

## Greater Milwaukee Synod Council Meeting Minutes

Meeting Held 20 January 2022

Meeting held via Zoom Technologies

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**God's Vision:** A world that embodies the fullness of life: justice, peace, equity, hope and love for everyone, including all races, genders, identities, abilities, and social status.

**Our Mission:** We follow Jesus, form communities, love all.

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### Meeting Attendance

Name	Conference/Position	Term Ends 8/31	Present	Absent	Anti-Racism
Jenny Brandt	North	2025		X	Pending
Robert Gee	Central	2025	X		11/2021
Vickie Stretz	West	2023	X		3/2021
The Rev. Matthew James	South	2025	X		11/2021
Edwin Aparicio	West Central	2023	X		10/2019
The Rev. Denise Mbise	South Central	2023	X		4/2019
Amber Davis	At Large	2023	X		Pending
The Rev. Kevin Kretzmann Farrar	At Large	2023	X		4/2019
José Andrés Guerrero	At Large	2023	X		Pending
The Rev. Kevin Beebe	At Large	2025	X		11/2020
Laura Hermanns	At Large	2025		X	11/2021
Steven Hartfield	At Large	2025	X		11/2021
Joyce Caldwell	Vice President	2025 (2)	X		11/2018
The Rev. Matthew Schlake-Kruse	Secretary	2023 (1)	X		Pending
The Rev. Karen Pahl	Treasurer	2025 (1)	X		11/2021
The Rev. Paul Erickson	Bishop	2022 (1)	X		3/2021
VACANT	Youth Representative				
Jacob Guerrero	Young Adult Rep.	2025	X		Pending

### Guests and Synod Staff

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Others present included: **The Rev. Jennifer Arnold**, Assistant to the Bishop for Missional Leadership; **Cheryl Bledsoe**, Area Coordinator, the Healing Network; **The Rev. Molly Doreza**, the Healing Network; **Mary Romskog**, Synod Assembly Manager; and **The Rev. Matthew Short**, Assistant to the Bishop for Evangelical Mission.

*\*In compliance with new guidance regarding the recording of Actions from the Office of the Secretary, numbering for Synod Council Actions does not reset at the onset of each month, but continues throughout the year.*

*Thus, SC22.01.16. may be followed by SC22.03.17., not ECSC22.03.01.\**

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## **Call to Order**

**Vice President Caldwell** called the meeting to order at 6:18 p.m.

## **Devotions**

**Cheryl Bledsoe**, newly hired Area Coordinator for the Healing Network (formerly Opioid and Substance Use Disorder Task Force) led the Council in devotions based on John 5's account of Jesus' healing a man near pool at Beth-saida. The world is yearning, she noted, for harbors of safety in its quest for hope and healing. When there seemingly is no one to help the man who cries out, Jesus speaks and the man is made whole. She connected this to the work of the Healing Network, where many within congregations dealing with addiction and substance misuse are "waiting by the pool, yearning to be pulled into healing waters." She led the Council in the Lord's Prayer.

## **I. Consent Agenda**

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 22.01.01. Approval of Consent Agenda**

The Council voted to approve items from the consent agenda as presented, including approval of voice for visitors; adoption of agenda for this meeting; approval of minutes from the Synod Council meeting of 18 November 2021; approval of On-Leave from Call Status for **The Rev. Jessica Short**, effective 14 December 2021; approval of continuing On-Leave from Call Status for **The Rev. Amanda Christensen; The Rev. Kerstin Hedlund (extended); The Rev. Paul Ihlenfeld; The Rev. Chad Kline; Deacon Douglas Krekling; The Rev. Tracy Polzin; The Rev. Richard Suero; and The Rev. Marcy Wieties**; and approval for Bishop Erickson to request On-Leave from Call extensions for **The Rev. Adam Moreno; The Rev. Kelly Taylor-Schaus; and The Rev. Dean Willich** at the 2022 Spring Conference of Bishops' meeting.

## **II. Synod Calls**

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 22.01.02. Approval of Synod Call**

The Council voted to approve a Synod Call for **The Rev. Heidi Borkenhagen**, called to interim ministry at **Trinity, Cedarburg**, effective 6 December 2021.

## Council Action

### SC 22.01.03. Approval of Synod Call

The Council voted to approve a Synod Call for **The Rev. Eric Silberschmidt**, called to interim ministry at **Our Savior's, Oconomowoc**, effective 11 October 2021.

## III. Ministry Highlight

**Cheryl Bledsoe and The Rev. Molly Doreza** shared updates on the ministry and mission of the Healing Network, the rebranded Task Force dealing with Opioid Addiction and other substance use disorders formed after the 2019 Synod Assembly. The mission statement of the Healing Network is “*working in faith to address addiction, substance misuse, and struggles in our diverse community.*” The Network has evolved and continues to partner with governmental, non-profit, and congregational institutions in accompanying individuals, families, and faith communities dealing with substance misuse, especially opioid misuse.

The Network has broken into many subgroups, including a fundraising team. **The Rev. Jennifer Arnold** serves as an advisory member in her role on Synod Staff. **The Rev. Doreza** introduced newly hired “Area Coordinator” **Cheryl Bledsoe**, whose role is focused on supporting and connecting congregations to the Network’s education and training sessions, fundraising, and grant writing.

Partnering with Twin Cities-based non-profit **Faith Partners**, 3 training sessions have been offered to the Greater Milwaukee Synod since 2020 began. Clergy education, congregational team training, and leadership development training are scheduled to be held in 2022.

The Healing Network itself continues to host quarterly meetings for its own development and learning, receiving “continuing education” from professionals and those involved in the recovery community. A new website and Facebook page are nearing launch. The Network is funded in part through support from the Greater Milwaukee Synod, Siebert Lutheran Foundation, and individual and congregational gifts; the recent rebrand was supported through time and services donated by **Vicar Matthew Olson (Holy Cross, Menomonee Falls)**. The Network continues to strive to seek financial sustainability as a part of its strategic plan.

## IV. Vice President’s Report

**Vice President Caldwell** presented information related to the input and feedback received in visioning conversations held during the Fall Conference Gatherings. She compiled a digest of all responses (without editing or analysis); this report was shared with Conference Deans and with Synod Council members in the Dropbox. **The Rev. Beebe** inquired as to any significant differences across conferences. The consensus among facilitators was that on the whole, aside from some contextual issues related to politics and racial justice reflecting geography, the vision and values lifted up across all six conferences were quite consistent.

**Caldwell** also shared the selected date of Saturday, 26 February for the Synod Council retreat. In her remarks, she gave thanks for the service and commitment of leaders on the Synod’s anti-racism and Reconciling in Christ (RIC) teams who are concluding their service. Anti-racism team leaders have served for twenty years and are working to transition to new leadership of this team and identifying a new group of leaders. **The Rev. Bill Beyer (Grace,**

**Thiensville**) has indicated his ‘retirement’ as RIC Team Leader/Convener effective in March after six years of service in this role. She offered thanks for the leadership in these important areas and for the Spirit’s discernment in raising up new leaders for these ministries.

## V. Bishop’s Report

**Bishop Erickson** apprised the Council of the current office protocols amid the omicron variant’s rise in COVID cases. He noted that he is in process of holding individual performance reviews with Synod Staff members and will have his own review conducted by members of the Executive Committee later in January.

**Bishop Erickson** also named the ongoing work he will ask the Council to address giving clarity and consistency to the structure, names, terms, and composition of various subgroups across the synod (i.e. teams, task forces, committees, etc.). It is his hope this can be accomplished through various continuing resolutions passed over the next few months.

**Bishop Erickson** informed the Council of his discernment to remain open to serving a second term, should the assembly elect him to do so. He shared his sense of call to this ongoing ministry, and lifted up there still being important work to continue, including carrying out the Equipping the Saints Mission Appeal and ongoing work for racial equity. He noted that recent trends of declining mission support from congregations is unlikely to be reversed, and whoever is elected to serve for the next six years will likely need to have a staff that is less expensive.

**Bishop Erickson’s** report also noted that he has authorized Approved Candidate for Ordination **Nicholas Schoob (they/them)** to serve as transition pastor at **Reformation, Milwaukee** as they await their first call.

## VI. Treasurer’s Report

**Treasurer Pahl** presented a brief overview of the latest financial reports. As of 31 December, the Synod is in a financial position slightly behind to budgeted projections. To date, \$1.5 million has been received in mission support and other income (\$1.65 million was budgeted; actual expenses total \$1.7 million (\$1.8 million was budgeted)). **Pahl** noted that January is often a strong month for receiving mission support, but total offerings can be inconsistent year-to-year based on fluctuating congregational status. She also noted that the 2022-2023 Budget includes a lower income projection than the current budget.

**Pahl** led the Council in a deeper conversation regarding greater-than-anticipated deficits in the future and the need for a change in philosophy and practice regarding the Synod Council’s use of deficit budgeting as soon as the 2023-2024 budget. The Finance team and Synod Council leaders will begin working on the 2023-2024 budget ahead of the March Synod Council Meeting.

### Council Action

#### SC 22.01.04. Approval of Financial Reports

The Council voted to approve and receive the financial reports through 31 December 2021 as presented.

## VII. Old Business

## **A. Update and Next Steps on Mission Appeal: “Equipping the Saints”**

**Vice President Caldwell**, presenting as the Campaign Manager, noted that total giving for the Equipping the Saints appeal has reached 22% of the \$2.3 million goal. **Robyn DiGiacinto** and the synod staff have been making videos on behalf of the appeal. **Caldwell** noted that COVID has made the appeal far more digitized than originally planned.

**The Council** acted upon a recommendation from the Executive Committee to disburse the first missional tithe of the funds received through 31 December 2021.

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 22.01.05. Approval of Equipping the Saints Missional Tithe**

The Council voted to approve disbursing funds from the Equipping the Saints Mission Appeal as part of the missional tithe totaling \$23,427.22: \$11,713.61 to Lutheran Social Services for Refugee Resettlement; \$5856.80 to the Diocese of Meru and \$5856.80 to the Lutheran Church in El Salvador for leadership development.

## **B. Appointment of Youth Synod Council Member**

**Caldwell** noted the Synod is still seeking a commitment for a 2-year term on the Synod Council from a youth (someone under 18 at time of election/appointment).

## **C. Updates on 2021 Synod Assembly Resolutions 1 and 2**

**Vice President Caldwell** noted that Task Force 1 (Authentic Diversity) has begun meeting in their three-year process. They have begun looking at the Constitution and other governing documents to discover where there may be structural barriers to authentic diversity and inclusion within the synod.

**Secretary Schlake-Kruse** presented a proposed Continuing Resolution to the ELCA Church Council drafted by Task Force 2 (Inclusive Gender Language) for adoption by the Synod Council. The Continuing Resolution asks the ELCA Church Council to recommend changes to the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA (and by extension, the Constitution for Synods) relating to binary gender divisions in the representational principles of the church. **The Rev. Matt James**, who served on the task force, gave further context as to the process and challenges to finding the best language and practices to utilize more expansive gender identities throughout the church.

**Council Action**

**SC 22.01.06. Adoption of Continuing Resolution to the ELCA Church Council**

The Council voted to adopt a continuing resolution to the ELCA Church Council (in response to 2021 Synod Assembly Resolution 2), recommending changes to the ELCA's governing documents related to gender language and this church's representational principles.

**D. Designation of Funds from Abiding Savior Sale Proceeds**

**Vice President Caldwell** updated the Council that proceeds from the property sale at **Abiding Savior, Brown Deer** have been received. The total of such funds were less than had been projected to the Synod, and consideration on their use will be addressed at future meetings.

**VIII. New Business**

**A. Approval of Grant Application for Racial Equity Organizer**

The Council was briefed by **The Rev. Matt Short** on the process of the Synod's grant application with the Siebert Lutheran Foundation as related to the Equipping the Saints Mission Appeal. After consultation with leaders from Siebert, joint passion emerged around the theme, "Building an Authentically Diverse Church," with support for the possible funding of a Racial Justice Organizer in the synod staff structure. The grant proposal has been written and submission is conditional on the Synod Council's formal approval.

**The Rev. Short** shared a "high-altitude view" of what the Racial Justice Organizer's work might look like, including supporting congregations study and act on racial equity, helping develop clearer outcomes for congregations on their anti-racism journey, and training congregations to more fully integrate an anti-racist identity in their daily lives.

**Council Action**

**SC 22.01.07. Approval of Grant Application Request**

The Council voted to approve the Synod's application to the Siebert Lutheran Foundation for funds totaling \$150,000 to support the proposal, "Building an Authentically Diverse Church."

**B. Approval of Synod Assembly Rules**

**Council Action**

**SC 22.01.08. Recommendation of 2022 Synod Assembly Rules**

The Council voted to recommend approval of selected 2022 Synod Assembly Rules to the Assembly: *Registration for the 2022 Synod Assembly shall close at midnight on Sunday, May 15th. No registrations will be received after the deadline has passed. Due to the limitations of the hybrid meeting and voting credentials, no walk-in registrations will be accepted.*

## **C. Adoption of Continuing Resolution regarding Synod Assembly Credentials**

**Secretary Schlake-Kruse** presented a proposed continuing resolution to address an imbalance in the proportions of lay and rostered credentials ahead of the 2022 Synod Assembly. Guidance from the ELCA Office of the Secretary has clarified that the 60% lay voting member/40% rostered minister voting member mandate must take into account all possible registrants, rather than actual registration numbers. The Synod Constitution currently names all retired rostered ministers as voting members; with 310 total rostered ministers in the synod, current registration practices require both a temporary and long-term amendment to the constitution to allow for a legal assembly under the rules of the ELCA. The Synod Assembly will need to address the retired rostered minister issue in constitutional amendments in May 2022.

The Council addressed communicating the extra voting member, the unintentional possibility of an extra voting member leading to an economic imbalance among representation, and providing for replacement of this continuing resolution after the 2022 Assembly.

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 22.01.09. Adoption of Continuing Resolution**

The Council voted to adopt the following Continuing Resolution (S7.21.A22.) related to voting members at Synod Assembly:

*All congregations may add one voting member to the number allotted in S7.21.A18. to assure 60% of voting members are laypersons. This is in addition to any youth or young adult voting members added under S7.21.B18.*

## **D. Approval of Voice and Vote at 2022 Synod Assembly**

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 22.01.10. Approval of Voice and Vote at 2022 Synod Assembly**

The Council voted to approve voice and vote for the following individuals at the 2022 Synod Assembly: **Edwin Aparicio**, a synod-authorized minister serving at **Ascension, Waukesha**; **Jerry Groth**, a synod-authorized minister serving at **Christ the King, Port Washington and Living Faith, Saukville**; **Germán Novelli**, a synod-authorized minister serving at **Ascension, Milwaukee and Faith/Sante Fe, Milwaukee**; **The Rev. Muriel Otto**, a pastor of the United Church of Christ serving at **Unity, Brookfield**; **Nicholas Schoob**, a synod-authorized minister serving at **Reformation, Milwaukee**; and **Duane Swenson**, a synod-authorized minister at **Christ Jackson**.

## **E. Appointment of Bishop Election Committee Members**

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 22.01.11. Appointment of Bishop Election Committee Members**

The Council voted to approve the appointment of the following individuals to the Bishop Election Committee for the 2022 Synod Assembly. **Dan Christianson (Atonement, Muskego); Chuck Ellingson (Cross, Milwaukee); Jerry Key (Reformation, Milwaukee); Charlotte Linberry (Lake Park, Milwaukee); The Rev. Beth Ann Stone (Mt. Pleasant, Racine); and The Rev. Drew Yoos (Holy Cross, Menomonee Falls).**

### **F. Approve Recommended Process for 2022 Bishop Election**

*Bishop Erickson and the Synod Staff departed the meeting at 8:02 p.m. so as to avoid conflict of interest.*

**Vice President Caldwell** and **Bishop Election Committee co-chair Stretz** presented an outlined process (recommended by the Executive Committee) regarding the pre-assembly process for a bishop election. The Synod Council was called by a Synod Assembly Resolution (2009 Resolution 4) to approve a process ahead of each bishop election in the Greater Milwaukee Synod.

The process recommended will a) invite people to submit names for pre-identified candidates to Election Co-Chairs by March 15. The Co-Chairs will then (b) have conversations with all persons identified to follow up and confirm their willingness to participate in the pre-assembly process. (c) All persons whose names were lifted up will participate in one-on-one video interview, responding to designated questions established by the Bishop Election Committee. (d) Videos will be shared on the synod website prior to the 2022 Synod Assembly and removed before the Assembly formally begins. (e) The election of a bishop will follow the constitutional guidelines for an ecclesiastical ballot at the 2022 Assembly.

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 22.01.12. Approval of Bishop Election Process**

The Council voted to approve the pre-assembly process for the 2022 Bishop Election as recommended by the Executive Committee.

### **G. Approve Amendments to 2022-2023 Synod Budget**

*\*Bishop Erickson and the Synod Staff members returned to the meeting at 8:18 p.m.*

**The Council** discussed the Executive Committee's recommendation to amend the synod budget to provide a 3% increase for synod staff compensation. The Synod Assembly-approved 2022 Budget factored in a 1% salary increase; COLA estimates at the end of 2021 were between 5-6%. There is currently funding in a separate designated "Salary Retention Fund" in the Synod's reserves.

**The Rev. Beebe** noted his concern that this pay increase is less than the recommended 5% compensation increase for rostered ministers. He commented that “it is of great concern that we’re asking more of congregations than we would ask for our synod staff.

The Council also discussed personnel guidelines regarding vacation time for synod staff as a possible way of compensation.

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 22.01.13. Amendment to 2022-2023 Synod Budget**

The Council voted to amend the 2022-2023 synod budget to include a 3% salary increase for Synod Staff and subsequent proportional increases to Synod Staff benefits.

*Bishop Erickson abstained from voting.*

### **H. Designation of Rogers Street Property Funds for Latino Ministry**

The Council discussed re-classifying designated funds from the sale of a property on Rogers Street. These funds are part of a land-contract held by the synod, with \$46,000 yet to be paid on the contract. A majority of the funds to date were used for upkeep of the property or to support Latino Ministry. This act simply clarifies use of the funds going forward.

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 22.01.14. Classification of Rogers Street Property Funds**

The Council voted to re-classify that Rogers Street Designated Funds be used to support Latino ministry in the Greater Milwaukee Synod.

### **I. Classification of Schaaf Funds for Seminary Scholarships**

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 22.01.15. Classification of Schaaf Funds for Seminary Scholarships**

The Council voted to assign management of the Schaaf Funds for Seminary Scholarships to the Synod Endowment Committee for investment and oversight.

### **J. Synod Committees and Structures**

**The Council** discussed the current guidelines for the finance/audit committee, which can have up to three members of the Synod Council, and the Nominating Committee, which is appointed by the Synod Council.

### **K. Resignation of Synod Council Member**

The council received with regrets the resignation of **Laura Hermanns** as an at-large lay female member of the Council. **Hermanns** will continue her service to the Lutheran Campus Ministry Board, but the Synod Council is able to appoint another council member to that board. **Hermanns'** seat will be up for nominations for a two-year term at the 2022 Synod Assembly.

## **IX. Reports**

- A. Evangelical Mission** – A written report was submitted.
- B. Congregations in Mission** – No report was submitted.
- C. Missional Leadership** – Written report was submitted. **The Rev. Arnold** responded to questions from the Council regarding the struggles of finding Interim and transitional pastors.
- D. Lutheran Campus Ministry** – No report was submitted.
- E. Reconciling in Christ** – Written Report Provided. As noted in the Vice President's report, **The Rev. Bill Beyer** will conclude his time as an advisory member of the Synod Council at the February Retreat
- F. Anti-Racism Team** – No report.
- G. Women of the ELCA-** Written report submitted.
- H. Outreach for Hope** – No report submitted.
- I. ELCA Church Council** – No report.
- J. Healing Faith (OSUD) Task Force-** Written Report submitted.

## **X. Adjournment**

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 22.01.16. Adjournment**

The council, reaching the end of its agenda of business, adjourned with prayer at 8:47 p.m.

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**Next Meeting: Special Synod Leadership Retreat**  
**Saturday, February 26<sup>th</sup> @ Mt. Hope Lutheran, West Allis**  
**9 a.m.—4 p.m.**

### **Scheduled 2021-2022 Council Meetings:**

Thursday, March 17<sup>th</sup> Format TBD  
Dinner at 5:30; Meeting at 6:15 p.m.

Unless otherwise published in advance, all meetings begin at 6:15 pm.

Signed,

The Rev. Matthew Schlake-Kruse, Synod Secretary