

**Northwest Washington Synod
Synod Council Meeting Minutes 17 January 2026
Via Zoom**

Present: Luke Allgeyer, Andy Arnold, Shelley Bryan Wee, Dan Clements, Kay Edgerton, Paul Eldred, Sara Funkhouser, Netsie Griffith, David Kinner, Shane Lambing, Sam Martinez, Sherianne Molzahn Caldwell, Cindy Shultz, Dan Squires, and Elly Stitt

Staff: Susan Berg and Judy Brennan

Absent: Salvador Cossio and Sam Sseba

Guest: Millie Fosberg, President of Northwest Washington Synodical Women's Organization

Call to Order and Land Acknowledgment

Vice President Kay called the meeting to order at 9:02 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.

Kay introduced our guest, Millie Fosberg, President of the Northwest Washington (NWWA) Synodical Women's Organization (SWO). She has also served in other roles in synod leadership including as a past Treasurer.

Millie shared that the NWWA SWO has begun making plans for their annual retreat to be scheduled as a one-day event in October. They are small but vibrant with the goal to be open and welcoming to more women and congregations not currently involved. Like many groups, they experienced a downturn in participation during and after COVID. They are interested in learning how we can be supportive of one another.

Opening Devotions

Bp. Shelley posed the following questions for our reflection. How can we be church in such a time as this? What is one action we can do to have a different narrative, a different way of being from where the world is right now? She then invited us to share, via the method of mutual invitation, how we are living in this day and how we can be church. After everyone had the opportunity to share, she offered a prayer.

Approval of Agenda and Consent Agenda

The Meeting Agenda was approved by acclamation.

Various questions were asked and points were made about items on the Consent Agenda, although nothing was pulled from the Consent Agenda for separate action.

Moved and Carried (MC)

SC2026.1.17.01 to approve the consent agenda consisting of:

- Approval of the minutes of the November 15 Synod Council Meeting
- Receipt of the following written staff reports as presented:
 - 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 Policy Review Committee
- Approval of the following housing allowance designations:
 - Bp. Shelley Bryan Wee - \$40,000

- Pr. Andy Yee - \$40,000
- Pr. David Hahn - \$10,000
- Appointments:
 - Appointed Tracey Dunlap to the Finance Committee
- Approval of the following roster actions:
 - Extended a Synod Call to:
 - Deb Mach: Providence Regional Medical Center, Chaplain
 - Retired:
 - Malcolm Brown – 12/28/2025
 - Jim Killough – 1/18/2026
 - Cindy Myatt – 1/31/2026
 - On leave from call:
 - Lori Cavender – 9/30/2025
 - Paul Ko – 12/28/2025
- Received the following notifications of roster changes (Spreadsheet in Teams):
 - Called:
 - Kathleen Yahns – St John United – 12/28/2025
 - Katrina Bentsen – Trinity Freeland – 12/14/202
 - Ordinations:
 - Katrina Bentsen – 1/10/2026
 - Transfer In:
 - Anthony “Tony” Rhodes – from Sierra Pacific Synod – 12/17/2025
 - Resigned/Removed from Roster
 - Eric Griffith – 1/13/2026

UPDATES SINCE THE LAST MEETING

Candidacy Committee Applicant Letters

Kay reported on the follow-up which had occurred since our November meeting regarding the candidate who was not entranced by the Candidacy Committee. Since that time the applicant met with a sub-group of the Candidacy Committee and the bishop. It is understood that these meetings resulted in a positive resolve to the concerns which had been raised. The Executive Committee is finalizing letters to be sent in response to the letters received.

Retreat Recap and Follow-up

- **Discernment**
- **Empowerment**
- **Listening**
- **Communication**

We were reminded that we had highlighted the above as four areas for growth. The two highest were empowerment and listening. **As council members we were asked to commit to one of the four areas.** The next time we meet in person, presumably at our March meeting, it was suggested that we break out in small groups and determine how we might want to specifically pursue growth in these areas.

Gathering Planning (*Life in God's Garden: Seeds of Abundance*), May 30th – Susan Berg

Susan was called upon to give us updates about the upcoming synod gathering. Planning is in the works. It is scheduled for 9 am-5 pm at Trinity Lutheran Church, Lynnwood and the new Lynnwood Neighborhood Center built on Trinity's property. Rev. Tim Brown will be the keynote speaker. The schedule will consist of worship, the keynote address, and two workshop time slots. If you would like to recommend a workshop or have ideas about breakout groups, contact Susan. It was asked if the keynote speaker would be recorded. Susan will explore that possibility.

OLD/ONGOING BUSINESS

Approval of “Guidelines for Negotiated Resignations in the NWWA Synod”

Netsie, chair of the Policy Review Committee, was called upon to present and answer questions about the policy under consideration for approval. Other committee members present (the bishop, Kay and Luke) also responded to questions.

MC

SC2026.1.17.02 **to approve the “Guidelines for Negotiated Resignations in the Northwest Washington Synod” as rewritten by the Policy Review Committee.**

NEW BUSINESS

Re-authorization of Synod Ministries – DEM, Judy

Judy entertained questions about the re-authorization of synod ministries. A question was raised about the status and funding of Bethel Ethiopian. It was clarified that they opted not to fill out the paperwork needed for funding in 2025 or 2026, yet the bishop has met with them. Though they do not wish to be publicly listed or acknowledged as a ministry of the NWWA Synod, they continue to want to be in relationship at this time. One reason for re-authorizing them at this time is their loan through Mission Investment Fund; they can’t continue that source of funding without an association with the synod. Next steps for either bringing them into a closer relationship with us or blessing their affiliation with another church body are: 1) a willingness to meet with Judy and the ELCA Director of African Descent Ministries, Dr. Joseph Bocko; and 2) to participate in a ministry review. Currently, the synods in Ethiopia are in conversation about reaffiliating with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) after previously leaving the ELCA to affiliate with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS).

MC

SC2026.1.17.03 **to authorize the following as Synod Authorized Worshiping Communities (SAWCs) of the Northwest Washington Synod for FY 2026: Echoes, El Camino de Emaus, Emmaus Table @ 7400 Woodlawn, Grace Chinese Lutheran of South King County, Grace Lutheran Sammamish Hills, Love of Christ Lutheran Church, Bethel Ethiopian; and to authorize Luther’s Table as a Synod Authorized Outreach Ministry (SAOM) of the Northwest Washington Synod for FY 2026.**

MC

SC2026.1.17.04 **to continue to designate St. Matthew’s Lutheran, Renton, and Columbia City Church of Hope as Strategic Ministries of the Northwest Washington Synod in FY 2026.**

Ministry Closures

MC

SC2026.1.17.05 **to close the following ministries of the Northwest Washington Synod on January 31, 2026: 1) North Cascades Wild Church (SAWC) and note that any remaining funds in synod accounts related to this ministry will return to the Emerging and Strategic Ministry Fund; 2) the Seattle Covenant Community Fellowship (SAWC) and note that any remaining funds in synod accounts will be returned to the Emerging and Strategic Ministry Fund; and 3) Ministry to Chinese Students and Scholars (SAOM) and note that any remaining funds in synod accounts will be transferred to UW Lutheran Campus Ministry.**

Approval of grant spending for 2026

MC

SC2026.1.17.06 **to approve 2026 grants from the Emerging and Strategic Ministry Fund (02-371-50002) in the amount of \$156,000 as determined by Director for Evangelical Mission, Judy Brennan, and the Evangelical Outreach Team for the approved authorized ministries as designated.***

**See addendum to these minutes for these specific designations.*

Investment Gains Transaction

Finance committee authorized the Treasurer to liquidate \$167,000 out of \$443,183 (as of 11/30/2025) in investment gains and reinvest this amount once the gains have been booked.

Budget Ammendments

MC

SC2026.1.17.07 to approve amendments to the 2026 Budget that would increase Investment Gains by \$167,000, reduce Mission Support Revenue by \$130,000, reduce investment income by \$20,000, reduce support of Churchwide by \$61,100, and transfer up to \$17,000 to (02-341-04442) Funds Held – North Cascade Wild Church to eliminate their negative balance.

Discrepancy in determining cost-of-living

When the 2026 budget figures were determined for salary guidelines for rostered Synod Staff a different percentage (based on the CPI) was used for cost-of-living expenses by the Finance Committee than that recommended by the Synod's 2026 Ministry Site Guidelines produced by the Personnel Committee (based on the L&I Index). To provide sufficient budget dollars to meet current ministry site guidelines, rostered wages will need to be increased by \$14,619 in 2026.

Moved, Seconded, Carried (MSC)

SC2026.1.17.08 to pay rostered Synod Staff according to the 6.8 % State L&I Average Wage figure for 2026 and request that the Personnel Committee reconsider their methodology for determining Cost of Living Expenses in 2027 based on the CPI Index.

Revenue Cutoff Policy

We experienced a situation in which Trinity, Freeland's mission support for 2025 was counted in the synod's 2024 Fiscal Year (FY), because of the month's difference between the congregation's and synod's FY. This skewed Mission Support to be higher in 2024 and lower in 2025 than projected.

MC

SC2026.1.17.09 to approve the following addition to the Revenue Cutoff Policy:
 "Also, should a congregation make a Mission Support contribution in January, prior to the February 1 start of the Synod fiscal year, and indicates their contribution is for the coming fiscal year, then funds shall be recorded in the new fiscal year beginning February 1, per their request."

Crisis Communication Policy

In the past, the council has had some discussion regarding what and how the bishop should communicate with the synod at large in a crisis. The ELCA has provided guidelines for such a situation which is what the synod office is currently using and plans to use in the future. Since this did not come from the Policy Review Committee, it was decided that this group would review it at their next meeting and forward it to Synod Council for official approval.

FOR DISCUSSION

Budget Planning Process and Timeline

Dan presented a timeline tracking the 2027 budget development process from the December 11th Finance Committee meeting through the May 16 special meeting of the 2025 Synod Assembly when the budget is presented for approval. He shared that the only date on this timeline which might be problematic is the Executive Committee Review of the budget on February 12th, as he won't get figures from the Financial Services Office (FSO) until February 10th, so it's a tight turnaround.

Agenda for the Special Meeting of the 2025 Synod Assembly – May 16, 2026, 9 am-12 pm via Zoom

Susan reminded us that an initial announcement was sent to congregations earlier reminding them of this special meeting of the 2025 Synod Assembly voting members. If 2025 voting members are not available to attend this

meeting, their congregation may provide a substitute/s for them. A deadline will be announced for providing names of substitute voting members.

Because this is a special meeting of the previous, gathered assembly, the agenda has been set and cannot be changed. Included on the agenda is: 1) an Opening Welcome, 2) the election of a Synod Vice President, Synod Secretary, and Synod Council Youth Representative, and 3) a 2027 Budget Presentation and voting on the budget.

A Nominating Committee is working on nominations and people were encouraged to make Susan aware of potential youth representatives. If someone on council is elected VP, SC would need to appoint someone to fill out their term. Now that Salvador has been approved for ordination, if he is ordained, he will be able to remain on SC, but we would need to appoint a lay person to fill out his lay term. So, we might have a couple of lay appointments coming up, as Cindy Shultz announced she is planning to run for VP.

Susan also noted that time is being allowed at the beginning of the gathering, if needed, for possible technological glitches, as this is a wily technological undertaking.

Reconciling Works/LGBTQIA+

Luke reviewed the expectations of synods on the Reconciling Works website for being a reconciling in Christ synod, and we are following these guidelines.

Management of Open Door Ministries Funds

No one is specifically tasked with managing these funds intended to be used for LGBTQIA+ projects/education throughout the synod. Thus, we need to figure out how to make these funds known and available for these purposes.

MSC

SC2026.1.17.10 **to set aside money of at least \$1200 per year in perpetuity from the Open Door Ministries Fund to contribute to Reconciling Works as part of our commitment as a Reconciling in Christ Synod.**

MSC

SC2026.1.17.11 **to draw from the Open Door Ministries Fund to fund synodical participation in Pride Parades/Events throughout the synod.**

It was also decided to establish a group of people to manage and access funds from the Open Door Ministries Fund. A good place to start would be to be in conversation with an ad hoc team already in existence that has been working on participation in the Seattle Pride Parade. **Susan** will provide a list of potential names of people and pass them on to **Kay** who will follow up by contacting people. A point was also made that thought needs to be given as to how to continue to bring revenue into this fund if we are anticipating funds being drawn from it in perpetuity.

FUTURE MEETING DATES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Meeting Dates

- The next **Executive Committee** (EC) meeting is via Zoom, **February 12**, 4:30 pm. Subsequent EC meetings are **April 9 and June 11** also at 4:30 pm via Zoom.
- **Synod Council** (SC) will meet next on **March 21**, 2026 at Synod Office; we anticipate people from Central Lutheran to be with us to discuss liturgical language; an on-line option will be available for those unable to attend in person.
- **May 16th** will be an online meeting of SC following the special meeting and begin at 1 pm.
- The Synod Gathering is scheduled for **May 30th**.
- **SC** will meet for dinner at Rick Steves' house, Sunday, **July 12th** and possibly have ELCA Presiding Bishop Curry as a special guest; this will be Kay's last time to meet with us, as she concludes her second term.

Some people missed seeing the requested Acronym Glossary shared at our November meeting. Netsie will include this as an attachment when sending out these minutes.

The meeting was adjourned by VP Kay at 12:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Netsie Griffith,
Synod Council Secretary

Addendum to January 17, 2026 Minutes

2026 Division for Mission Grants

Approved 2026 Grants from the Emerging and Strategic Ministry Fund (02-371-50002):

	Synod
	<u>2026</u>
Luther's Table (2025)	\$20,000.00
Family & Friends Gathering (2018)	\$5,000.00
Grace Lutheran, Des Moines	\$10,000.00
Grace Chinese, Sammamish Hills (2007)	\$6,000.00
Love of Christ, Bellevue (2024)	\$15,000.00
Echoes (2013)	\$18,000.00
El Camino (2004)	\$30,000.00
Grace Chinese of South King County (2007)	\$10,000.00
Emmaus Table (2016)	\$7,000.00
St. Matthew's, Renton	\$15,000.00
Columbia City Church of Hope	\$15,000.00
SKY Youth Ministry	\$5,000

The ministries listed in blue have not yet had their 2026 funding approved by churchwide. It was asked that their synod grants be approved pending churchwide approval of grants.