

## Greater Milwaukee Synod Council Meeting Minutes

Meeting Held 16 September 2021

Meeting held 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
Jenny Brandt	North	2025		X	Pending
Robert Gee	Central	2025	X		Pending
Vickie Stretz	West	2023	X		3/2021
The Rev. Matthew James	South	2025	X		Pending
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		Pending
Steven Hartfield	At Large	2025	X		Pending
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		Pending
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

Others present included: **Jennifer Arnold**, Assistant to the Bishop for Missional Leadership; **Sue Seidemann**, President, Synod Women of the ELCA; **The Rev. Matt Short**, Assistant to the Bishop for Evangelical Mission; and **Sonja Wolfe**, ELCA Church Council Representative.

## **Call to Order**

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

## **Devotions**

**Bishop Erickson** led the Council in devotions and prayer based on the portion of Revelation 2 addressed to the church in Ephesus. Focused on the complaint of the revelator, “I have this against you—that you have abandoned the love you had at first,” the devotion invited reflection on our passions, our first loves, and finding connections in those things that make one’s heart sing. Using the metaphor of his family’s generational raspberry bushes, the Bishop noted “who we are is rooted in God’s deep soil.”

## **I. Consent Agenda**

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 21.09.01. Approval of Consent Agenda**

The Council voted to approve all 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 16 July 2021; approval of On-Leave from Call Status for **The Rev. Lynn Erickson**, effective 28 August 2021; and **The Rev. Marcy Wieties**, effective 29 July 2021; and approval of retired status for **The Rev. James Holmberg**, effective 1 August 2021; **Deacon Susan Daniels**, effective 1 July 2021; **The Rev. Paul Bulgerin**, effective 1 September 2021; and **The Rev. Cheri Johnson**, effective 1 October 2021.

## **II. Synod Calls**

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 21.09.02. Approval of Synod Call**

The Council voted to approve a Synod Call for **The Rev. Casey Sugden**, called to interim ministry at **Christ the Servant, Waukesha**, effective 23 June 2021.

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 21.09.03. Approval of Synod Call**

The Council voted to approve a Synod Call for **The Rev. Tim McIntosh**, called to specialized ministry as Director of Spiritual Care at Cedar Community, West Bend, effective 2 August 2021.

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 21.09.04. Approval of Synod Call**

The Council voted to approve a Synod Call for **The Rev. Greg Van Dunk**, called to interim ministry at **Grace, Grafton**, effective 27 September 2021.

**Council Action**

**SC 21.09.05. Approval of Synod Call**

The Council voted to approve a Synod Call for **The Rev. Jennifer Olson**, called to specialized ministry as Chaplain at St. Francis Place, Milwaukee and Franciscan Place, Brookfield, effective 3 August 2021.

**Council Action**

**SC 21.09.06. Approval of Synod Call**

The Council voted to approve a Synod Call for **The Rev. Diane Olson**, called to specialized ministry as Chaplain at Allay Home and Hospice, Brookfield, effective 17 August 2021.

**Council Action**

**SC 21.09.07. Approval of Synod Call**

The Council voted to approve a Synod Call for **The Rev. Andrew Nyren**, called to specialized ministry as Chaplain to Compassus Hospice, Brookfield, effective 13 September 2021.

### **III. Vice President's Report**

**Vice President Caldwell** invited Council members into small groups to reflect on the following questions: *What has sustained you during the pandemic?* and *What helps you to remember who you are and whose you are?*

### **IV. Bishop's Report**

**Bishop Erickson** gave a brief oral report of his sabbatical, which included reading and writing on leadership and innovation. He is finishing an essay for publication in a volume on public theology entitled, "Is Anybody Listening? ELCA Bishops as Adaptive Leaders and Public Theologians in a Time of Crisis."

**Bishop Erickson** noted that **The Rev. Kristin Nielsen** is completing the second half of her sabbatical, and that **The Rev. Jennifer Arnold** will qualify for sabbatical under the synod sabbatical policy in 2022.

It was noted in the Bishop's report that as of 1 September, **Venice Williams (The Table)**; **Edwin Aparicio (Ascension, Waukesha)**; and **The Rev. Germán Novelli**, a pastor of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (**Ascension, Milwaukee and Faith/Santa Fe, Milwaukee**) have been re-authorized as synod-authorized ministers for an additional twelve months at their given ministry settings.

### **V. Treasurer's Report**

**Treasurer Pahl** presented a brief overview of the latest financial reports. Through August 2021, income is 91% of the budgeted mission support (\$953,000); expenses in most areas are on

target or behind budgeted levels, also at 91% of the budget. The synod is currently ahead of the budgeted deficit at this point in the fiscal year.

**The Rev. Pahl** presented line graphs showing month-over-month giving for FY2019, 2020, and 2021 to date. It was noted that a few congregations did not submit letters of intent for 2021, but overall the financial picture of the synod is steady.

**Treasurer Pahl** also noted that the 2019 and 2020 audit has been formally completed and reviewed. 2020-2021 audit data is still being processed by the auditing firm. Recommendations from this completed audit note that there are minor adjustments to be made to clarify and communicate policies and procedures with regards to the roles and responsibilities for the synod's accounting practices and further documentation of internal controls already in practice.

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 21.09.08. Approval of Financial Reports**

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

## **VI. 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 appeals continues to grow slowly closer toward the \$2.3 million goal. As of 16 September, \$287,888 has been pledged or received.

Recruiting Major Gifts are an active focus of the campaign in August and September. Five events providing information and seeking gifts are being held throughout the synod. **The Rev. Jim Bickel** and **Tim Knutson** are co-chairs for Major Gifts

The Retired Rostered Ministers informational events have shifted from in-person gatherings to Zoom. **The Rev. Larry Westfield** and **The Rev. James Stein** are reaching out to all retired ministers with encouragement to be involved in supporting the campaign.

75% of the "First Round" congregations attended a training session for pastors and key leaders on 19 July. November leadership training will be provided by **The Rev. Mike Ward** of GSB. **The Rev. Jim Holmberg** is the Chair for Congregational giving.

**Hartfield** sought clarification as to the official end-date of the campaign with the delays of COVID impacting the formal start date. The original intent of the campaign was to receive gifts for three years; this would put the ending of the current schedule in 2023-2024.

### **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. Review of Policy on the Use of Funds from the Sale of GMS Church Properties**

**Vice President Caldwell** noted the Dropbox now contains the synod's policy documents for the use and distribution of undesignated funds from the sale of church properties in the Greater Milwaukee Synod. There is broad latitude for the Synod Council in these documents to decide how to use these funds to "bless and grow God's church in bold ways." The Synod will soon be receiving a gift pending the completion of the property sale and closure at **Abiding Savior, Brown Deer**.

### **D. Presentation and Discussion of Process for Synod Engagement for 2022 Bishop Election**

**Vice President Caldwell** presented the initial stages of how we as a synod will begin the discernment process about our identity and how we might seek feedback ahead of the Bishop Election in May. She shared the outline proposed by the Executive Committee, in which conferences will meet, led by Synod Council members, to discuss our synod's identity. The goal of these sessions is to gather feedback, input, and receive questions similar to those asked of congregations beginning the Mission Exploration (MET) process.

**Hermanns** sought clarification as to the process of reporting back. **Schlake-Kruse** noted that the hope is to compile the data received into an executive summary which would be shared throughout the synod, preferably ahead of its January meeting.

**Stretz** added that the target audience would likely be comprised of both rostered ministers and lay individuals, and recommended inviting 2021 Synod Assembly Voting Members to participate. The Council also discussed how translation may be used and needed in conference meetings.

## **VII. New Business**

### **A. Overview of Role and Responsibilities of Synod Council**

**Secretary Schlake-Kruse** presented a brief overview of the role and responsibilities of Synod Council members and the goals and expectations for leadership. Special attention was given to the Anti-Racism Training expectation for Synod Council members.

### **B. Addressing 2021 Synod Assembly Resolutions**

#### **1. Resolution 1: On Authentic Diversity**

The Council received recommended names for leaders to serve on the Authentic Diversity Task Force, a three-year appointment. **The Rev. Beebe** noted the concentration of members coming from the Northern Conferences of the Synod, and sought representation from the South and/or South Central Conferences going forward.

## **Council Action**

### **SC 21.09.09. Appointment of Authentic Diversity Task Force**

The Council voted to appoint the following individuals to form the Authentic Diversity Task Force, addressing 2021 Resolution 1: **DawnMark Bacon-Johnson** (they/them), **Grace, Thiensville**; **Chuck Ellingson** (he/him), **Cross, Milwaukee**; **The Rev. Char Guiliani** (they/them), **Incarnation, Milwaukee**; **Jerry Key** (he/him), **Reformation, Milwaukee**; **Haley Kordosky** (she/her), **Trinity, West Bend**; **Youa Reinicker** (she/her), **St. Matthew's, Wauwatosa**; **The Rev. David Schoob** (he/him), **Trinity, West Bend**; **Nanette Smith** (she/her), **Holy Cross, Menomonee Falls**; and **The Rev. Mark Thompson** (he/him), **Faith, Cedarburg**.

## **2. Resolution 2: On Gendered Language in Synod Organizational Structure**

**Secretary Schlake-Kruse** noted the Gendered Language Task Force had its organizational meeting and appointed **Nicholas Schoob (Trinity, West Bend)** and **The Rev. Perrie Dralle (Gethsemane, Brookfield)** as co-conveners.

## **C. Acknowledgement of Bequest Received**

The Council received notice of an undesignated bequest from the estate of Mr. Mark Olson of \$50,000. The Synod Council will designate its use at a future meeting. The Council discussed received recommendation from the Executive Committee before acting on this business at the November Council meeting.

## **D. Approval of 2022 Compensation Guidelines**

**The Rev. Arnold** presented the 2022 Compensation guidelines for Synod Council approval. **Bishop Erickson** noted that Regional Portico Benefit Services Representative **Jennifer Prinz** reviewed the guidelines and provided updates reflected in the guidelines to accurately reflect the benefits and products provided.

It was noted that the proposed guidelines recommend a 5% cost-of-living adjustment increase based on forecasts from numerous sources as to the federal government recommendations. This is an unusually high level because of the inflation levels and post-COVID economic reality. The guidelines also include salary increases per each year of experience. A letter from **Bishop Erickson** will go to Synod congregational leaders along with the guidelines, explaining these realities.

**The Rev. Arnold** noted feedback was sought from Rostered Ministers, who noted that in times of financial uncertainty, many congregations choose to increase salary at lesser levels. She noted that many use guidelines when a pastor or deacon begin their call, but then compensation slips over time. There is no consensus in how congregations used these guidelines.

**Gee** sought clarification as to whether or not compensation guidelines exist for non-ordained lay leaders. They do not.

A motion to accept the 2022 compensations guidelines was made and seconded.

In discussion, **The Rev. Kevin Beebe** expressed his desire to clarify the definition of weekly time off in the guidelines. He stated he prefers the word sabbath be included and replace “time off” to highlight the support of wholeness and actual rest for many overworked pastors and deacons.

A motion to replace the motion was made and seconded, replacing references to weekly time off with “sabbath time off.”

The Council then discussed the meaning of sabbath and how best to include it in the document.

A motion was made to suspend discussion and action to a special meeting to be held before 30 September 2021, whereby **The Rev. Beebe** could work with Synod Staff to draft a replacement and justification for such changes ahead of that meeting.

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 21.09.10. Suspension of Action**

The Council voted to suspend action on the approval of 2022 Compensation Guidelines to a special meeting to be held no later than 30 September 2021.

### **E. Approve Benefit Plan Levels for Synod Staff**

**Bishop Erickson** presented the 2022 Benefit Level recommendations for the Synod Staff. The Synod Council is required to offer benefit plan levels with Portico Benefit Services for Synod Staff. The ELCA now recommends either the Gold+ medical plan or the SilverA plan. These cost the employer similar amounts. The Gold+ plan has a lower deductible and offers an optional Flexible Spending Account, while the Silver plan has a higher deductible but offers a Health Savings Account, which carries over year to year. In the SilverA plan, each employer makes a contribution to the HSA on behalf of the plan member, thus costing the employer the same as the Gold+ plan.

**Bishop Erickson** shared his preference to offer the Synod staff the option to choose either of those plans, depending on their benefit context. He noted that Portico requires that employers choose one plan for all members, and individuals can opt to buy up (Silver to Gold+ or Platinum+), but they can't "buy down" (Gold+ to SilverA). Thus, the action would offer the Silver A plan while also paying any premium difference for staff choosing Gold+ plans.

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 21.09.11. Approval of 2022 Benefit Plan for Synod Staff**

The Council voted to provide health care benefits for eligible staff with Portico Benefit Services at either the Silver A or Gold + level, per each employee's discretion, while covering any differences in premiums for staff choosing Gold+ benefits.

## F. Ratify Members of the Outreach for Hope Board

### Council Action

#### SC 21.09.12. Ratification of Outreach for Hope Board Members

The Council voted to ratify the election of the following Outreach for Hope Board Members: **Chris Beloin, Tim Muth, and Vickie Stretz** (as Synod Council representative).

## G. Appoint Synod Council Member(s) to Mt. Meru Coffee Project Board

### Council Action

#### SC 21.09.13. Appointment of Mt. Meru Coffee Board Member

The Council voted to appoint **The Rev. Kevin Beebe (Spirit Alive, Kenosha)** as the Synod Council representative on the board of the Mt. Meru Coffee Project.

## H. Elect Executive Committee Members

The Synod Council held a Zoom Poll to elect three lay members to serve one-year terms on the Executive Committee.

### Council Action

#### SC 21.09.14. Election of Executive Committee Members

The Council elected **Robert Gee, Amber Davis, and Jacob Guerrero** to serve one-year terms as members of the Executive Committee, effective immediately until 31 August 2022.

## VIII. Reports

- A. **Evangelical Mission** – A written report was submitted. **The Rev. Short** lifted up the resources on [elca.org/evangelism](http://elca.org/evangelism), which he has been working on, and asked for feedback on how the church might best frame resources for evangelism. He also noted the beginning of new regular online programming featuring synod leaders called, “I’m Curious About” discussions.
- B. **Congregations in Mission** – No report was submitted. **The Rev. Nielsen** is completing her sabbatical.
- C. **Missional Leadership** – No written report was submitted. **The Rev. Arnold** noted the work continuing with adjusting to COVID-impacts on fall events. She has also been providing coverage for the congregations in transition who normally work with **The Rev. Nielsen** during her sabbatical.
- D. **Lutheran Campus Ministry** – Written report submitted from UWM Campus Ministry.
- E. **Reconciling in Christ** – Written report submitted.
- F. **Anti-Racism Team** – Written report submitted. **Caldwell** noted the training available for synod leaders on November 5, 6, and 12.



- G. Women of the ELCA-** Written report submitted. **Seidemann** noted low registrations for the October convention. She provided context on the future status of the board and likely discussions of long-term organizational sustainability.
- H. Outreach for Hope** – Written report submitted.
- I. ELCA Church Council** – **Wolfe** noted the challenges of doing the work of the ELCA Church Council via online meetings. She asked for prayers after the unexpected death of ELCA Vice President **Bill Horne**.
- J. Opioid and Substance Use (OSUD) Task Force-** No report submitted.

## **IX. Adjournment**

### **Council Action**

#### **SC 21.09.15. Adjournment**

The council, reaching the end of its agenda of business, adjourned with prayer at 8:48 p.m.

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**Next Meeting: Thursday, November 18th**  
**Meeting Held Via Zoom**  
**Meeting at 6:15 p.m.**

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

Thursday, January 20<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, March 17<sup>th</sup>

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

Signed,

The Rev. Matthew Schlake-Kruse, Synod Secretary