



Talking Points

*from the Eastern Synod Council meeting
November 13-14, 2020 / E-Meeting
Wendell Caron Grahlman, Secretary*

The Eastern Synod Council met by video-conferencing software for its autumn meeting, occurring again during the COVID-19 pandemic time.

✚ Outcomes from the meeting included:

- Authorization that the Eastern Synod apply to the CRA to be designated as a public foundation.
- Upon receipt of a call, Jordan Smith and Rev. Ronald Shumba were approved for reception onto the roster of ordained ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.
- Ernst & Young LLP were appointed as the Synod auditors for 2020.
- Revisions in the Synod's Strategic Plan - Work Plan Priorities were affirmed for 2020-2021, as related to focusing our efforts and managing resources, as well as adapting to the pandemic environment.
- Approval of constitutions and bylaws and amendments for: Peace Latvian, Ottawa; Good Shepherd, Barrhaven; Chinese Lutheran, Montreal; Rhenish, Toronto; Trinity, London; St. John's, Augsburg; St. Peter's Estonian, Toronto.
- Synod Assembly 2021 will be convened next year as an online meeting; it is planned for June 2021. Registration fees have been set at \$300 per rostered/lay delegate; there is no fee for visitors whose congregational rostered and lay delegates have already registered.
- Appointments to committees:
 - Rev. Thomas Mertz to the Examining Committee;
 - Jim Diehl, Rick Ritz Dr. Rudolf Michaeli, Mark Weingartner and Deacon Scott Knarr to the Candidacy Committee;
 - Rev. Jason Ashby, Emily Walker, Peggy Read and Rev. Sebastian Meadows-Helmer to the Mission Committee;
 - Rev. Susan Climo and Diane Karges to the Professional Leadership Committee;
 - Bonnie Weppler as the Synod Council representative on the Youth and Young Adult Committee;
 - Penney Smile, Rev. Tuula van Gaasbeek, David Schnarr and Susan Heard to Martin Luther University College Board of Governors;
 - Ben Cameron (ES Rep for PCYM), Nancy Hilborn, Jonathan Hopkins, Sydney Marshall and Sophie Slessor to the Youth and Young Adult Committee.

✚ Bishop's report to Synod Council:

- Bishop Michael praised congregational leaders for significantly meeting the challenges that the pandemic has presented in the past 8+ months. He acknowledged that significant challenges still remain – and we have not come through this unscathed – but for the most part, the state of the church is healthy, engaged and very much alive!

- One of the big learnings for churches and the Synod coming out of this pandemic is the need to remain nimble and responsive to an ever-changing environment.
- We need to be building on insights and learnings as we move forward and lean into new models for ministry and discipleship that have been revealed to us over this time of enforced physical distancing and those that have yet to be revealed.
- In many ways, we have never been more connected with one another as church than we have within the past several months. We've got to make sure that continues. It has built us up as the Body and Christ and strengthened the bonds that unite us.
- It's important that we maintain and build new relationships with the many people who have connected or re-connected with congregations via online presences.
- The pandemic has also dramatically increased our awareness of deep structural biases and inequities that exist within the life of our wider communities and within the life of our church. The same injustices and prejudices that have fueled the Black Lives Matter demonstrations on the streets of the world this past summer also exist in the pews of our churches. It is not a mere accident of history that Lutherans count themselves among the whitest denominations in North America.
- The pandemic has also made it plainly evident that there are systemic inequities within our society that put significant populations at much greater risk, including those with insecure housing or employment, and those who are differently-abled or food-insecure. So how might our ministries better address such realities? What words and acts of good news might we put forward to address so much that is bad news!
- Bishop encourages us to engage what is truly a changed world, welcome the new insights and perspectives that have been revealed, seize opportunities for renewal, act courageously; to quote Luther, we need to sin boldly!

✚ From Keith Myra, Synod Treasurer:

- Benevolence receipts have decreased for 2020, understandably because of the pandemic; receipts to the end of the third quarter are down about 6.5% as compared to the previous year. However, and cautiously, income and expense factors could potentially leave us ending the year with a healthy surplus.
- St. John's By the Sea, Feltzen South, Nova Scotia has recently closed and sent a cheque in thanks for its synodical partnership.
- There are government financial assistance programs still available for congregations, and help is available from synod office for information and application.
- The 2019 audit has been completed with Ernst & Young's unqualified opinion that the synod's financial statements are in good order. Additionally, the 2019 Charity Information Return (T3010) was completed and submitted on schedule.

✚ Task Force on the Resumption of In-Person Worship: Vice-Chairperson Laurie Knott has been the chair of the Task Force; she reminds us that congregations are their own primary authority to make their congregational decisions (including agreement of both the council and the rostered leader). Advent and Christmas worship resources are available for download through the BOX Resource Library (if you are not currently connected with this growing resource library, please contact Liz Zehr (ezehr@elcic.ca) or Cindy Stubbs (cstubbs@elcic.ca) to obtain access).

✚ The ELCIC has launched an appeal for scholarships for students in schools of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, helping them in a time when they have been particularly affected by the pandemic.

- ✚ Reports were received from the standing committees: Candidacy, Examining, Mission, Professional Leadership, and Youth & Young Adults.
 - Mission Committee grants are anticipated to be selected and distributed in the near future.
 - The Youth & Young Adult Committee funded the following initiatives for 2021: Lutherlyn Camp & Conference Centre; Camp Mush-a-Mush; Camp Emergency Fund (to be split between the two camps); Summer Lutheran Youth Camp, Montreal Lutheran Campus Ministry; Toronto Lutheran Campus Ministry; Bible Camp, Owen Sound; Neighbourhood Table, St. Phillip's; Messy Church at Home, Christ, Peterborough; Unplug, St. John's Arnprior; Faith Message Digital, Faith, Port Elgin; Pix in the Six, St. Philip's, Etobicoke; Young Canadian Lutheran YouTube Channel, Mt. Zion; Young Adult Retreat, Mt. Zion; 35 Under 35, Mt. Zion; – and – funding from the Patricia Watt's Fund: Bible Camp, Owen Sound; Neighbourhood Table, St. Philip's, Etobicoke; Messy Church at Home, Christ Peterborough; Unplug, St. John's Arnprior.
 - The Professional Leadership Committee prepared guidelines for the 2021 Eastern Synod Compensation Schedule. The approved COLA was 2.25%. This is based on the year over inflation rates after the December CPI numbers are reported. In addition, regarding how rental costs are decided upon by congregations when it comes to housing allowances and compensation and the current rental markets, the Committee added this line to the 2021 Eastern Synod Compensation Schedule: "We recommend congregations review the housing allowance in consultation with the pastor at a minimum of every two years."

- ✚ The Council meeting included an online workshop with Joel Thiessen, Professor of Sociology & Director of Flourishing Congregations Institute, Ambrose University, Calgary, Alberta. Joel spoke in part of the various aspects of what might define and consist of a "flourishing" congregation and how those congregations self-identify with respect to their core values and purpose. He noted how pandemic circumstances in our congregations have forced us into innovation and hopefully and courageously lead us away from safety nets and past familiar practices, especially with regard to worship, and in the ability to adapt/change. Another area of discussion relates to evangelism, and the priority it receives from a faith community: centrality of evangelism, teaching, equipping, opportunities, celebrations, measurements.

- ✚ Next meeting: April 16-17, 2021.