



**Southeastern Minnesota Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
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**Southeastern Minnesota Synod Council**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**September 7, 2024**

The Southeastern Minnesota Synod Council met on September 7, 2024, at St. John's Lutheran in Kasson, MN.

Members present: Joellen Barak, Rev. Jessica Bakken Busch, Rev. Shelley Cunningham, Matthew Huggenvik, Jennifer Levison, Rev. Sam Mailleue, Karen Myers, Deacon Amanda Sabelko, Brian Scott, Mona Skare, Ed Taylor, Dr. Joyce Thompson, Rev. Dr. Kristen Venne, Treasurer Tammy Dahlvang, Secretary Rev. Josh Enderson, Vice President Lisa Dierks, and Bishop Regina Hassanally.

Absent: Marshall Laidlaw, Rev. John Weisenburger, Carolyn Solberg, Sam Pollack.

Staff: Rev. Emily Carson.

Special Guests: Rev. Amanda Simons, Lutheran Social Services

**GENERATIVE WORK**

**WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS**

- Vice President Lisa Dierks welcomed the council and began with devotions.
- The council members then introduced themselves.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST & CONFIDENTIALITY FORMS**

- Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality forms were distributed and discussed. Council members were asked to read, sign, and return these forms.

**MAKING CONNECTIONS WITH CONCENTRIC CIRCLES**

- The council then participated in an icebreaker exercise to get to know one another.

**LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES (LSS)**

- Rev. Amanda Simons from Lutheran Social Services was invited to share about Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota.

- She shared the mission, vision, and origins of LSS.
- LSS is the social service arm of the ELCA.
- There are 1,200 ELCA congregational partners of LSS.
- Rev. Simons noted that LSS of Minnesota serves 1 in 63 Minnesotans and that they serve more people outside of the metro area.
- She discussed some of the services that LSS provides, and the ways that congregations and LSS work together to help our neighbors. Services fall into categories for older adults, people with disabilities, and children, youth, and family services.
- She noted that LSS is looking for people or a group to "adopt" a group home to do yardwork (fall and spring). Right now, the staff has to do this. This also allows for volunteers to get to know the residents and build healthy relationships.
- She encouraged council members to lift up the financial counseling program that LSS provides, the above mentioned "adopt a group home" request, and to ask congregations to consider holiday giving for group homes, as this is very meaningful to those who receive it.

**ROLE OF THE COUNCIL**

- Director of Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop Rev. Emily Carson was invited to discuss the role of the synod council and the Constitution of the synod.
- She noted the role of the constitution and constitutions in general and walked through a brief history of the ELCA.
- Bishop Regina Hassanally noted the work of the Committee on the Renewal of the Lutheran Church, which is reviewing our current governing documents and evaluating if they work for our current time.
- She then walked through S10.03. of the synod's constitution, which discuss the synod council's function. The council discussed these functions in detail.

**BREAK**

- At 11:40am, the council took a break for lunch.

## **BUSINESS MEETING AGENDA**

### **CALL TO ORDER & OVERVIEW OF AGENDA**

- Vice President Dierks called the meeting to order at 12:13pm.
- She then presented the agenda.
- Matt Huggenvik motioned to approve the agenda.

### **SC24.09.34 Motion to approve the agenda.**

#### **Motion approved.**

- She then asked for signed Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality forms to be returned.

### **CONSENT AGENDA**

- Minutes from April 2024 and July 2024 Synod Council meetings
- Minutes from staff, Committees, and Tables
- To approve appointment of Dave Holger to Committee on Discipline—Root River Lay Member
- To approve Synod Treasurer Tamara (Tammy) Dahlvang as an approved signer for Synod financial accounts at F&M bank and to remove Jeff Chestnut as an approved signer.
- Joleen Barak motioned to approve the Consent Agenda.

### **SC24.09.35 Motion to approve the Consent Agenda.**

#### **Motion approved.**

### **VICE PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS**

- Vice President Dierks then gave the following updates to the council:
- Minimum Compensation Guidelines Task Force Update & Tentative Timeline
  - She gave an update on the timeline for this Task Force and the changes that were made to this last year. The task force is currently working on this document and will have the document ready by September 20. A public review period will be open from September 20-September 30. In early October, a special synod council meeting will be held to approve these guidelines.
- Committee on the Election of a Bishop
  - An election of a Bishop will be occurring at the next synod assembly.

- She noted that 21 synods will be electing bishops this year.
- At this point, the Committee on the Election of the Bishop is waiting for the Conference of Bishops and Churchwide to meet and offer some guidance on the process. This meeting will happen in November.
- The council discussed the Landscape Survey, which was completed prior to the last Bishop election in 2018.
  - Vice President Dierks reached out to other Synod Vice Presidents to see if they did a similar survey process prior to a bishop election. She noted that there were two big responses from the group: Some did the Landscape Survey; others created their own google form with a few questions and sent these out for respondents to answer.
  - The council discussed if another survey should be done, and how in depth it should be. It was felt that some of the main themes pulled from the prior survey are still pertinent and could be of use to the upcoming work of the Committee.
- Treasurer Tammy Dahlvang made a motion to have the Committee on the Election of the Bishop review the 2018 Landscape Survey and return to the council if they feel any further survey work needs to be done.

### **SC24.09.36 Motion to have the Committee on the Election of the Bishop review the 2018 Landscape Survey and return to the council if they feel any further survey work needs to be done.**

#### **Motion approved.**

- Because of the upcoming bishops election, conference assemblies are all set for the same date. After discussion with the Conference Deans, a date of February 16,

2024, with a backup date of February 23, was recommended.

- Joellen Barak made a motion to set conference assembly dates for February 16, 2024 and February 23, 2024 as a backup date.

**SC24.09.37 Motion to set conference assembly dates for February 16, 2024 and February 23, 2024 as a backup date.**

**Motion approved.**

**BISHOP'S COMMENTS**

- Bishop Regina Hassanally gave the following comments:
  - Personnel and Administration Updates
    - Director of Communications Ashley Corbett will be taking a 4-week medical leave. Other staff members will be covering her tasks during this time.
    - A signed independent contract was completed with DEM Rev. Emily Carson to help separate some of her financial duties from her DEM work.
    - A job description is in process for a youth event coordinator for the synod. This job will be posted soon.
    - A synod vehicle driven by Rev. Matt Larson was in an accident and is currently being totaled. Bishop Hassanally noted that they don't have the intention of buying another vehicle at this point.
    - Task Forces continue to work on updating the Personnel and Sexual Misconduct Policies, and Rev. Carson is working on Financial Policy updates.
  - Summer Activity Updates
    - Youth Gathering
      - Bishop Hassanally attended the Youth Gathering over the summer in New Orleans. Everyone had a great time

and around 700 kids from the synod attended.

- The Bishop was invited to attend an advocacy trip in Washington DC in June.
- She lifted up that MN ELCA bishops were invited to meet with the governor's office, in order to have a line of communication with them.
- Bishop Hassanally went on a visit to our companion synod in Columbia, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Columbia, She went with Assistant to the Bishop Kathy Chatelaine.
- Supporting Rostered Leaders
  - She has taken part in in an ordination recently and has a few more coming up in the fall.
  - She noted that there is a larger number of people going through approval right now, but the numbers drop off following that.
  - The Fall Theological Conference is coming up in October.
  - The New to the Synod gathering will be next week.
- Supporting Congregations
  - "Councils as Leaders" date has been set. This event will have practical sessions and resources for council leaders.
  - The Bishop and her staff continue to work at visiting all congregations of the synod.
- Updates on the wider church
  - She continues her work on the CRLC and sits on the Planning and Report Committee and Governance Committee.
  - Bishop Hassanally will be at the Conference of Bishops in November.
  - She continues to serve on the LSS and Augsburg boards.

## CONFIRMATION OF BENEFITS FOR SYNOD STAFF

- Bishop Hassanally then presented the costs for Portico benefits for synod staff, along with the recommendation of enrolling staff at Silver+ level, with an HSA contribution at level A, with the option of buying up to Gold+ or Value Copay at the synod's expense.
- Rev. Jennifer Bakken Busch motioned to enroll synod staff at the Silver+ level, with an HSA contribution at level A, with the option of buying up to Gold+ or Value Copay at the synod's expense.

**SC24.09.38 Motion to enroll synod staff at the Silver+ level, with an HSA contribution at level A, with the option of buying up to Gold+ or Value Copay at the synod's expense.**

**Motion approved.**

## FINANCIAL REPORTS

- Synod Treasurer Tammy Dahlvang then updated the council on the synod finances. She presented the July 2024 Financials and walked through a few items from the report.
  - She noted that, overall, our finances are \$2,000 positive at this point.
- Matt Huggenvik motioned to receive the July financial report.

**SC24.09.39 Motion to receive the July financial report.**

**Motion approved.**

## ANNUAL FINANCIAL AUDIT

- The 01/31/2024 Financial Audit was presented and had been presented prior to the meeting for the council members to read and review.
- Joellen motioned to approve the 01/31/2024 Financial Audit.

**SC24.09.40 Motion to approve the 01/31/2024 Financial Audit.**

**Motion approved.**

## NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE UPDATE

- Vice President Dierks gave an update on the Nominations Committee. The Vice President chairs this committee.

- She walked through the workbook and the positions that are open.

## ELECT AT-LARGE MEMBERS TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Each year, two council members are elected to be members of the Executive Committee, one rostered and one lay, for a 1-year term.
- The following names were put forward for these positions:
  - Lay: Matt Huggenvik
  - Treasurer Tammy Dahlvang motioned to cease nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Matt Huggenvik for the lay At-Large member to the Executive Committee for 2024-2025.

**SC24.09.41 Motion to cease nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Matt Huggenvik for the lay At-Large member to the Executive Committee for 2024-2025.**

**Motion approved.**

**SC24.09.42 Motion to elect Matt Huggenvik as the lay At-Large member to the Executive Committee for 2024-2025.**

**Motion approved.**

- Rostered: Rev. John Weisenburger
- Rev. Sam Mailleue motioned to cease nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Rev. John Weisenburger for the rostered At-Large member to the Executive Committee for 2024-2025.

**SC24.09.43 Motion to cease nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Rev. John Weisenburger for the rostered At-Large member to the Executive Committee for 2024-2025.**

**Motion approved.**

**SC24.09.44 Motion to elect Rev. John Weisenburger as the rostered At-Large member to the Executive Committee for 2024-2025.**

**Motion approved.**

## EXECUTIVE SESSION

- The Council then moved into executive session to discuss changes to the roster.
- Dr. Joyce Thompson motioned to move into executive session.
- The council went into executive session at 1:44pm.

### **SC24.09.45 Motion to move into executive session.**

#### **Motion approved.**

- The following action items were taken during this time:
- Roster Changes:
- Retirement Status (Needs Approval)
  - Rev. Mark Van House, effective: 08/01/2024. Approved at synod council meeting 09/07/2024.
  - Rev. Jeffrey Sandgren, effective: 09/01/2024. Approved at synod council meeting 09/07/2024.
  - Rev. Margaret Pleiss-Sippola, effective 12/01/2024. Approved at synod council meeting 09/07/2024.
- Bishop Hassanally motioned to approve the Retirement Status roster changes.

### **SC(ES24.09.46) Motion to approve Retirement Status roster changes.**

#### **Motion approved.**

- On Leave From Call (Extension- Needs Approval)
  - Rev. Rebekah Barnhart, 2<sup>nd</sup> & Final Extension, approved by synod council on 09/07/2024.
- Bishop Hassanally motioned to approve 2<sup>nd</sup> and final extension of On Leave from Call status for Rev. Rebekah Barnhart.

### **SC(ES24.09.47) Motion to approve 2<sup>nd</sup> and final extension of On Leave from Call status for Rev. Rebekah Barnhart.**

#### **Motion approved.**

- Dr. Joyce Thompson motioned to leave executive session.

### **SC(ES24.09.48) Motion to leave executive session.**

#### **Motion approved.**

## ADJOURNMENT

- Vice President Dierks declared the meeting adjourned at 1:51pm.

The next meeting of the Synod Council will be on November 9. This meeting will be held in person at a location to be determined.

Submitted,  
Rev. Josh Enderson  
Synod Council Secretary

APPROVED 11/09/2024 JE