

**Northwest Washington Synod
Synod Council Meeting Minutes 21 March 2026
Synod Office, St. John United Lutheran Church**

Present: Luke Allgeyer, Andy Arnold, Shelley Bryan Wee, Dan Clements, Salvador Cossio, Kay Edgerton, Paul Eldred, Sara Funkhouser, Netsie Griffith, Shane Lambing, Sherianne Molzahn Caldwell, Cindy Shultz, Dan Squires

Present via Zoom: Sam Sseba

Staff: Susan Berg and Judy Brennan

Absent: David Kinner, Sam Martinez, and Elly Stitt

Guest: Cheri Cornell from Central Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity

Call to Order and Land Acknowledgment

Vice President Kay called the meeting to order at 9:09 a.m. and shared the following land acknowledgment:

- We acknowledge the original inhabitants of this area, the Coast Salish people. Since time immemorial, they have hunted, fished, gathered, and taken care of these lands. We respect their sovereignty, their right to self-determination, and honor their sacred spiritual connection with the land and water. We will strive to be honest about our past mistakes and bring about a future that includes their people, stories, and voices to form a more just and equitable society.

Opening Devotions

Bp. Shelley shared a reading from the book, *For Such a Time as This: An Emergency Devotional*. The entry she read was titled, "Break Bread or Nourish Community." She concluded by exhorting us, as did the reading, to practice community.

Approval of Agenda and Consent Agenda

The Meeting Agenda was approved by acclamation.

Moved and Carried (hereafter MC)

SC2026.3.21.01 to approve the consent agenda consisting of:

- Approval of the minutes of the January 17, 2026 Synod Council Meeting
- Receipt of the following written reports as presented and including any addendums:
 - Report of the Bishop – Shelley Bryan Wee
 - Report of the Assistant to the Bishop – Andy Yee
 - Report of the Treasurer – Dan Clements
 - Report of the Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM) – Judy Brennan
 - Report of the Director of Properties – Jay Edgerton
 - Report of the Vice President – Kay Edgerton
 - Report of the Policy Review Committee – Netsie Griffith
- Approval of the Crisis Communications Policy
- Approval of the following roster actions:
 - Renewal of Synod Calls to:
 - Rev. (deacon) Janet Cederberg – 5/16 – Lutheran Counseling Network
 - Rev. (deacon) Susan Franke – 4/15 – Specialty Chaplain, Swedish Cherry Hill
 - Rev. (pastor) Leslie Mahraun – 5/1 – Director of Spiritual Services, Hearthstone
 - Rev. (pastor) Michael Trice – 5/16 – Ex. Director, Center for Ecumenical and Interreligious Engagement, SU, Seattle

- Rev. (pastor) Stephen Weisser – 5/15 – Senior Manager of Spiritual Care, Providence Swedish Hospital
- Receipt of the following notifications of roster changes:
 - Transfer Out:
 - Rev. (pastor) Lori Cavendar – Oregon
 - Rev. (pastor) John Coffey – Oregon
 - Rev. (pastor) Dawn Coffey - Oregon

Reports

It was noted that Marc Hander was not included on the Consent Agenda under Synod Call Renewals, because the office had not yet received his Synod Call Renewal Form.

Moved, Seconded and Carried (hereafter MSC)

SC2026.3.21.02 **to renew, upon receipt of his Synod Call Renewal Form, a Synod Call for Rev. (pastor) Marc Hander, Community Engagement Manager, Lutheran Community Services NW, Bellingham.**

Kay referenced her written report and also reported that she is working on a transition task list for whoever will be the newly elected Vice President.

Property Actions

MSC

SC2026.3.21.03 **to accept a \$200,000 donation from Lutheran Community Services Northwest for Columbia City Church of Hope.**

Moved and Seconded

SC2026.3.21.04 **that in the event of an insurance default related to True Living Church to delegate a foreclosure decision to a majority of the Bishop, Vice President and Treasurer.**

MSC

SC2026.3.21.05 **to amend the motion related to True Living to replace “a majority of the Bishop, Vice President and Treasurer” with “a majority of the Executive Committee.”**

MC

SC2026.3.21.06 **that in the event of an insurance default related to True Living Church to delegate a foreclosure decision to a majority of the Executive Committee.**

Discussion on Inclusive/Expansive Language for the Trinity – Cheri Cornell

Cheri Cornell from Central Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity, Seattle (CLCHT), was given the floor to discuss her congregation’s memorial titled ***To Allow the Use of Inclusive and Expansive Language for the Three Persons of the Trinity Throughout All ELCA Services, Including the Rite of Holy*** (full text included below as Addendum A to the Minutes)

Though submitted to be brought to the floor of the 2025 Synod Assembly, the Reference and Counsel Committee ruled against forwarding CLCHT’s memorial to the Assembly. Because of the care and work gone into its preparation it was decided Synod Council would provide an opportunity for discussion.

Cheri opened the time of discussion by sharing both why it is important to her and to her congregation and made the following points:

- Finding a congregation that truly embraced an expansive image of God was very important.
- A decision was made to raise bi-faith children Lutheran because of the welcome and inclusive language provided at CLCHT.
- There is a concern that Pr. Paul could be seen to be in violation of his ordination promises if using trinitarian language other than “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” during the baptismal rite.

- There is a concern that the baptism of children/adults would not be recognized by other Christian congregations if the traditional trinitarian name was not used at their baptism.
- Our understanding of the Trinity is not circumscribed by the bounds of gender..
- Pr. Paul expressed that there is confusion in the ELCA position that congregations have the freedom to use expansive language but, when it comes to the baptismal rite, it feels like a “don’t ask; don’t tell approach.”

The following responses were shared during the counsel discussion:

- The primary issue seems to be concerning the baptismal rite; Bp. Shelley explained the understanding of our baptism, as it pertains to the understanding of the Roman Catholic Church.
- Is it a question of doctrine, a theological issue or a polity issue?
- Sacraments are God’s action; whatever words are used are subservient to God’s action.
- We live in a “forever reforming” church.
- Do we need to have a statement of support for pastors who choose to use expansive language for the Trinity in the baptismal rite?

It was the consensus of the Council that we want to offer support and opportunities for education around expansive and inclusive language. Yet, it was also stated that CLCHT needs to continue to take the initiative and communicate to us what they would see as helpful. It was also clarified that if the Synod Council passes a resolution, it goes to the ELCA Council but not to our own Synod Assembly.

OLD/ONGOING BUSINESS

Budget Actions – Dan Clements

Dan referred us to his report detailing the proposed changes made to the previously distributed 2027 Draft Budget and to the needed modifications to the 2026 Budget. He entertained questions and reiterated the rationale for these changes.

MC

SC2026.3.21.07 to approve the ten housekeeping adjustments to the 2026 Budget and the changes to the 2027 Draft Budget resulting in a reduction of the General Fund revenue by \$43,839 and an increase in expenses by \$56,133.*

****See specific adjustments below in Addendum B.***

At their last meeting Finance Committee also discussed three other issues being brought to our attention:

- 1) **Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)** – The Finance and Personnel Committees have not been able to discuss their different approaches to determining COLA; one understanding looks at COLA in June and the other in September; if a resolution is not reached prior to the April Executive Committee (EC) meeting, EC will need to make a decision; the bishop will be meeting with, Fred, our Personnel Committee Chairperson and will bring this to his attention.
- 2) **Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Reparations Account** – The Finance Committee would like to set up a specific account for an entity (in addition to supporting individuals which the current fund does); Synod Council supports this proposal.
- 3) **Churchwide request to increase Mission Support by 1%** - Churchwide has made a request to synods to consider increasing their Churchwide Mission Support by 1%, as they are facing a \$6 million deficit. The consensus of the Finance Committee was to maintain our 47% contribution, as our synod percentage is higher than most synods.

MSC

SC2026.3.21.08 to increase our mission support percentage to Churchwide by 1% for the 2027 Budget increasing it from a 47% contribution to a 48% contribution.

NEW BUSINESS

World Council of Churches (WCC) Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action Resolution

As a synod, we have been asked to consider forwarding a resolution on the WCC Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action. Since this is a “Gathering” and not an “Assembly” year for our Synod, a decision on this resolution needs to be made by the Synod Council.

There was some confusion about the Resolution as worded, so further work to look at it more in depth and, if needed, propose modifications to the wording was delegated to a working group. The members of the working group are **Netsie, Cindy and Sherianne**. They will bring the results of their work to our May meeting.

MSC

SC2026.3.21.09 **to table action on the WCC Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Resolution until the May meeting of Synod Council.**

FOR DISCUSSION

Seminary Debt Reduction Funds

The Seminary Debt Reduction Fund which was established as part of the money raised from the 2018/2019 “Because of You Campaign” gave out its first awards since ceasing making awards during the COVID Epidemic.

- The granting team consisting of the Bishop, Assistant to the Bishop and Vice President invites us to ponder if more could be done with this money to support rostered ministers given the low number of requests (just three).
- Because of many variables in the status of student debt relief, the guidance from Council was to give it time and see if the need and awareness of this aid increase in the next couple of years.

Bishop Sabbatical Coverage

Bp. Shelley would like to be very clear about the responsibilities assigned to Bishop Emeritus Boerger who has agreed to serve as “acting bishop” while Bp. Shelley is on sabbatical. She has been working on a list of duties, the draft of which was shared with SC.

FUTURE MEETING DATES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Meeting Dates

- The next **Executive Committee (EC)** meetings are via Zoom, **April 9 and June 11** at 4:30 pm.
- **Synod Assembly Special Meeting: May 16, 2026** via Zoom, 9 am- 12 pm.
- **May 16th** will also be an online meeting of SC following the special meeting and will begin at 1 pm.
- The **Synod Gathering, “Life in God’s Garden: Seeds of Generosity,”** is scheduled for **May 30th**.
- **Lutherwood Gala: Sunday, May 31**
(<https://secure.qgiv.com/for/lutherwoodcampretreatcenter/event/lutherwood2026fundraisinggala/>)
- **SC** will meet for dinner at Rick Steves’ house, Saturday, **July 11th**; this will be Kay’s last time to meet with us, as she concludes her second term.

Information will be going out today about the 5/30 Gathering; in April more info will go out about 5/16 meeting.
The meeting was adjourned by VP Kay at 12:16 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Netsie Griffith,
Synod Council Secretary

ADDENDA TO THE MINUTES

ADDENDUM A

MEMORIAL TO ALLOW THE USE OF INCLUSIVE AND EXPANSIVE LANGUAGE FOR THE THREE PERSONS OF THE TRINITY THROUGHOUT ALL ELCA SERVICES, INCLUDING THE RITE OF HOLY BAPTISM

WHEREAS, “We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believe God’s intention revealed through the Scriptures is that all people have life abundantly and flourish.” A Social Statement on *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* (2019) (hereafter, “the 2019 Social Statement”);¹ and

WHEREAS, “We believe all people are created equally in the image of God. Every individual is dependent upon God, and all share in the God-given vocation to contribute their gifts to help all of creation flourish. Being in the image of the triune God means that we humans are relational, that we are interconnected. Just as we interact with God, we are social creatures relating with each other and all of creation.”;² and

WHEREAS, the 2019 Social Statement provides:

- “The central Lutheran belief that we are justified by grace through faith *empowers this church to challenge patriarchy and sexism*, which devalue people according to sinful human standards.”;³
- “The formulation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is at the center of the conversation...The ELCA affirms the creedal witness to the mystery, relations, and actions of the three persons of the Trinity. At the same time, this church holds that exclusive use of a male-oriented formula to refer to God is problematic. The use of expansive language for God reflects faithfulness to God’s self-revelation in the Scriptures and in human experience. In our life together, we call upon leaders and members to enlarge the dialogue about and practice of inclusive and expansive language and images for God.”;⁴
- “This church is committed to the deepest Christian understanding of the Trinity revealed through Jesus Christ and to the importance of imagining and speaking about God in faithful ways that expand rather than limit the expression of God’s self-revelation and mystery. In particular, we support developing liturgies, hymns, prayers, and educational materials that broaden use beyond predominantly masculine language.... *Employing inclusive and expansive language for and images of God helps human beings approach and encounter the God of beauty and love who reveals God’s self to humanity in rich and mysterious ways.*”;⁵ and

WHEREAS, the 2019 Social Statement does not instruct ELCA rostered and unrostered leaders and members how to interpret specific passages of the Holy Scriptures, Creeds, Confessions, or Lutheran teachings regarding inclusive and expansive language for the three persons of the Trinity; and

WHEREAS, the 2019 Social Statement does not instruct ELCA rostered and unrostered leaders and members how to interpret the baptism language in Matthew: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....”⁶ regarding inclusive and expansive language for the three persons of the Trinity; and

WHEREAS, the Holy Scriptures, the Creeds, the Confessions, and Lutheran teachings do not prohibit the use of inclusive and expansive language for the three persons of the Trinity;

Therefore, be it RESOLVED that the Northwest Washington Synod, in assembly, memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to:

Clearly state that ELCA rostered and unrostered leaders and members may, but are not required to, use inclusive and expansive language for the three persons of the Trinity throughout all ELCA services, liturgies and rites, including, but not limited to, every part of the rite of Holy Baptism.

1 A Social Statement on *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* (2019; adopted by Churchwide Assembly) (PDF), p. 2.

2 *Id.*

3 *Id.*, pp. 6-7 (emphasis added).

4 *Id.*, pp. 54-55.

5 *Id.*, p. 8 (emphasis added).

Approved by the Council and Congregation of Central Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity,
Sunday, January 26, 2025

Contact:

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ADDENDUM B

Figure 1: 2026 & 2027 Budget Modifications

#	Account # Account Title	2026 Budget		2027 Budget		Reason for Change
		Original	Revised	Original	Revised	
	Revenue:					
1.)	01-512-00002 Gifts	n/a	n/a	100,000	50,000	No major property donations
2.)	01-####-#### - Open Doors Ministry Fund Transfer	n/a	n/a	1,000	1,500	Request due to need
3.)	01-####-#### Designated Property Fund	n/a	n/a	45,000	-	No major property donations
4.)	01-####-#### Opening Fund Balance	542,421	684,082	575,538	617,199	Increase in 2026 fund balance gain on investments
	Expenditures:					
5.)	01-601-03202 PLTS Support	29,000	25,200	n/a	n/a	Reflect 2025 Assembly amendment
6.)	01-601-03372 Luther Seminary Support	29,000	25,200	n/a	n/a	Reflect 2025 Assembly amendment
7.)	01-601-03522 Real Rent (Duwamish)	1,200	5,000	1,200	5,000	Reflect 2025 Assembly amendment
8.)	01-####-#### Reconciling Works	n/a	n/a	1,000	1,500	Funding Increase request
9.)	01-746-04502 - Church Wellness Network	9,167	9,167	9,167	11,000	Appears that 2026 budget figure was input error
10.)	01-####-#### Emerging & Strategic Ministries	n/a	50,000	-	50,000	Approved for 2026 Budget, no account, not entered

The following . . . provide[s] a more detailed background rationale for these modifications.

- 1.) **Gifts.** The main source of Gift Revenue has been contributions from property sales. No major property donations are anticipated in 2027.
- 2.) **Open Doors Transfer.** This transfer was increased from \$1,200 in 2026 to \$1,500 to fund an increase in Reconciling Works.
- 3.) **Property Fund Transfer.** A \$45,000 amount was budgeted in 2026, and no transfers were made due to lack of fund balance. Since no major property donations are anticipated in 2027, this transfer has been zeroed out.
- 4.) **Opening Fund Balance.** General Fund 2026 Opening Balance was increased by \$141,661 due to the realization of investment gains.
- 5.) **PLTS Support.** Support for Pacific Lutheran was reduced by a floor motion at the 2025 Assembly from \$29,000 to \$25,200. This change was not reflected in the 2026 Budget.
- 6.) **Luther Seminary.** Support for the Seminary was reduced by a floor motion at the 2025 Assembly from \$29,000 to \$25,200. This change was not reflected in the 2026 Budget.
- 7.) **Real Rent Duamish.** Real Rent Duamish was increased from \$1,200 to \$5,000 by a floor motion at the 2025 Assembly. This change was not reflected in the 2026 Budget.
- 8.) **Reconciling Works.** The budget for Reconciling Works was increased from \$1,000 to \$1,500 based on a needs request from Pr. Jory Mickelson.
- 9.) **Church Wellness.** After discussing the budget reduction from 2025 of \$11,000 to \$9,167 in 2026 with Kevin Bates, and reviewing worksheets, it appears the figure used for the 2026 budget was the 2025 actual, not the budgeted amount which should have been carried forward.
- 10.) **Emerging Ministries.** During adoption of the 2026 Budget, \$50,000 was allocated for Emerging & Strategic Ministries. Due to a combination of events these funds were not included in the 2026 budget, and were not subsequently included in the 2027 Draft Budget. This action restores funding in the FY 2026 and FY 2027 budgets.