

Greater Milwaukee Synod, ELCA  
Summary of the Synod Council Meeting  
**November 19, 2015**

Christ the King Lutheran Church  
1600 Genesee Street, Delafield

*Ignited by God's love, Burning for Justice, We embrace the world*

**Attendance**

Name	Cluster/Position	Term Ends 8/31	Present	Absent	Anti-Racism
Ms. Sue Schmidt-Decker	Kenosha/West Racine	2017		X	10/2015
Vacant	Lake Country	2019			
Ms. Ar Lee	Milwaukee 1	2017		X	10/2014
The Rev. Lisa Bates-Froiland	Milwaukee 2	2017	X		1/2011
Ms. Claire Zautke	Milwaukee 3	2019		X	Pending
The Rev. Bill Knapp	Milwaukee 4	2019		X	Pending
Mr. Tom Gauthier	Northern Lakeshore	2017	X		9/2013
The Rev. David Schoob	Northwest	2017	X		9/2013
Ms. Lynn Hooper	Racine	2017	X		Pending
The Rev. Angela Khabebe	Waukesha	2019	X		10/2015
The Rev. Lindsay Jordan	At Large	2019	X		Pending
Mr. Steven Hruska	At Large	2019		X	Pending
Vacant	At Large	2019			
Mr. Scott Manske	Vice President	2017 (1)	X		10/2015
Mr. Matthew Brockmeier	Secretary	2019 (2)	X		1/2012
Mr. Lee Johnston	Treasurer	2017 (2)	X		Pending
The Rev. Jeff Barrow	Bishop	2016 (1)	X		1/2008
Ms. Sarah Muller	Youth Representative	2017	X		Pending
Mr. Jonathan Barker	Young Adult Rep.	2017	X		9/2013

Also present were Rev. Sandy Chrostowski, Director of Evangelical Mission; Ms. Cindy Dobberke, Member of Funds Policy Task Force; Ms. MaryBeth Hoffman, Chair, GMS Reconciling in Christ Ministry Team; Mr. Jerry Key, Anti-Racism Team Representative; Rev. Kristin Nielsen, GMS Director of Rostered Leadership; Rev. Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld, Interim Senior Pastor at Cross Lutheran Church, Burlington and Anti-Racism Team Representative; and Ms. Donna Yourell, President, Synod Women's Organization.

**Vice President's Remarks**

Mr. Manske provided a status report on the Bishop Election Committee, which has formed and had its first meeting, Ms. Esther Rusch is the chair. All members attended the initial meeting, and there is enthusiasm for the project. Some questions on the process have been raised by the Assembly Planning Team, headed by Mary Romskog, and a range of questions were addressed in a conference call with ELCA Secretary Rev. Wm Chris Boerger. Among the major questions were technical issues regarding voting machines, and other process-related issues. Ms. MaryBeth Hoffman added that sub-committees have been formed for some tasks, with work having begun. She also noted the dedication of the committee.

**Bishop's Report**

**Council Action**

**Approval of One Leave from Call Status**

## Greater Milwaukee Synod Council November 19, 2015 Meeting Summary

The Council voted to approve On Leave from Call Status for Rev. Linda C. Hanus, effective December 16, 2015; and a change from On Leave from Call Status to Family Leave Status for Rev. Amy R. Becker Perez.

### **Council Action**

#### **Approval of Retired Status**

The Council voted to approve retired status for Rev. David J. Keller, effective December 1, 2015.

Following a round of introductions, with comments on what people are thankful for, the bishop spoke about his priorities for his final year in office. He said that he is feeling the transition, with “a bit of a lame duck” feeling. At the same time, he took to heart the remark that he is “now free to move about the cabin.” The net result is that he is “very much at peace, but a little bit scared. I don’t know what life will be like. I see so many pastors in retirement who have a problem with ‘who am I?’” He went on to say that, not only is it a time of transition for him, but for all the staff.

There is “plenty to do and to accomplish. Important to try to leave the synod in as good shape as we can for the next administration. You want a new synod staff to have resources, but also the chance to make a mistake or two,” he said, adding that he wants to “make the way as smooth as we can.”

The bishop said that the financial health of the synod is important, and that he wants to try to balance the budget or possibly build a modest surplus. A goal is to keep synod benevolence at \$2 million or higher, in an effort to reverse the trend of financial contraction for the synod.

Regarding challenges, he pointed to current areas of higher-than-normal expenses; support for Rev. Gabriel Marcano and legal fees. Regarding legal fees, he said that there has been more need for legal advice, especially as some congregations consider the end of their ministries.

Returning to the aim of attaining at least \$2 million in benevolence, Bishop Barrow asked the Council for their thoughts on sending out a year-end appeal. He framed this in part as reminding people of what was discussed at the Synod Assembly. He asked whether formal action was necessary and was told it was not, though the sense of the Council was strongly in favor in any event.

Part of the reason for pushing the goal is to have funds available for projects where other funding is sought, where funders may want a financial commitment from the synod as assurance of the synod’s commitment to the project. In response to a question from Rev. Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld about a focus for the appeal, the bishop said that “leadership is the thing that is really important to people right now.” He mentioned again one of the fundamental themes of the synod’s work under his leadership, the concept of “healthy leaders and healthy congregations.”

Rev. Angela Khabeb added that people should be reminded that “offerings are part of worship.” Other suggestions included the use of social media to spread the appeal.

Final notes in the bishop’s reports were about staffing (with a possible Cross+Generation Ministry hire after Christmas), a focus on shoring up ministries like Anti-Racism and Campus Ministry during the remainder of his tenure, and the possibility of a session with other bishops to discuss “what it’s like to be bishop” at the January 23<sup>rd</sup> Lead and Learn event, for those considering standing for election.

#### **Anti-Racism Training**

Members of the Anti-Racism Team to shared results of their recent training event and discussed financial support for future training sessions.

## Greater Milwaukee Synod Council November 19, 2015 Meeting Summary

The October event was unique, with presentations made in Spanish and English for various parts, with translation provided. Sixty-two individuals attended, which pushed the total cost to \$17,387.25, including \$4,500 for translation services. This was still very expensive, even though some costs were shared with Emmaus-Emaús Lutheran Church in Racine, the host congregation.

Two Council members, Mr. Manske and Rev. Khabeb, recounted their experiences and impressions from the training.

Brief discussion on an approach to budgeting a higher level of funding for ongoing training, with suggestion that the Anti-Racism Team meet with the synod's finance committee during their work on the 2017-2018 budget. The current budget is \$8,000, while average annual costs have grown to \$11,000-12,000. Some funds have come from other sources, though those are largely depleted.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Treasurer Mr. Lee Johnston told the Council that "we are where we need to be at this time of the year. October was pretty good." Reiterating the bishop's comments on unusual expenses, he reported that there was roughly a \$48,000 fiscal year-to-date deficit at the end of September, which was "in line with expectations." He encouraged the special appeal, saying that it "can help put us where we need to be." There is cautious optimism on the year-end results. He also urged the Anti-Racism Team to make a presentation to the finance committee.

### **Council Action**

#### **Approval of Financial Statements**

The Council voted to approve the synod's financial statements as of September 30, 2015 as presented.

### **Action Items – Old Business**

**2014 Resolution 3 Final Recommendation** – Mr. Manske gave an overview of the 2014 resolution on Intentional, Called Interim Ministry, which was not passed but resulted in a charge to the Council to review and report. Following creation of a task force, which met in early 2015, no recommendations were made by the task force. With the resignation of task force chair Rev. Jay McDivitt, the Council considered his comments regarding the prospect that between the tight budget and the selection of a new bishop it was unlikely any plan could be implemented. His recommendation was to allow the question to lapse.

### **Council Action**

#### **Recommendation to Synod Assembly**

The Council voted to recommend that the 2016 Synod Assembly adopt the report, based on Rev. McDivitt's letter, on Intentional, Called Interim Ministry in the Greater Milwaukee Synod.

**Funding Task Force** – Discussion on the funding task force began with a history of action on the question, but soon moved to substantive questions focused on whether the recommended grant process should be mandatory when funds are available and whether there should be more flexibility in the use of distributed funds. Among the concerns was the idea that effective existing ministries would be at a disadvantage, that a prohibition on use of funds for capital expenses was limiting, and that the length of the process could limit the flexibility to fund short-term opportunities. The idea of channeling such funds to the Synod Endowment Fund was discussed, either as the default process or as an option. The sense of the Council was to a large extent summed up in comments by Rev. Khabeb, who said "when we deal with the body of Christ it shouldn't be that hard. I want to see it as something that flows, is more fluid, we can support something new, but also something that is thriving."

# Greater Milwaukee Synod Council

## November 19, 2015 Meeting Summary

ing but struggling.” It was agreed, without formal action, that the policy document would be re-crafted to give the Council final say on procedures when funds are available, and to reduce restrictions on the use of funds. A revised document will be considered in January.

**Status of Disbursement of Funds from Good Shepherd Fund** – While most grant funds have been disbursed, only partial payments, nearly a year ago, were made for the Faith/Santa Fe project. There will be discussion on this by staff, and the Council may revisit in January.

### **Action Items – New Business**

**Consideration of Synod Office Staff 2016 Cost of Living Increase** – Mr. Manske presented the question of a cost of living increase for synod staff, which was not included in the approved budget for next year. Among the factors leading to not increasing staff salaries was the nine percent increase in health insurance premiums. Mr. Johnston added that a cost of living increase would increase the synod’s deficit, also noting that staffing may be in flux with the election of a new bishop. He will provide options for no increase or one or two percent increases for consideration in January.

### **Approval of 2016 Housing Allowance for Synod Clergy Staff**

#### **Council Action**

##### **Approval of Housing Allowances**

The Synod Council voted to approve synod clergy staff housing allowances for 2016 of \$35,000 for Bishop Jeff Barrow, \$34,000 for Rev. Jim Bickel, \$16,320 for Rev. Mary Martha Kannass, and \$17,500 for Rev. Kristin L Nielsen.

### **Change to Personnel Policy Regarding Holidays**

#### **Council Action**

##### **Approval of Amendment to Employee Handbook**

The Synod Council voted to amend the Paid Holidays section on page 18 of the Employee Handbook as follows:

A holiday falling on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday will normally be observed on the preceding Friday. A holiday falling on Sunday will normally be observed on the following Monday. The Bishop shall have discretion to schedule holiday observance for the workday before the holiday.

### **2016 Synod Assembly Rules**

Vice President Manske reported that, because of pending decisions by the Elections Committee, action on the Synod Assembly rules will be delayed until the January meeting.

### **Reports**

**Director of Evangelical Mission** – A written report was presented. Rev. Sandy Chrostowski provided additional information on the Congregational Vitality & Sustainability Quick Check, a new tool from the ELCA for review of congregational status, which will be part of this year’s congregational report. A longer form Congregational Check-up form will also be available, with feedback available from the ELCA for a fee. She invited Council members to participate on a Council panel at the January 23<sup>rd</sup> Lead and Learn event.

**Director of Discipleship** – No report submitted.

**Director of Rostered Leadership** – A written report was presented at the meeting, with Rev. Kristin Nielsen providing information on transition updates. She said that there are more part-time interims, with many congregations looking at missional options. “Our interims are going to

## Greater Milwaukee Synod Council November 19, 2015 Meeting Summary

be needing to help guide some of those conversations more. Just walking with them in that reality.” There has been, she said, some discussion on shifting from full to part-time calls with the same pastor in place at some congregations, which would mean a change of call. She is working more with this. Discussion with the Cluster Deans has moved this questions to “How do we use our leaders well? How do we communicate about filling needs, not just the synod filling the need? What are some of the gifts that are already in our congregations? What do we keep in mind in facilitating a conversation? How to better use leaders that are already in our midst in the interim process and the discernment process?” Rev. Nielsen said that we have more tools in our midst, and we’re going to need them. Mr. Manske expressed appreciation for this report, with the suggestion that she reach out to Council members to get more feedback on leadership questions. Rev. Khabeb asked “How do we keep wonderful pastors in our synod? What is in place, what is the process to do this?” She said she doesn’t want to see good pastors floundering.

**Cross+Generational Ministry** – No report submitted.

**Lutheran Campus Ministry** – No report submitted.

**Reconciling in Christ** – No written report submitted. Ms. MaryBeth Hoffman said that more people are contacting her about what Reconciling in Christ is, and with questions from pastors who want to deal with the question about how to address situations where influential members of congregations don’t want the congregation to adopt Reconciling in Christ. She invited inquiries from congregations interested in learning more.

**Anti-Racism Team** – A written report was presented, augmented by the earlier discussion.

**Women of the ELCA** – No written report was submitted. Ms. Donna Yourell told the Council that she was glad to be back. She was happy, she said, that she “finally got someone younger than me on the board this year.” She invited members to visit <https://www.facebook.com/greatermkeswo/?fref=ts> on Facebook. A key focus for SWO will be human trafficking. Next year’s SWO convention will be at Trinity Lutheran Church in West Bend.

**Outreach for Hope** – A written report was presented.

### Old Business

ELCA Capital Campaign – The 2015 focus of the ELCA’s Capital Campaign was on congregations. The Council had decided that it would follow the main themes, with the theme for 2016 being world hunger, which Mr. Manske reported that the synod has tended to support well. “The malaria campaign is now complete, which is great news.” He did say that the synod was a little bit behind its malaria campaign goal. Brief discussion on announcing the hunger focus to congregations, with the bishop saying that there has been some work by a committee on this effort.

Mr. Jerry Key announced that the Anti-Racism Team can visit congregations with a presentation on justice statement from the ELCA.

### Next Meeting

**Thursday, January 21, 2016 – 5:30 Dinner; 6:15 Meeting**

Lord of Life Lutheran Church, 5601 Washington Ave, Kenosha

### Future Meetings

- Thursday, March 17, 2016 – Ascension Lutheran Church, 1415 Dopp St, Waukesha
- Thursday, May 19, 2016 – St. Paul’s Lutheran, 705 Grand Ave, Random Lake
- Thursday, July 21, 2016 – Bishop Barrow’s Home, Racine

## Greater Milwaukee Synod Council November 19, 2015 Meeting Summary

- Thursday, September 15, 2016 – Fox Point Evangelical Lutheran Church, 7510 N Santa Monica Blvd, Fox Point

Unless otherwise noted, all meetings are preceded by a dinner at 5:30 pm, with the meeting beginning at 6:15 pm.

Submitted,

Mr. Matthew Brockmeier  
Synod Secretary