salsgiver (UMC)

Speeches by candidates for Vice President

Elections Committee

- First Ballot for Vice President
- Synod Council elections
- Committee on Discipline elections
- Consultation Committee elections

Reference and Counsel

Campus Ministries

Candidacy Committee: Rev. Karla Leiby, Chair

2:45-3:00 Break

Plenary Three

Weber Chapel

3:00 Elections Committee report: Aly Wyland

Second ballot, if needed

Ecumenical Greetings: Rev. Dr. Larry Pickens, PA Council of Churches

Lutheran World Relief: Ms Emma Wagner

Bishop's Report

Breakout groups

Degenstein Campus Center & Weber Chapel

4:45 Evening Prayer

Weber Chapel

Recognition of Congregation Anniversaries

5:30 Dinner

Degenstein Campus Center

Saturday, June 18, 2022

Plenary Four

8:30 Morning Prayer

Weber Chapel

Installation of Conference Deans and Secretaries

9:00 Report of the Registrar

Greetings from Ecumenical Partners: Bishop Ronald Gainer

Report from the Churchwide Representative: Rev. Dr. Philip Hirsch

10:00-10:15 Break

10:15 *Report of Synod Council: Holly Fry, Vice President

- Special Presentation
- Recommendation 1: Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament (salary and housing)
- Recommendation 2: Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Service (salary)
- Recommendation 3: Budget for fiscal year end January 31, 2025

10:30 Bible Study: Rev. Dr. Gilson Waldkoenig

11:15 Dismiss for Lunch / Workshops

Plenary Five

Weber Chapel

1:30 Hymn and Prayer

Recognition of Rostered Leaders' Anniversaries

United Lutheran Seminary: Rev. Martin Otto Zimmann

- PA Church Insurers: Mike Hard
Reference and Counsel
Unfinished Business
2:30 Break for Transition to Worship
2:45 Closing Worship with Holy Communion and Closing of the Assembly

SA2023.06.01. The agenda was adopted.

Adoption of Rules of Procedure

Bishop Miller called for consideration of the Rules of Procedure for the Assembly

**RULES OF PROCEDURE
UPPER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD ASSEMBLY – 2023**

1. The bar of the Assembly is the front section of the Weber Chapel auditorium. Voting members must be seated in this area during plenary sessions.
2. **ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER**, latest edition, shall be the governing parliamentary law of this assembly. (S7.32.) *Note: the 12th edition of Roberts Rules of Order is the governing parliamentary law of this assembly except as otherwise provided.* A parliamentarian may be appointed by the bishop.
3. **Voting Procedure**
 - a. Only voting members wearing official voting member name tags shall be eligible to vote.
 - b. Voting and elections at the assembly will use a voting application. In the event unforeseen issues arise, elections may be held by paper ballot or other means.
 - c. As directed by the chair, voting also may take place by voice, by show of hands, by standing, or by written ballot.
 - d. Except in the case of voice votes, voting members must have an internet connected device to participate in elections and other votes. Voting members having difficulty connecting to the voting application should make their issues known to a page as soon as possible.
 - e. At registration, voting members will be provided a passcode for the online voting application. The passcode must not be shared with anyone other than another registered voting member.
4. **Speeches**
 - a. When addressing the chair, speakers shall use a microphone provided. Voting members shall state plainly their name and congregation or, in the case of Rostered Ministers serving in specialized ministries, their place of call.
 - b. When there are many wishing to speak for or against a motion, the chair will recognize alternately persons making a statement for or against.
 - c. In all plenary sessions, speeches from the floor will be limited to one three-minute presentation per person. This rule shall not apply to persons presenting a report, nor when direct questions are posed to specific individuals for clarification.
 - d. Non-voting members may be permitted to speak on the floor of the assembly by a 2/3 vote of the assembly. This rule does not apply to those designated to present reports as part of the approved agenda.
 - e. In the give-and-take of debate on issues before the Churchwide Assembly, members of the assembly and visitors shall refrain from applause.
5. **Motions**
 - a. All motions shall be written by the mover, signed, and presented to the Committee of Reference and Counsel, except those that are offered as germane motions, which must be written and presented to the Secretary before being discussed by the assembly. Motion forms are available at the pages' table located near the main entrance to the assembly hall.

- b. Any motion that seeks to amend the proposed synod budget by increasing expenses shall also include adjustments in other income or expense categories to maintain a balanced budget proposal. (\$10.04.)
- c. Resolutions and memorials concerning issues of the church may be developed for consideration at the annual Synod Assembly. The deadline for such resolutions and memorials to be received in the synod office is May 15. Any resolutions or memorials received **after** that date may be referred to Synod Council for consideration. The Committee on Reference and Counsel will meet prior to the assembly and will prepare an initial report concerning memorials and resolutions, including the text of all resolutions and memorials received, which will be available on the synod website in the Bulletin of Reports.

6. **Nominations**

- a. Except for the election of a bishop, all nominations from the floor must have the prior approval of the person nominated. The person making the nomination will provide (a) the name of the nominee, (b) the nominee's occupation, and (c) the nominee's home congregation. All nominations must have a Candidate Identification Form available at the pages' table.

7. **Departing from Agenda**

- a. With the consent of a majority of the voting members, the chair shall have the authority to call items of business before the assembly in whatever order the chair considers most expedient for the conduct of the assembly's business.
- b. A motion to alter the agenda shall require for adoption a two-thirds vote of the voting members present and voting.
- 8. After the adoption of the Rules of Procedure and any amendments thereto offered prior to the adoption of the Rules, any further amendment to, revision in, or suspension of the Rules shall always require for adoption a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting.
- 9. All questions related to resolutions and memorials are to be addressed to:

Noah Roux, Chair

Committee of Reference and Counsel

Other questions submit to:

Mr. Ray Huff

Secretary of the Synod

SA2023.06.02. The Rules of Procedure were adopted.

Adoption of Minutes from the 2022 Synod Assembly-

Bishop Miller asked for any corrections or amendments to the Minutes from the 2022 Synod Assembly. Hearing none, he declared that the minutes were **Approved**.

Introduction to Reference and Counsel

Bishop Miller called on Mr. Noah Roux, Chair of the Committee on Reference and Counsel to speak about the committee's work. Mr. Roux introduced committee members and noted the two resolutions that would come before the assembly at a later time.

Report from Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries

Bishop Miller introduced Mr. Scott Habecker, CEO of Diakon Lutheran Services, who reported on their ministries.

Greeting from faith partners

Bishop Miller introduced Rabbi Nina Mandel, Temple Beth-el, Sunbury, and invited her to bring greetings to the assembly.

Good morning. Thank you, Bishop Miller, for this invitation to greet you all. In the years that I have been in the Central Susquehanna Valley, I have been fortunate to have worked with a number of ELCA

colleagues, collaborating on projects, gathering in support of one another, and providing me with a community of peers. In this area, there are few opportunities to do that with other Jewish clergy, so I am deeply appreciative.

It has been a challenging couple of weeks for me and the Jewish community as the trial of the shooter who killed 11 worshippers in a Pittsburgh synagogue has been taking place. Hearing the bits and pieces of testimony from the survivors and other witnesses has been heartbreaking. I don't know any rabbi who hasn't wondered what they would do, how they would react, if they had been on the pulpit that day. I happen to know one of the rabbis now serving in that community, so I can tell you that healing from that traumatic day has barely begun.

So I was wondering, since I have been given the opportunity to offer a message to a room full of clergy colleagues, what can I say that will begin to communicate the impact of this. I don't need to tell you all how dangerous and immoral targeted hate crimes can be. But I thought I could tell you a story, a true one, from my recent experience, that might give you some insight:

A family arrived at Friday evening Shabbat worship, father, mother, 3 kids, one of them a 5-year-old girl. The father came to me, angry, because he had just had a conversation with the 5-year-old who was insisting that Rabbi Nina is God. It took me a minute, but I realized that on Sunday mornings, I have the children act out parts of the weekly Torah reading. They get to be all of the characters (Abraham, Sarah, sheep...) but I tell them that only I get to be God. When I explained this to the father, I thought the misunderstanding was kind of cute, but he did not. I promised to talk with all of the kids.

I thought a lot about what to say to the kids other than, Rabbi Nina is not God. In truth, talking about God with children makes me a little uneasy. I try to do it in a way that they can understand, developmentally, but also in a way that communicates a Jewish understanding but doesn't perpetuate some of the reductive concepts of God that I find are problematic. I also want to be sure that I am not setting up a dynamic of "our God" and "their God." Especially because many people stop learning about the nature of God in Sunday School. We call this pediatric theology. So I'm cautious about the impression I'm making.

I started by telling them that these are fun skits, and just like they aren't sheep when they play them, I am not really God.

With that, the little girl who thought I was, said: my father said God can't be a girl.

I respond with something like: I don't think God is a girl or a boy.

To which another kid says: Is God trans?

So I back up and start with: God isn't either a boy or girl because God isn't a human, even though we use human language to describe God.

Another kid asks: What about Jesus?

What about Jesus? (Jesus not being a topic I ever discuss in Hebrew School)

He says: "Jesus was a human and he was the son of God until Jewish people killed him. That's why God doesn't like Jewish people and that's why we don't go to heaven. Only people who believe in Jesus go to heaven."

His parent explains to me that he learned it from a good friend who sometimes invites him to church activities.

This just became a lot to unpack: girls can't be God, God hates Jewish people, Jewish people are punished by God because we killed Jesus.

Over the years in my job, I have noticed that at about the 3rd and 4th grade level, the kids in my congregation start grappling with how their Jewish identity makes them different than most of their

friends. That's not surprising, it is developmentally appropriate. But what I've also noticed is that this is also the age and grade where our kids start getting told by some of their Christian classmates that they are going to hell, and that Jews killed Jesus, and God is punishing Jews.

I do not think that the majority of the Sunday Schools and churches are preaching this doctrine with these words. I know many pastors, and believe that your goal, like mine, is to develop spiritually moral and ethical children of God, with the teachings of their faith to guide them. But I do think that children hear things like children. And adults often say things that are perfectly nuanced and make perfect sense to adults, but children hear something different. And then they filter it through their understanding of the world.

Sometimes, because of the pediatric theology thing, children become adults who continue filtering their world in ways that don't reflect an adult understanding. Over the course of my lifetime, even prior to becoming a rabbi, I have had a fair number of people approach me with genuine concern about my soul and encourage me to change my relationship to God and Jesus, in order to save myself from an eternity of hell.

I am not concerned about my soul, but I am concerned about the children who get the message early in life that there is something inherently wrong with being Jewish.

That day and in the weeks that followed, I was able to unpack these issues with the children in my congregation, with the help of their parents. And I have become much more aware of the messages I teach, how I teach them, and how people are receiving them.

My friends, as spiritual leaders, our voices carry an outsized amount of weight. We are seen as authorities. We are heard as authorities. I was able to talk this through with my kids, but did their Christian friends learn that what they were saying is not simply a cute mistake, but a stone in a path that can become harmful, if not deadly, to others?

In a time when teenagers commit suicide because they are told their sexuality or gender is a sin; when people don't question the abuse of women or people of color, and when men walk into synagogues in order to murder Jews, or hold them hostage, we all have a heightened responsibility. We need to turn to our religious narratives, histories, and practices, and ask where and how we are unknowingly reinforcing the messages that be interpreted through biased or hateful rhetoric.

May this gathering be a time of connection and renewal. May it also be a time of strength and reckoning, so that we can, together, build a world in which justice is our moral compass.

11:15 Recess for Lunch / Workshops

Plenary Two

Weber Chapel

Plenary two opened at 1:30pm with devotions and Installation of Camp Mt. Luther summer staff

Report of Camp

Mr. Chad Hershberger, Director of Camp Mount Luther, reported on the ministries of the Camp, introducing their new camp logo, camp staff, and a capital campaign which will be chaired by Bishop Emerita Barbara Collins.

Report of the Nominating Committee

Bishop Miller called on Vicar RuthAnn Kephart to bring the report of the Nominating Committee. After each nominee presentation, the Bishop called for nominations from the floor.

The report of the Nominating Committee can be found on the assembly webpage. The Nominating Committee gathers information from congregations and conferences for elections to take place at the Synod Assembly. This year, elections include Vice President, Synod Council,

Consultation Committee, and Committee on Discipline. After presentation of nominees for each position, the assembly will have opportunity to make additional nominations.

In addition to me, Nominating Committee members were Bishop Miller, Barry Spangler, Vicar Mindy Bartholomew, Rev. Dan Warntz, Rev. Pete Bergstresser, Rev. Karl Runser, Craig Rhoades, and Jonathan Moser.

The synod vice president serves for a term of four years and may be reelected. Our current vice president has chosen not to run this year. We have one nominee for vice president: Mr. Noah Roux.

There were no additional nominations for Vice President

For synod council, there are five seats up for election this year: one rostered leader (pastor or deacon) for a full term, one rostered leader for a partial term, two lay persons, and one youth lay person. Synod council terms are for three years and those serving may stand for reelection once. The nominating committee has one nominee for the position of rostered leader, three-year term: the Rev. Richard Adams.

There were no additional nominations for Synod Council rostered leader.

We have one nominee for the position of rostered leader, two-year term: the Rev. Lisa Barnes. As Pastor Barnes should have been declared elected at the 2022 synod assembly but through an oversight was not, the nominating committee recommends this as an uncontested election.

Bishop Miller asked for consent to leave this nomination uncontested. There was no objection.

The nominating committee has one nomination for synod council lay: Mr. Scott Frost.

There was one additional nomination for Synod Council lay: Ms Barbara Horn.

For synod council youth, the nominating committee has identified one nominee: Mr. Gabriel Schaeffer.

There were no additional nominations for Synod Council youth.

For Consultation Committee, nominees are identified by conference assemblies. The following were nominated: from Buffalo Valley Conference, the Rev. Erwin Roux; from Middle Creek Conference, Ms Danielle Lauver; from North Branch Conference, Ms Wendelin Davis; from Juniata Valley Conference, no nominee. Consultation Committee members serve for a term of six years.

There were no additional nominations for Consultation Committee.

Finally, for the Committee on Discipline, we have five open positions to elect, four full terms of six years and one partial term of four years. Like the Consultation Committee, these nominations are to come from conference assemblies. The following nominations were received by the nominating committee: from Buffalo Valley Conference, the Rev. Lisa Barnes and Ms Beverly Hoffman (these are for two separate positions); from the West Branch Conference, the Rev. Ronald Montgomery; from the North Branch Conference, Ms Pam Mausteller; and for the partial term, from the North Branch Conference, the Rev. Daniel Warntz and the Rev. Gretchen Johanson.

There were no additional nominations for Committee on Discipline.

Rev. Ken Longfield, Holy Communion, Yeagertown, moved to have the Secretary cast a unanimous vote on behalf of the Assembly to elect all nominees running in uncontested elections. The motion was seconded.

SA2023.06.03. To direct the Secretary to cast a unanimous vote on behalf of the Assembly to elect all nominees running in uncontested elections. Adopted.

Vice President – Noah Roux

Synod Council 3-year term – Rev. Richard Adams, Mr. Scott Frost, Ms Barbara Horn.

Synod Council 2-year term – Rev. Lisa Barnes, Mr. Gabriel Schaeffer.

Consultation Committee – Rev. Erwin Roux, Ms Danielle Lauver, Ms Wendelin Davis.

Committee on Discipline – Rev. Lisa Barnes, Ms Beverly Hoffman, Rev. Ronald Montgomery, Ms Pam Mausteller.

Bishop Miller thanked Vicar Kephart and the members of the Nominating Committee for their work.

Report of the ELCA Foundation

Bishop Miller called on Sister Marianne Brock, Regional Gift Planner, for a report from the ELCA Foundation.

Greetings from Ecumenical partners

Bishop Miller introduced the Rev. Dr. Thomas Salsgiver, Assistant to the Bishops of the Susquehanna Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Dr. Salsgiver brought greetings on behalf of Bishops Cynthia Moore-Koi Koi and Sandra Steiner Ball from the entire Susquehanna Conference.

Campus Ministries

Bishop Miller called for a report from Campus Ministries. Rev. Scott Kershner, Chaplain at Susquehanna University, Meryl Wilcox, Campus Minister at Mansfield University, and Shelly Litz, Coordinator for Campus Ministry at Penn College, shared reflections on Campus Ministry. They encouraged congregations to share contact information with them of students who will attend their setting so Campus Ministry can connect with them at the schools. They concluded with a video from the campus ministry at Penn State main campus, led by Alicia Anderson.

2:45-3:00 Break

Plenary Three

Weber Chapel

Elections Committee

Turning attention to the election for Committee on Discipline, four-year term, for nominees from the North Branch Conference, the Rev. Daniel Warntz and the Rev. Gretchen Johanson, Bishop Miller called for the vote.

Reference and Counsel

Bishop Miller called on Noah Roux to present resolutions from the Committee on Reference and Counsel. Mr. Roux directed attention to the first resolution, Establishing A Commission for

Congregational Renewal and Vitality. The committee recommended adoption of this resolution.

SA2023.06.04.

WHEREAS the Upper Susquehanna Synod's missional call ("United as Christ's Disciples, we Support one another; and Serve God in the World") entrusts us with the responsibility to accompany congregations throughout the entirety of their course of life, death, and resurrection; and

WHEREAS the Upper Susquehanna Synod is comprised of 116 congregations, of which approximately forty (40) can afford to compensate full-time rostered leadership in their current configuration; and

WHEREAS the 116 congregations of the Upper Susquehanna Synod are served by forty-six (46) rostered Ministers of Word and Sacrament in active ministry out of a total of ninety-nine (99) rostered Ministers of Word and Sacrament; and

WHEREAS congregations that are in the process of closing often struggle to make decisions to be faithful stewards of the resources God has entrusted to them; and

WHEREAS the Bishop and synodical leadership are called to serve all congregations of the synod, but currently experience an imbalance of time, energy, and resources spent with congregations struggling to maintain vital ministry. Therefore be it

RESOLVED that the Upper Susquehanna Synod will develop a process to accompany struggling congregations with discerning how they can best "Serve God in the World" using the resources, time, and talents they have available.

This process will seek to do the following:

- Accompany congregations who are engaged in congregational discernment by helping them consider fully the process of congregational revitalization and the process of holy closure.
- Provide congregations that are discerning holy closure or revitalization with a vision of resurrection and hope within the church.
- Create an avenue by which congregations that decide to move towards holy closure or revitalization can offer their resources with intentionality.
- Create an avenue by which resources offered by closing congregations can breathe new life in vital congregational ministries across the Synod

and be it further

RESOLVED that within ninety (90) days of the designation of a Director of Evangelical Mission (DEM) for the Upper Susquehanna Synod, a team be appointed by the Bishop and DEM to work alongside the DEM in developing such a process; and be it further

RESOLVED that said team present a plan/process for approval by Synod Council within one year of the team's formation; and be it further

RESOLVED that said team present a progress report on this plan/process during the 2024 Synod Assembly; and be it further

RESOLVED: The Upper Susquehanna Synod Assembly directs Synod Council to create an appropriate budget allocation as seed money for the purposes of this commission.

The resolution was adopted.

Mr. Roux presented the second resolution, to amend the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Upper Susquehanna Synod.

SA2023.06.05.

Whereas, preregistration for the 2023 Synod Assembly, as of June 12, 2023 is at 190 voting members; and

Whereas, quorum, as determined by the constitution of the synod and synod council is 192 voting members; and

Whereas, lack of quorum during preregistration leads to uncertainty leading up to synod assembly; and

Whereas, attendance at Synod assembly has been declining in recent years;

It is resolved, that the Upper Susquehanna Synod in assembly amends S7.14. of its Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions as follows:

~~One-half~~ Forty percent (40%) of members of the Synod Assembly shall constitute a quorum.

The resolution was adopted.

Elections Committee report

Bishop Miller asked Ms Ali Wyland for a report on the election for Committee on Discipline.

Committee on Discipline- 4-year term

Rev. Daniel Warntz 72 votes (49%),

Rev. Gretchen Johanson. 76 votes (51%)

Bishop Miller declared the Rev. Gretchen Johanson elected.

Bishop's Report

In 2019 the synod council adopted a strategy for mission in the Upper Susquehanna Synod. You may remember when we introduced the strategy under the statement,

United as Christ's disciples, we support one another and serve God in the world.

The goal of the strategy was to change how people perceive the synod and, more than that, to change how we behave and practice being a synod. Much of the strategy called for strengthening relationships among congregations and ecumenically so that we would more effectively live into whom God calls us to be.

While the covid 19 pandemic delayed implementation of the strategy and forced on us different priorities for a time, we still made small steps toward the vision for mission.

Here in this, my first year as your bishop, I call us back to the strategy once again and ask that we recommit ourselves to a vision that I think calls us into the future of our church and our synod. The theme of this assembly acknowledges this commitment: we gather as people Baptized into Christ: united, supporting, and serving.

At baptism, we speak of the covenant God makes with us, a covenant that comes with expectations which we affirmed at confirmation or when we became members of a Lutheran congregation: to live among God's faithful people, to hear his Word and share in his supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

It is in the spirit of this covenant that we seek to be united, supporting, and serving.

The Gospel according to John (17) records a long prayer of Jesus for those who have been called to follow him – the great pastoral prayer in which Jesus asks, “that they may be one as you [Father] and I are one.” Similarly, Saint Paul writes to the church in Philippi (Philippians 2) his desire that they be of one mind, “having the same love” as he has proclaimed to them in Jesus Christ.

This, I believe is the unity we seek; that we would love one another and the world in the spirit of Christ Jesus; and that having this love, we would always work for the good of one another. I believe the call to unity extends beyond our congregations, beyond our synod, and beyond our ELCA to encompass ecumenical and interfaith partners, companion synods and companion churches.

It is expressed in many ways, including here at this assembly. Here we gather as one body under the banner of our Lord Jesus Christ to work together for the sake of our common mission. And here we celebrate and commit ourselves to partnerships such as our companionships with the Ansbach Würzburg Kirchenkreis and the Lutheran Church in Liberia, our Lutherans, Anglicans, and Roman Catholic covenant relationship, full-communion partnerships, ecumenical relationships, our ministries with Seafarers, Lutheran World Relief, Church World Service, and many more.

A clear sign of our unity is found in the mutual support we share, support between and among congregations, and support – financial and physical – that we give to various ministries. I give thanks to God for the generosity of our members expressed in so many ways, some of which I will mention shortly.

I give thanks also for the generosity of our congregations in support of the mission of our synod. As Pastor Hebrink noted in his report, last year Mission Support exceeded expectations and contributed to a positive financial outcome for our synod.

But financial support is only a small part of what support looks like in our synod. I have heard countless stories of how congregations have stepped up to meet a need in a crisis. And I have seen the many ways we support ministries within and outside our synod: the annual Christmas at Sea satchels; Quilts for Lutheran World Relief; flood cleanup buckets; school kits; and so much more. Support looks like this and more.

I want this synod to provide a robust system of training for congregation leaders, guided by our successful Lay Ministry Institute. We have a fine group of trained Lay Worship Leaders and some new leaders in training through our new partnership with the Allegheny and Northwest Pennsylvania Synods. Based on this structure, and perhaps in partnership with our seminary as

well, we can develop opportunities for our congregation leaders, such as presidents, treasurers, Bible study leaders, and more, to grow more confident in their ability to lead and help others.

I think we all know about how difficult it has become to provide pastors for all our congregations, and many of our congregations find it difficult to keep up with the financial demands of staff and property. In this context, support looks like developing more collaboration between congregations for the sake of our common mission.

We have a history in this synod of multi-congregation parishes and pastoral charges. Some parishes in our synod have worked together for more than 100 years. We are imagining how we can expand on this model, along with leadership training, to develop sustainable and vital ministry for our time and to carry us into the future to which God is calling us. The Bishop's Discernment Team is undertaking as a core part of its ministry the role of facilitating and guiding conversations among congregations. We are seeing this beginning in East Lycoming where five congregations have embarked on a two-year process of conversation.

An important part of this work of collaboration will include financial support for leaders and for process. I intend to ask our synod council and Fiscal Management Team to look at our restricted accounts, particularly mission funds, to develop a policy for using them toward support of collaborative initiatives, through small church grants and other avenues.

We also have an exciting opportunity to fund leadership development through our synod Fund for Leaders. This fund has recently become the recipient of annual payments from the St. Paul's Church Fund that formerly supported the work of the Lutheran Shared Ministry in Lycoming County and provided scholarships to Lutheran students from the county. With the addition of a portion of these funds, our Fund for Leaders will soon reach \$100,000, the point at which the synod council has determined we can establish an endowment for long-term development of leaders. Our synod assembly offerings will also support this fund.

Recently, when talking with a congregation council about their ministry, we got to notice how many of their members live at some distance to the church. For most congregations, this is not uncommon: some members will pass more than one Lutheran church on their way to worship at their "home" congregation. Another way to look at this is to see that our congregations have a larger territory than we often think, and that territory includes other ministries. I challenged that council to imagine what it means to have other Lutheran churches in their area of responsibility. What if the question, "who is my neighbor", is answered in a way that includes not just the individuals and families who live within our sphere but also those ministries, Lutheran or otherwise? How does that affect your ideas about support?

We need to look at these neighbors as partners with us in our mission for the sake of the unity of our church. This is not a time for a spirit of competitiveness but collaboration; not a time for a survival of the fittest attitude but for mutual support and encouragement.

All of these things we do are so that we can continue to serve our neighbors with the grace of Jesus Christ. Through our service we proclaim the love of God who cares for all the world.

As I began to say earlier in this report, the many ways our members and congregations serve our neighbors is a source of great pride. I can boast of the generosity that flows within and from this synod to people in need around the world. Our little synod, like the Macedonian church of Paul's day, is an example to others of what it means to share the gracious love of God in Christ Jesus through offering of ourselves and our treasures.

The proposals I have made in this report, and the plans I have put forward, are all meant to provide for us a means to sustain this generous spirit and even grow in it as we grow into the full stature of our Lord Jesus.

Finally, we must recognize that the success of our mission, so much as it relies on us, comes from our willingness to commit ourselves in ways that build up the church and us as disciples of Jesus. I call on all in our synod to renew yourselves in the covenant God made with you in baptism. Dedicate yourselves to lives of prayer for the church, your congregation, your neighbors, and the world. Delve into the Word of God through Bible study and private reading. I am convinced that the church that prays thus, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, will be a vital church, able to overcome the challenges of our time.

In a few minutes we will move into breakout groups. In each room, there are sheets of questions that you might consider as you engage in conversation about this report or anything you have seen or heard so far in this assembly.

Bishop Miller invited members to move into breakout groups to discuss his report and other things they might have heard at the assembly. The assembly recessed at 4:45pm with Evening Prayer, including recognition of congregation anniversaries.

Saturday, June 17, 2023

Plenary Four

8:30 Morning Prayer and Installation of Conference Deans and Secretaries opened the plenary.

Report of the Registrar

Amber Ellis reported as of 9:00am, 73 rostered leaders and 123 lay members registered and received credentials for a total of 196 voting members. In addition, 27 visitors and guests were registered.

Bishop Miller noted that Secretary Ray Huff was absent and he had appointed Ms Wendelin Davis as secretary pro tem.

Greetings from Ecumenical Partners

Bishop Miller introduced Bishop Ronald Gainer of the Diocese of Harrisburg who brought greetings to the assembly.

Report from the Churchwide Representative

Bishop Miller called on the Rev. Dr. Philip Hirsch, Director of Christian Community and Leadership at the ELCA churchwide office, to give the report from the ELCA. Included in Dr. Hirsch's report was a video message from Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton.

Report of the Treasurer

The Bishop called on the Rev. Chad Hebrink for the report of the Treasurer.

10:00-10:15 Break

Report of Synod Council

Holly Fry, Vice President, presented recommendations from the synod council.

Recommendation 1:

SA2023.06.06. To adopt the Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament for 2024. Adopted.

Recommendation 2:

SA2023.06.07. To adopt the Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Service for 2024. Adopted.

Recommendation 3:

SA2023.06.08. To adopt the Budget for fiscal year end January 31, 2025. Adopted.

Bible Study:

Rev. Dr. Gilson Waldkoenig presented the second Bible study session on Ephesians 4.
"Making Every Effort (Ephesians 4:3)"

11:15 Recess for Lunch / Workshops

Plenary Five

Weber Chapel

1:30 Hymn and Prayer began the fifth plenary session. Bishop Miller introduced pastors marking anniversaries in multiples of five years (they are listed in the worship materials for the assembly).

United Lutheran Seminary

The Rev. Martin Otto Zimmann presented a report from United Lutheran Seminary, including a video message from seminary president, Rev. Dr. Guy Erwin.

Candidacy Committee

Bishop Miller called on the Rev. Karla Leiby, Chair of the Candidacy Committee for the report of that committee.

Bishop Miller invited Mr. Noah Roux, Vice President elect, to speak about his hopes for his term as Vice President.

At the request of some assembly members, Bishop Miller called on Pastor Kristina Schaeffer to speak about the recent fire at Salem Lutheran Church.

Bishop Miller expressed gratitude for those who worked on the assembly and invited the assembly to share their thanks by applause.

The assembly recessed for transition to worship with the rite of closing of the assembly.

Closing worship began at 2:35. Offering from the assembly was designated to the Lutheran Church in Liberia university project and the Upper Susquehanna Synod Fund for Leaders.