

Greater Milwaukee Synod, ELCA

Minutes of the Synod Council Meeting

16 November 2023

Meeting held at Church of the Resurrection, Pewaukee

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 for Synod Council Members

Name	Conference/Position	Term Ends 8/31	Present	Absent	Anti-Racism
OPEN	At Large Lay				
Beebe, Rev. Kevin	At Large Clergy	2025	x		11/2020
Beutin, Todd	South Central	2027	x		6/2023
Caldwell, Dr. Joyce	Vice President	2025 (2)	x		10/2023
Dotson, Dr. Rose	At Large Lay	2025	x		11/2021
Erickson, Rev. Paul	Bishop	2028 (2)	x		6/2023
Grosser, Linda	North	2025	x		10/2023
Guerrero, José Andrés	At Large	2027 (2)	x		Pending
Guerrero, Jacob	Young Adult Rep.	2025	x		Pending
Gyson, Rev. Joshua	At Large Clergy	2027	x		Pending
Hartfield, Steven	At Large Lay	2025		x	11/2021
James, Rev. Matthew	South	2025	x		11/2021
Jordan, Rev. Kimberly	West	2027	x		Pending
Key, Jerry	Central	2025		x	Pending
Pahl, Rev. Karen	Treasurer	2025		x	11/2021
Schober, Missy	West Central	2027	x		6/2023
Short, Lucas	Youth Representative	2024		x	Pending
Stobie, Rev. Sarah Crance	Secretary	2027	x		06/2023

Guests and Synod Staff

Others present included: **Tracy Gingrass, Be Still; Mary Romskog, Synod Staff; and the Rev. Aida Muniz, Anti-Racism Team Co-Chair.**

**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 6:15 at p.m.

Devotions

Tracy Gingrass shared a devotion for our meeting on the topic of gratitude and its purpose, focusing on the example which the Apostle Paul gave to the Philippians.

I. Consent Agenda

Council Action

SC 23.11.79 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 minutes from the Synod Council meetings of 11 September 2023; approval of on leave from call status for **the Rev. Tim McIntosh**, standard leave effective 30 June 2023, and approval of retired status for **the Rev. Tom Smith**, effective 01 November 23.

II. Ministry Highlight: Be Still

Ms. Tracy Gingrass presented on the status of the ministry site, **Be Still**, which is a synod-authorized worshipping community. **Be Still** gathers at Mama D's coffee shop in Wales. They have two gatherings at **Be Still**: Sunday Stillness meets at 9 am, which is a contemplative and intimate time and Open Table meets on Thursday mornings in the main area of the coffee shop. All are welcome to participate. **Gingrass** shared that more of the regulars of the coffee shop are now participating within the gathering times. The vision is to have their own coffee shop to hold **Be Still** gatherings in the future. **Gingrass** says that in this site, regulars (this is the term used to define those who participate) are able to find a community that is not a church but is a worshipping community. **Gingrass** shared that **Be Still** helps those who want to worship, but not attend a formal church setting.

III. Synod Calls

Council Action

SC 23.11.80 Approval of Synod Call

The Council voted to approve a Synod Call for **the Rev. Heidi Borkenhagen**, called to interim ministry at **First United Lutheran/Sheboygan**, effective 9 October 2023.

Council Action

SC 23.11.81 Approval of Synod Call

The Council voted to approve a Synod Call for **the Rev. Grant Quever**, called to interim ministry at **Peace Lutheran/Burlington**, effective 1 November 2023.

Council Action

SC 23.11.82 Approval of Synod Call

The Council voted to approve a Synod Call for **the Rev. Lynn Erickson**, called to interim ministry at **Mount Carmel Lutheran/Milwaukee**, effective 29 November 2023.

IV. Vice President's Report

Vice President Joyce Caldwell waived her right to present a report because she wanted to devote more time to the agenda. **Caldwell** asked the Council to consider ideas to create more visibility of the Synod Council membership. **Caldwell** asked the Council to be prepared to discuss this issue at our January Synod Council Meeting. There is a need for more visibility and awareness within our synod based on feedback received through the Authentic Diversity Audit.

V. Bishop's Report

Bishop Paul Erickson submitted a written report prior to the meeting for review. **Erickson** shared highlights concerning the transition to the new bookkeeping service. **Erickson** also shared a request for prayers for our **Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton**, who has started a 4-6 month paid leave of absence and for **the Rev. Michael Burk who was appointed to be our Presiding Bishop Pro Tempore**. The bishops will be having a Zoom call with **Burk** on November 30. **Erickson** shared that we may need to pursue action concerning **Wellington Park Lutheran/Milwaukee** as well as reviewing a few other congregations that are vulnerable after the new year.

VI. Treasurer's Report

Prior to the meeting, due to her planned absence, **Treasurer Karen Pahl** presented the financial reports through Dropbox. **Pahl** shared a summary as well through Dropbox. **Bishop Paul Erickson** shared that the \$75,000 projected budget deficit number is not accurate, and it will be reviewed and updated after her return from her retreat.

Council Action

SC 23.11.83 Reception of Financial Reports

The Council voted to receive the financial reports through 30 September 2023 as presented.

VII. Old Business

A. Discussion of Synod Assembly Structure and Format for 2025

Vice President Caldwell shared that there are some questions to consider prior to planning the 2025 Synod Assembly. Changes are not able to be made for 2024, due to the contract with the Italian Conference Center. **Mary Romskog** shared how tight the timeframe is for the 2025 schedule for the conference. Small groups were created for the discussion for 15 minutes. Following the time, **Caldwell** asked for brief summaries from each group.

- One group shared that in previous years, synod assemblies had different expectations for attendance, the schedule of days would overlap on Sundays, there would be vendors on site, and how sad it is that there is less collegiality now. Banquet is nice, but not necessary if money is an issue. Table talks were not as fruitful this past year. It was noticed that people left early.
- One group appreciated the worship services, the mix of speakers, the experience of other voices as guests, getting to know other people and congregations. Do all voices, if they agree, need to be heard? Once every three years it could just be a day long or go to a longer biennial event. The food didn't seem worth the costs this year. Choose something easier.
- One group shared that worship is a high, having a keynote speaker is good, having small groups time is needed. They wondered if there was a lack of preparation by attendees and that created a longer timeframe, but they understand that business is necessary. What is essential to our gathering is telling the story of what is happening in our churches. Driving there twice—its hard. Possible to accomplish business in one day, and the other day can meet and do other things, focus on different goals. Maybe go to every other year, use electronic means more. Gather electronically as conferences on the off year, and then be able to tell micro stories at that time. Is banquet necessary?

Romskog shared that bookings begin in December for 2025. She expressed concern on our timeline. **Bishop Paul Erickson** asked if we do the third weekend in May—would this still work? Most agreed the time was good. **José Andrés Guerrero** asked about moving all to online. **Erickson** shared that gathering in person and for worship is

valuable. **Romskog** shared that electronic voting for bishop elections helps the process go more smoothly. **Erickson** shared there are ways to break up bishop elections as well. **The Rev. Kimberly Jordan** shared that cards are not confidential and is that been a concern? **Erickson** said that paper ballots can be called for, or the chair can call for it, at any time. **Erickson** shared that different options would be secured, and we would make decisions in January regarding time and location.

B. Update on Equipping the Saints Mission Appeal

Before the update by **Vice President Caldwell**, **Bishop Paul Erickson** shared an email from the Lilly Foundation that our grant was denied.

Caldwell shared that we have received almost 1 million dollars in hand from pledges for the campaign. **St. John's Lutheran/Jackson** has completed its goal for the campaign and raised more than their \$25, 000 goal. **Mt. Olive Lutheran/Mukwonago** completed their campaign in October as well. **Cross Lutheran/Milwaukee** is finishing its campaign at the end of December, and **Gethsemane Lutheran/Brookfield** will also complete its campaign in December. A special mailing was sent to all congregations with ideas of how to support the ETS campaign. **The Village Church/Milwaukee** connected with **Caldwell** about doing an appeal. **The Rev. Joshua Gyson** shared ways that his congregation in Slinger is also considered an appeal. **Caldwell** shared that special gifts, tithes, endowment funds are all good ways to support the appeal.

Erickson reminded the Council that in January, we will discuss disbursements. **Erickson** also shared that one of the resources made available through ETS is for coaching and coaches to work with congregations regarding innovative ministry and listening to the community.

C. Update on the Authentic Diversity Audit Work with Gold Enterprises

Vice President Caldwell shared that Gold was here in October and met with the Strategic Plan Task Force. **Caldwell** shared that 6 themes were listed in a document and shared with the Strategic Plan Task Force at that time. They will review it, tweak it, and the Council will discuss it in January.

The Rev. Aida Muniz shared that in the past two days there has been discussion on the workshops for TIM which will address breaking barriers for implementing the congregation assessment tool. **Muniz** encouraged attendance at TIM and the workshop. **Caldwell** shared the workshops will share the tool for the first time, and they will be held once in the morning and once in the afternoon so that all may attend.

D. Recommendation to Approve Revised Employee Handbook

Vice President Joyce Caldwell shared that revised handbook applies to the synod staff only. The major changes are parental leave policy, an updated appeals process, and staff vacation time is now 4 weeks for all. Some of the changes were suggested by Gold Enterprises after their document review as part of the synod audit.

Council Action

SC 23.11.84 Approval of Revised Employee Handbook

The Council voted to approve the recommendation by the Executive Council to approve the Revised Employee Handbook.

E. Review of Synod Assembly Resolutions

Vice President Caldwell led the Council through an overview of actions required by resolutions adopted at the 2023 Synod Assembly.

1. Resolutions 3 & 4: Synod Compensation Guidelines & Continuing Education Guidelines

Caldwell shared that there is a need for one task force to work on both resolutions. A few persons have volunteered, and there is a need for more lay members. **Caldwell** shared that the Council would appoint the persons to the task force in January.

2 Resolution 5: Children and Vulnerable Youth

Caldwell shared that a youth listening task force is needed to address the resolution, and only one member has agreed to serve on this task force. **Caldwell** will reach out to South Central conference members and ask for assistance in launching this task force. **Caldwell** shared that the Council would appoint the persons to the task force in January.

VIII. New Business

A. Recommendation to Accept Property from Wellington Park Lutheran/Milwaukee

No action was taken. **Bishop Paul Erickson** shared updated details on the recommendation of the synod lawyer in his report. **The Wellington Park Administrative Team** will discuss the recommendation of the synod lawyer.

Vice President Joyce Caldwell and **Dr. Rose Dotson** shared the names of the **Wellington Park Administrative Committee** which were appointed previously by the **Council**. They are **Edward Heiser, Dr. Rose Dotson, the Rev. Kelly Taylor-Schaus, the Matthew Brockmeier, and the Rev. Casey Sugden.**

B. Bishop Paul Erickson received a request to join the national organization called **Churches for Middle East Peace** as an organizational partner. **Erickson** shared that sponsorship from all mainline denominations including the ELCA is listed on the organization's website. **Erickson** shared some history concerning the organization, and the work that they have done since 1984.

Council Action

SC 23.11.85 Approval to be a Partner Organization with Churches for Middle East Peace

The Council voted to become a partner organization with **Churches for Middle East Peace**.

C. Approve Designation of 2024 Staff Housing Allowances for Bishop Paul Erickson – \$40,000; The Rev. Kristin Nielsen - \$30,000; The Rev. Afi Dobbins-Mays - \$15,000; and the Rev. David Rebey – \$21,309.25

Council Action

SC 23.11.86 Approval of 2024 Staff Housing Allowances

The Council voted to approve the housing allowances for **Bishop Paul Erickson – \$40,000; The Rev. Kristin Nielsen - \$30,000; The Rev. Afi Dobbins-Mays - \$15,000; and the Rev. David Rebey – \$21,309.25.**

D. Approve the Appointment of Synod Finance/Audit Committee. They are listed: Treasurer Karen Pahl, Bob Reinders, Ka Bao Yang, and Todd Beutin.

Council Action

SC 23.11.87 Approval of Appointment to the Synod Finance/Audit Committee

The Council voted to approve the appointment of **Treasurer Karen Pahl, Bob Reinders, Ka Bao Yang, and Todd Beutin** to the Synod Finance/Audit Committee.

E. Ratify Mt Meru Coffee Project, Inc.’s Directors and Officers as listed: Rick Frowein, Marty Manley, Patti Nelson, Tori Mallak, Walt Chossek, Bishop Paul Erickson, the Rev. Kevin Beebe, and Ava Lemke.

Council Action

SC 23.11.88 Ratification of the Mt. Meru Coffee Project, Inc.'s Directors and Officers

The Council voted to ratify the Mt. Meru Coffee Project the slate of directors and officers as listed: **Rick Frowein, Marty Manley, Patti Nelson, Tori Mallak, Walt Chossek, Bishop Paul Erickson, the Rev. Kevin Beebe, and Ava Lemke.**

F. Open Synod Council Position: At-Large Female

Vice President Joyce Caldwell reminded the Council of this vacancy and requested that all members consider possible persons to fill the position. Gender non-binary is also eligible to serve in this role.

G. Appointment of Nominating Committee (1 person from each conference)

Vice President Joyce Caldwell shared there is a need for nominations for the 2024 Synod Assembly elections for 2025 Churchwide Assembly voting members. **Caldwell** shared that the synod should form a more cohesive Nominating Committee per the synod's constitution (please refer to Chapter 9). The deans have been asked to lift up one person to serve on this committee with **Secretary Sarah Stobie**. No action at this time.

H. Other Business?

No further business was shared.

IX. Reports

A. Assistant to the Bishop for Evangelical Mission – A written report was submitted.

B. Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations in Mission – A written report was submitted.

C. Assistant to the Bishop for Authentic Diversity and Leadership –A written report was submitted.

D. Lutheran Campus Ministry-A written report was submitted.

E. Reconciling in Christ –No report submitted.

F. Anti-Racism Team – No written report submitted. **The Rev. Aida Muniz** shared that they have been gathering to discuss *My Grandmother's Hands*, but once the Strategic Plan Task Force shares the new document, they will move forward with more action. **Muniz** shared that the grant denial will change a few plans.

G. Women of the ELCA- No report submitted.

H. Outreach for Hope – A written report submitted. **The Rev. Kimberly Jordan** shared that there is meeting coming up and that grant requests have been received.

Bishop Paul Erickson stated that the grants will be reviewed, voted on by the board

at their November meeting, and dispersed over the course of 2024. **Erickson** shared that this Fall's fundraiser was very successful.

- I. Latino Strategy Table**—No report submitted. **José Andrés Guerrero** shared that the churches will have Las Posadas this year. **Guerrero** also shared that there is fundraising for **Faith/Santa Fe Lutheran Church** because a burglary happened recently.
- J. Endowment Committee**- No report submitted.
- K. Healing Faith Network**- No report submitted.

X. Adjournment

Council Action

SC 23.11.89 Adjournment

The Council, reaching the end of its agenda of business, adjourned with the Lord's Prayer at 8:24 pm.

Next Meeting:

Thursday January 18, 2024

Location: ZOOM only.

Unless otherwise noted, all meetings begin with dinner at 5:30 p.m. and formal business at 6:15.

Submitted,

Rev. Sarah Crance Stobie

The Rev. Sarah Crance Stobie, Synod Secretary