

Greater Milwaukee Synod Council Meeting Minutes

Meeting held 16 March 2023

Meeting held at the Greater Milwaukee Synod Office, 1212 S. Layton Blvd. Milwaukee, Wisconsin and concurrently via Zoom Technologies.

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.

Meeting Attendance

Name	Conference/Position	Term Ends 8/31	Present	Absent	Anti-Racism
OPEN	North	2025			
Jerry Key	Central	2025		X	Pending
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
Rose Dotson	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
Bob Reinders	Acting Treasurer	2025 (1)	X		11/2021
The Rev. Paul Erickson	Bishop	2028 (2)	X		3/2021
Lucas Short	Youth Representative	2023	X		Pending
Jacob Guerrero	Young Adult Rep.	2025	X		Pending

Guests and Synod Staff

Others present included: **The Rev. Char Guiliani (Incarnation, Milwaukee)**, Reconciling in Christ Ministry Team; **The Rev. Kristin Nielsen**, Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations in

Mission; **The Rev. Karen Pahl**, Interim Synod Financial Administrator; **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 SC22.03.01. **

Call to Order

Vice President Caldwell called the meeting to order at 6:16 p.m.

Devotions

The Rev. Short and **Dotson** led the Council in devotions based on 2 Corinthians 4:15: *All this is for your benefit, so that the grace reaching more and more people may increase thanksgiving, that all may overflow with the glory of God.* The Council discussed the power of the good news—and how we are sometimes leery of sharing the gifts of God with others.

I. Consent Agenda

Council Action

SC 23.03.17. Approval of Consent Agenda

The Council voted to approve the following items from the consent agenda as presented, including approval of voice for visitors; adoption of agenda for this meeting; approval of Disability Roster status for **The Rev. Steve Kuhl**, effective 1 December 2022; approval of Retired Roster status for **The Rev. Paul Ihlenfeld**, effective 1 March 2023; and approval of Voice and Vote at the 2023 Synod Assembly for **The Rev. Muriel Otto**, on the roster of the United Church of Christ, serving at **Unity, Brookfield**; and **The Rev. Afi Dobbins-Mays**, a pastor of the United Methodist Church, serving on Synod Staff.

The Council approved removing approval of the minutes of January 19 from the consent agenda.

II. Synod Calls

Council Action

SC 23.03.18. Approval of Synod Call

The Council voted to approve a Synod Call for **The Rev. Casey Sugden**, called to Interim Ministry at **Ascension, Milwaukee** effective 1 October 2022.

Council Action

SC 23.03.19. Approval of Synod Call

The Council voted to approve a Synod Call for **The Rev. Bradley Brown**, called to chaplaincy at **Commonheart Hospice, Milwaukee**, effective 10 January 2023.

III. Ministry Highlight: Synod Mission Table

Dotson and **The Rev. Short** gave an overview on the ministry and work of the Synod's Mission Table. The Mission Table is convened by the Director of Evangelical Mission and focuses on vitality and innovation in congregational life. Processes are focused on helping accompany congregations through periods of change and transformation. Key tasks of the Mission Table include: Enacting "Faithful Innovation" & "Fresh Expressions" programs and taking the lead on coaching and leadership for our Synod's congregations. through Luther Seminary; connecting and empowering lay leaders to "do" mission; supporting cross-cultural and multi-cultural ministry; facilitating the "I'm Curious About..."; supporting Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities and their leaders; and finding resources and provide opportunities to revive congregations.

IV. Vice President's Report

Vice President Caldwell reported and shared reflections on her recent travel to the Holy Land. Wrestling with the question, "Who is Jesus in the Manger?" and the metaphor of how many of our nativity sets have white Jesus's stuck and unable to be taken from the manger. She encouraged the Council to reflect on what makes Jesus' presence "real" for them. She posed the following questions: "To what are we, as a Synod, and as a Council, being called?" and "What are the Synod's needs for healing?" She shared a prayer of gratitude and calling on behalf of the Council.

V. Bishop's Report

Bishop Erickson updated the Council on the spirit of the Synod Staff and the ongoing process looking for a financial administrator. He noted work has begun on revising and renewing the Synod's personnel policies in the next weeks and months, due in part to the feedback from Gold Enterprises.

Bishop Erickson provided an update on details regarding the 2023 Synod Assembly. **Pardeep Singh Kaleka** will be the keynote speaker addressing hope in the midst of hatred and religious violence. **The Rev. Kenneth Wheeler** will be the preacher for worship; he has recently begun a book tour for his book about racial injustice and Christian nationalism.

He noted **Messiah, Racine**, has begun the process of initiating Holy Closure.

The Rev. Beebe inquired if the Conference of Bishops are responding and how the denomination is responding to transphobia and trans hatred. **Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton** will be presenting a formal statement denouncing transphobia in the coming weeks. **Bishop Erickson** noted the Conference of Bishops continue to receive updates on the process related to the Commission for the Renewed Lutheran Church. **The Rev. Char Guiliani** and **Matthew Brockmeier** were the Synod's nominees to the Commission.

Bishop Erickson noted his work as a part of a task force on the impact of the ELCA's Discipline Policies on people of color and his service on the board of **Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service**.

Bishop Erickson updated the Council on the property formerly held by the Kujichagulia Lutheran Center. Per conversations with **Minister Venice Williams**, there are many ongoing conversations that preclude taking any action regarding the property going forward. The Synod does hold a liability policy for the church building.

VI. Treasurer's Report

Acting Treasurer Reinders presented the financial reports. Mission Support for 2022-2023 totaled \$1.65 million (97% of budgeted income); this is \$44,000 short of estimated projections. Expenses totaled \$1.893 million, about \$10000 under budget. \$919,000 of expenses were benevolence to the ELCA and other ministry partners. The Net operating loss for the year was \$141,200. \$129,000 had been the budgeted shortfall. The Council discussed the lack of further undesignated funds to cover future deficits when the St. Andrew's Ministry Funds will be used up.

Council Action

SC 23.03.20. Reception of Financial Reports

The Council voted to receive the financial reports through 28 February 2023 as presented.

Council Action

SC 23.03.21. Transfer of Funds to Cover Budget Deficit

The Council voted to use funds from the St. Andrew's Ministry Funds and additional Salary Retention Funds to cover the 2022-2023 Budget Shortfall.

VII. Old Business

A. Revision of 2023-2024 Synod Budget

Acting Treasurer Reinders presented proposals to amend the 2023-24 Synod Budget to reflect a more realistic expectation of mission support and the lack of funds to cover future deficit spending. The projected deficit approved by the Synod Assembly is \$85,000. **Reinders** presented the Executive Committee's recommendation to reduce the Synod's ELCA Mission Support to 45% of revenue (from 49.3%). This would reduce the projected deficit to approximately \$19,000.

The Council discussed the short-term and long-term impact of these decisions. **Bishop Erickson** noted anecdotally, the ELCA average for Synod Mission Support tends to be around 45%; other synods are also facing similar decisions and reduction in staff expenses. **The Rev. Short** noted congregational mission support is steady, but few are able to increase their mission support in the coming year. He noted the cumulative effect of congregational closures is beginning to be realized.

The Rev. Beebe inquired as to the Synod Staff compensation in relationship to Synod Compensation Guidelines; in most cases, these salaries are close to the guidelines. **Bishop Erickson** noted the current staffing model is unlikely to continue at its present trajectory in future budgets; that conversation will continue in the coming months.

The Council also discussed possible ideas to address the \$20,000 of remaining deficit in the budget and how the Council will work to intentionally address that shortfall. Based on the reports from the Authentic Diversity Audit, how can we build

relationships between Synod Council leaders and congregations. The dynamic of resistance to “the Synod” and repairing previous mistrust and pain is a large part of what Synod Staff face regularly. The Council had robust discussion on communication and helping to connect with congregations.

Council Action

SC 23.03.22. Amendment of 2023-24 Synod Budget

The Council voted to amend the 2023-24 Synod Budget to reduce the percentage allotted to ELCA Mission Benevolence to 45% of income.

B. Update on Equipping the Saints Mission Appeal

Vice President Caldwell, presenting as the Campaign Manager, reported the Synod has received over \$1 million in pledges and gifts. Efforts are being made to re-connect with congregational leaders to engage in the campaign process. 3 congregations are completing their campaigns before April; several have timelines to begin in mid-to-late spring. There is hope to reach about 50% of congregations for support in the campaign.

C. Approval of ETS Granting Process for Innovation

Council Action

SC 23.03.23. Approval of ETS Granting Process

The Council voted to approve the Innovation Coaching Grant Process for funds from the Equipping the Saints Appeal, as proposed and carried out through the Synod Mission Table.

D. Synod Administration of Wellington Park Lutheran Church

The Council received updates as to the beginning of the Synod Administration Process with **Wellington Park, Milwaukee**. **Bishop Erickson** has recently met with congregation leader **Dawn Edwards** and explained the process and function of the Administrative Committee. Members of the congregation would hold voice but not vote in the administrative committee process. She has agreed to this process.

Wellington Park currently owns the church property at 7017 W. Medford Ave, which includes an attached residence at 7021 W. Medford Ave., as well as a house across the parking lot at 4863. N. 70th Street. An initial estimate of the value of these properties is \$300,000-400,000. The congregation’s leaders are in agreement that the property needs to be sold;

The administrative committee, acting on behalf of the full synod council, would need to vote on any decisions related to the closing of the congregation, hiring a realtor, selling the property, and distributing the assets. Synod administration is the means by which the synod would work with her and the others present to make sure that

remaining congregation members' desires are considered but things are done in good order. This process also ensures that Edwards and the others at WPLC were protected from any allegations of misappropriation of funds or property.

Council Action

SC 23.03.24. Approval of Synod Administration & Administrative Committee

The Council voted to transfer of decision-making power for Wellington Park Lutheran Church to Synod Administration and to authorize the Bishop to select individuals to serve on the Administrative Committee.

E. Report from 2022 Resolution 1 Task Force

The Rev. Guiliani presented a written and oral remarks on Resolution 1, dealing with Authentic Diversity. The Task Force has presented recommendations to the Synod after spending time researching and studying governing documents and policies. They noted that a number of practices could be modified to be more inclusive of LGBTQIA+ and people of color in the Synod.

Some of the recommendations lifted up in the presentation included: addressing binary language in governing documents; accountability for representative principles; seeking models for doing business beyond Robert's Rules; requiring anti-racism and anti-bias training of any employees; and including clearer anti-discrimination language.

The Rev. Guiliani also noted questions raised in the midst of the Task Force's discussion included: Is the concept of congregation self-sufficiency a hindrance to a more inclusiveness and equitability in the synod? Does the present partnership process place city congregations in competition for partners? Do the present special funding sources put too much emphasis on new and unique programing at the expense of support for existing congregational ministry? Is it time to consider a process for equalization of salaries in the synod to allow professional leaders to work in areas and ministries they have gifts for rather than seeking the highest paying positions which are inevitably in primarily white congregations bleeding off leadership resources from economically stretched congregations? Are people in communities of color and the LGBTQIA+ community feeling the synod does not properly hear their concerns? If yes, what is hindering the communication and how can we open the channels? Is it appropriate that so many of the ministry positions in communities of color have become part-time and multi-parish? Does this allow congregations of color and city ministries to develop in ways that meet the needs of their community?

The Council had further discussion on implementation of a consensus model, looking to the Southeastern Synod for an example. There is a need for more conversation partners and people interested in doing this work.

The Task Force noted this is the beginning of such work and hopes to further ongoing discussion and changes as part of the next steps after the results of the Authentic Diversity Audit.

VII. New Business

A. Synod Council Actions for 2023 Synod Assembly

1. Recommendation of 2024-2025 Budget to 2023 Synod Assembly

Acting Treasurer Reinders presented the proposed 2024-25 Budget for approval by the 2023 Synod Assembly. This budget contains similar estimates for mission support, benevolence giving, and other revenue. There is a 2% increase for Synod Staff salary and corresponding increases in benefits. The proposed budget projects a \$35,000 deficit. The budget can be amended to reflect financial realities later.

The Rev. Beebe discussed concerns about inflation levels and maintaining consistency with recommended salary guideline increases. The Council discussed proportional cuts to Lutheran Campus Ministry and with regard to staffing costs and other expenses. **Dotson** shared the insights of why the Executive Committee has recommended the budget as proposed, knowing there is space to revisit these numbers when more data is available to the Council. **The Rev. Mbise** sought greater detail regarding the funding of the budget and other sources of income.

Council Action

SC 23.03.25. Recommendation of 2024-25 Synod Budget to Synod Assembly

The Council voted to recommend the proposed 2024-25 Synod Budget to the 2023 Synod Assembly for approval.

2. Rescission of Continuing Resolution S7.21.A22.

Council Action

SC 23.03.26. Continuing Resolution Amendment

The Council voted to rescind and strike Continuing Resolution S7.21.A22., which had been enacted to give extra Synod Assembly voting members to attain a legal lay/rostered balance in 2022.

3. Recommendation of 2023 Synod Assembly Rules to 2023 Synod Assembly

Council Action

SC 23.03.27. Recommendation of Synod Assembly Rules

The Council voted to recommend the 2023 Synod Assembly Rules to the Assembly for approval.

4. Recommendation of 2023 Synod Assembly Agenda to 2023 Synod Assembly

Council Action

SC 23.03.28. Recommendation of Synod Assembly Agenda

The Council voted to recommend the 2023 Synod Assembly Agenda to the Assembly for approval.

5. Recommendation of Recommended Amendments to Synod Constitution to 2023 Synod Assembly

Council Action

SC 23.03.29. Recommendation of Recommended Amendments to the Synod Constitution and Bylaws to 2023 Synod Assembly

The Council voted to recommend that all Recommended Amendments to the Synod Constitution (as approved by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly) be approved by the Synod Assembly.

B. Action regarding Mount Meru Coffee Project

1. Ratification of Bylaw Changes for Fiscal Year

Council Action

SC 23.03.30. Ratification of Mt. Meru Coffee Project Bylaw Changes

The Council voted to ratify bylaw changes proposed by the Mt. Meru Coffee Project, changing the project's fiscal year to begin 1 January from 1 February.

2. Ratification of Board of Directors and Offices

Council Action

SC 23.03.31. Ratification of Mt. Meru Coffee Board

The Council voted to ratify the members of the Mt. Meru Coffee Project Board: **Walt Chossek (President); Rick Frowein (Vice President); Patti Nelson (Secretary); Tori Mallak (Treasurer); Andy Peterson (Financial Secretary); Fred Meyer; The Rev. Paul Erickson; and The Rev. Kevin Beebe.**

3. Acceptance of Mt. Meru Coffee Project Annual Report

Council Action

SC 23.03.32. Reception of Mt. Meru Coffee Project Annual Report

The Council voted to receive, with gratitude, the 2022 Annual report of the Mt. Meru Coffee Project.

C. Candidacy Scholarship Task Force Report – Abiding Savior Funds

The Council received a written report from a Task Force of Candidacy Committee with recommendations for distribution of the Synod's Scholarship Funds (known as the Abiding Savior Funds, formerly the Schaff Scholarship). This team determined that the best use of the funds was to make sure that every candidate for ministry could receive some funding if requested.

Their recommendations include:

At the end of January each year, the amount to be distributed to candidates from the Abiding Savior fund will be determined. The distribution amount will be a rolling three-year balance of 5 percent.

Candidates applying for funds must:

- be a Greater Milwaukee Synod Candidate for Word and Service or Word and Sacrament ministry.
- have a positive entrance decision from the Greater Milwaukee Synod Candidacy Committee.
- be an active seminary student as verified in writing by the seminary.
- request funds by using our simple application form and submitting it by the deadline.
- make a request for funds of an amount between \$500 and \$2500 per year.

Once requests are received, they will be reviewed by several members of the Candidacy Committee and the synod staff person for candidacy. The requests will be totaled, and the candidates will receive a percentage of their request based on available funds. Each candidate will receive the same percentage of their request. Funds will be given directly to the candidate and will not be sent to the seminary.

Council Action

SC 23.03.33. Approval of Scholarship Fund Policies

The Council voted to approve the recommended guidelines and policies established by the Candidacy Committee to share the Abiding Savior Scholarship Funds.

IX. Reports

A. Evangelical Mission – A written report was submitted.

- B. Congregations in Mission** – A written report was submitted. **The Rev. Nielsen** noted transitions continue to move slowly with identification of interim and called pastors. The number of candidates seeking call are less than in years past; congregations need better preparation for those realities.
- C. Assistant to the Bishop for Authentic Diversity and Leadership** – An oral report was provided in addition to a written report.
- D. Lutheran Campus Ministry**- No report submitted.
- E. Reconciling in Christ** – The RIC team is preparing for PrideFest (June 2-3-4); Synod Pride Worship will be held on 1 June 2023 at Ascension, Milwaukee. The theme for this year’s Synod RIC Pride Worship is “Born in God’s Image: Reborn in Christ’s TRANSformational Love” **Chuck Ellingson (Cross, Milwaukee)** will be organizing this year’s worship.
- F. Anti-Racism Team** – No report submitted.
- G. Women of the ELCA**- No report submitted.
- H. Outreach for Hope** – Written report submitted.
- I. Latino Strategy Table**—**Aparicio** provided a brief oral update regarding **Emaús, Racine**.
- J. Endowment Committee**- No report submitted.
- K. Healing Faith Network**- No report submitted.

X. Adjournment

Council Action

SC 23.03.34. Adjournment

The council, reaching the end of its agenda of business, adjourned with prayer at 9:09 p.m.

Next Meetings:

May 11, 2023: 5:30 dinner; 6:15 meeting

Synod Assembly – June 2—3, 2023; Opening Plenary Friday at 2:00 p.m.

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

Submitted,

The Rev. Matthew Schlake-Kruse, Synod Secretary

