



Southeastern Minnesota Synod Council
Meeting Minutes
February 15, 2025

The Southeastern Minnesota Synod Council met on February 15, 2025 via Zoom.

Members present:

Joellen Barak, Rev. Jessica Bakken Busch, Rev. Shelley Cunningham, Matthew Huggenvik, Rev. Sam Mailleue, Karen Myers, Sam Pollack, Deacon Amanda Sabelko, Mona Skare, Carolyn Solberg, Ed Taylor, Rev. Dr. Kristen Venne, Rev. John Weisenburger, Secretary Rev. Josh Enderson, Vice President Lisa Dierks, and Bishop Regina Hassanally.

Absent: Marshall Laidlaw, Jennifer Levison, Brian Scott, Dr. Joyce Thompsen, Treasurer Tammy Dahlvang,

Staff: Rev. Emily Carson.

WELCOME & DEVOTIONS

- Vice President Lisa Dierks welcomed the council to the meeting and Karen Myers began with devotions.

CALL TO ORDER & OVERVIEW OF AGENDA

- Vice President Dierks called the meeting to order at 9:08am.
- She then presented the agenda.
- Carol Solberg motioned to approve the agenda.

SC25.02.01 Motion to approve the agenda.

Motion approved.

CONSENT AGENDA

- November 9, 2025 Synod Council Meeting Minutes
- Reports from Staff, Committees, & Tables
- Congregational Constitutions
 - St. Olaf, Austin
 - Council Action: to thank St. Olaf Lutheran Church in Austin, for the work done on the constitution and bylaws; to express appreciation for the way

the congregation bylaws have been codified in the document as a model for other congregations in the synod; and to accept the constitution approved by the congregation on January 26th, 2025 as consistent with the 2022 Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the constitutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Southeastern Minnesota Synod.

- Trinity, West Concord
 - Council Action: to thank Trinity Lutheran Church in West Concord, for the work done on the constitution and bylaws; to express appreciation for the way the congregation bylaws have been codified in the document as a model for other congregations in the synod; and to accept the constitution approved by the congregation on January 26th, 2025, as consistent with the 2022 Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the constitutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Southeastern Minnesota Synod.

- Joellen Barak motioned to approve the consent agenda.

SC25.02.02 Motion to approve the consent agenda.

Motion approved.

VICE PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

- Vice President Dierks gave the following comments:
 - Vice President Dierks gave an update on the Nominating Committee and noted positions that

are open for election on the upcoming ballot, as well as open positions that can be appointed by synod council at any time.

- Vice President: names for this position are put forward by synod council, not from conference assemblies.
- She encouraged council members who are eligible and willing to stand for a second term to fill out the nominations form.
- Committee on Consultation: There are three open lay positions for appointment by Synod Council.
- Committee on Discipline: There are two elected positions open and one position open for appointment.
- Several positions open on Augsburg University Corporation Board.
- She then gave an update on the work of the Committee for the Election of a Bishop on behalf of Dr. Joyce Thompson. The committee had a meeting with Churchwide in November and also had a consultation with conference deans in January to prepare for Conference Assemblies.
- There was some discussion with the synod council on what to do with scheduled forums, as only Bishop Regina Hassanally's name has been put forward for reelection. It was decided to not move forward with these forums, but to find other ways to have listening sessions around the synod with staff and Bishop.

BISHOP'S COMMENTS

- Bishop Regina Hassanally then gave the following comments to the council:
 - Bishop Hassanally took a moment to discuss the recent executive orders naming out LSS, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, Global Refuge and how they affect their work. She noted these organization's responses and that they have put out good resources in

response to this. MN Council of Churches does a lot of refugee resettlement, and are seeing changes in their funding due to recent executive orders, translating into roughly 35 full time staff being laid off.

- LSS only gets about 10% from federal funding and is less impacted right now. She noted that they are concerned about talks of reductions in Medicaid, as LSS does much with cognitively disabled people, food insecurity, etc.
- She and her staff recently hosted Region 3 Bishops and staff. Engaging in spiritual practices was the theme. It was held in Alexandria.
- A candidacy retreat was held at Good Earth Village. Rev. Matt Larson prepared and led this retreat.
- There have been several ordinations and installations since the last council meeting, and one more ordination is happening soon.
- A Chrism Mass was held during Advent for rostered leaders and other church staff and leaders.
- Bishop Hassanally participated in the Bishops' Academy, which was held in Puerto Rico.
- She recently spent 5 days in Mt. Holyoake College for continuing education.
- The Council as Leaders event will be held on March 8.
- Synod Assembly plans are underway, and staff is working hard on this.
- Churchwide Assembly is coming up in July.
- She will soon attend Council of Bishops.
- Advocacy week for LSS is soon.

FINANCIAL REPORTS

- Treasurer Tammy Dahlvang was unable to be at the meeting, so Director of Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop Rev. Emily Carson joined the council and updated them on the synod's finances. The following items were highlighted from the financial reports:
 - December was a good month for mission support.

- As the fiscal year for the synod ends on January 31, December is the most current report available, as end-of-the-year reports are underway from the accountant.
- Rev. Sam Mailleue motioned to receive the financial report as of December 31, 2024 and file for audit.

SC25.02.03 Motion to receive the financial reports.

Motion approved.

SPENDING PLAN TASK FORCE

- A Spending Plan Task Force was presented, which will review actual income and expenses in 2024 as compared to the approved 2025 budget. They will also review recommendations from staff related to their ministry areas. All of this will help to craft the 2026 Spending Plan which will go before the 2025 Synod Assembly.
- 2-3 members of council were asked to join Bishop Hassanally, Rev. Emily Carson, and Treasurer Dahlvang to be on this Task Force.
- Rev. Jessica Bakken Busch, Rev. Dr. Kristen Venne, and Sam Pollack volunteered to be on this task force.

SC25.02.04 Motion to appoint Rev. Jessica Bakken Busch, Rev. Dr. Kristen Venne, and Sam Pollack to the Spending Plan Task Force.

Motion approved.

UPDATE FROM FINANCE POLICY TASK FORCE

- Rev. Carson presented an update on the work of the Finance Policy Task Force.
- Several policy updates were presented for approval by the council, which had been suggested by the auditors and were worked on in consultation with the accountant.
- The policies were all presented prior to the meeting for review by the council. The following policies were put forward for approval:
 - Credit Card Use
 - Cost Allocation
 - Formal Asset Capitalization
 - Whistleblower
 - Travel Expense Reimbursement

- One area for discussion remained within the “Travel Expense Reimbursement” Policy regarding the level of reimbursement for meals while traveling.

- After discussing, the following amendment was made to the “Travel Expense Reimbursement” Policy:

- “Meals: Reimbursement for meals will be up to the federally approved per diem rate for the state of Minnesota.”

- Karen Myers motioned to approve the Finance Policies: Credit Card Use, Cost Allocation, Formal Asset Capitalization, Whistleblower, and Travel Expense Reimbursement, with an amendment to the “Travel Expense Reimbursement” policy stating, “Reimbursement for meals will be up to the federally approved per diem rate.”

SC25.02.05 Motion to approve the Finance Policies: Credit Card Use, Cost Allocation, Formal Asset Capitalization, Whistleblower, and Travel Expense Reimbursement, with an amendment to the “Travel Expense Reimbursement” policy stating, “Reimbursement for meals will be up to the federally approved per diem rate for the state of Minnesota.”

Motion approved.

HOUSING INSECURITY TASK FORCE REPORT TO SYNOD ASSEMBLY

- Rev. Carson brought forward a question from the Housing Insecurity Task Force, wondering what reporting was requested from the Council.
- After discussion, the council requested a written report in the Pre-Assembly Report.
- The original resolution also requested a celebration after 3 years. The task force wonders what this looks like. The council felt that acknowledging the work of the task force from the Committee on Reference and Counsel would be appropriate.

SYNOD ASSEMBLY 2025

- Bishop Hassanally gave an update on the upcoming Synod Assembly, which will be held on May 30-31, 2025 in Mankato, MN.
- A reminder was given on the registration process for synod council members.
- She noted that there will be a new parliamentarian for this assembly.
- Michael Chan will be the keynote speaker.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

- Rev. John Weisenburger motioned to move into executive session to discuss changes to the roster.

SC25.02.06 Motion to enter executive session.

Motion approved.

- The council entered executive session at 10:41 am.
- The following action items were taken during executive session:
 - Call to Interim Ministry Through Synod Council (Approval)
 - Rev. Jessica Bakken Busch, Pastor at Faith, Dodge Center to Bridge Interim at United Redeemer, Zumbrota. Effective: 01/15/2025. Approved at Synod Council Meeting: 02/15/2025.
 - Rev. Cheryl Indehar, Interim at Grace, Albert Lea to Interim at Faith, Dodge Center. Effective: 01/26/2025. Approved at Synod Council Meeting: 02/15/2025.
 - Bishop Hassanally motioned to approve the Call to Interim Ministry Through Synod Council Roster Changes.

ES(SC25.02.07) Motion to approve the Call to Interim Ministry Through Synod Council Roster Changes.

Motion approved.

- Call to Specialized Ministry Through Synod Council (Approval)
- Rev. Mary Iverson, Pastor at Trinity, New Richland to Hospice Chaplain at Prairie Grace Hospice, Mankato. Effective: 03/15/2025. Approved at Synod Council Meeting: 02/15/2025.
- Bishop Hassanally motioned to approve the Call to Specialized Ministry Through Synod Council Roster Changes.

ES(SC25.02.08) Motion to approve the Call to Specialized Ministry Through Synod Council Roster Changes.

Motion approved.

- Retirement Status (Approval)
- Rev. David Reedstrom. Effective: 12/01/2024. Approved at Synod Council Meeting: 02/15/2025.
- Rev. Dr. Scott Olson. Effective: 03/01/2025. Approved at Synod Council Meeting: 02/15/2025.
- Bishop Hassanally motioned to approve the Retirement Status Roster Changes.

ES(SC25.02.09) Motion to approve the Retirement Status Roster Changes.

Motion approved.

- On Leave From Call (New-Approval)
- Rev. Jason Pollington, Start Date: 11/24/2024. Approved at Synod Council Meeting: 02/15/2025.
- Bishop Hassanally motioned to approve the On Leave from Call (New) Roster Changes.

ES(SC25.02.10) Motion to approve the On Leave From Call (New) Roster Changes.

Motion approved.

- On Leave From Call (Yearly Renewal-Approval)
- Rev. Peter Reuss, 2nd Request. Approved at Synod Council Meeting: 02/15/2025.
- Bishop Hassanally motioned to approve the On Leave from Call (Yearly Renewal) Roster Changes.

ES(SC25.02.11) Motion to approve the On Leave From Call (Yearly Renewal) Roster Changes.

Motion approved.

- On Leave From Call-Study (Renewal-Approval)
- Rev. Dean Smith, 2nd Request, Approved at Synod Council Meeting: 02/15/2025.
- Bishop Hassanally motioned to approve the On Leave from Call-Study (Renewal) Roster Changes.

**ES(SC25.02.12) Motion to approve the On
Leave From Call-Study
(Renewal) Roster Changes.**

Motion approved.

- Matt Huggenvik motioned to leave executive session.

**ES(SC25.02.13) Motion to leave executive
session.**

Motion approved.

- The council left executive session at 10:48am.
- Vice President Dierks declared the meeting adjourned at 10:49am.
- The next meeting of the Synod Council will be on April 26, 2025 via Zoom.

Submitted,
Rev. Josh Enderson
Synod Council Secretary

APPROVED 04/26/2025 JE