

Synod Council Meeting Highlights March 27, 2020 via Zoom



With the current Covid 19 pandemic health concerns, Synod Council of the Alberta and the Territories held their spring retreat meeting via two zoom meetings on Friday, March 27, 2020. The Reverend Heidi Wachowiak served as chaplain and offered prayers to begin and end each zoom session. The Reverend John Lentz and Councillor Shae Belanger served as the Code of Conduct Complaint Handling Committee.

The Bishop's Performance Review Committee undertook separate zoom meetings (Thursday, March 26, 2020) to conduct the informal review of the Bishop's Performance and shared their recommendations with Synod Council during an *In Camera* session during the Council meeting.

One of the check-in questions Councillors responded to was: "Where have you seen God recently?" Many heart-warming stories were shared especially during this stressful time during this health crisis.

The following report was shared by the Executive Committee:

- The risk management policy was reviewed and was felt to adequately address the various risks faced by the Synod.
- A list of ideas has been developed by the Executive of how Councillors can be a link to members and congregations; a review of this material will become part of each fall's Council meeting.
- A small committee will begin work on reviewing the Synod's Constitution and Bylaws, in part to ensure that they reflect a 3-year convention cycle. Any motions regarding changes to the Synod's Constitution and Bylaws will be presented at the 2021 Synod Convention.

At each Synod Retreat a number of policies are reviewed to ensure that the Bishop and Synod Council are in compliance with the guidelines set forth in those policies. Nineteen such policies were reviewed at this meeting; we are in compliance with all of them.

Our Treasurer, Paul Ellison, provided a financial update for our information:

- The financial statements for 2019 are being prepared and the audit will begin soon. 2019 benevolence to the Synod was similar to 2018 levels.
- The Treasurer anticipates that our cash flow and reserves are enough to weather the current situation.
- The invested estate funds with ELFEC – Evangelical Lutheran Foundation of Eastern Canada, have provided some interest which has been directed to congregations in Whitehorse and Yellowknife, and to northern ministries, as per the donor's instructions.
- The narrative budget document has been well received throughout the Synod. In the new format it is easier to determine our spending percentages related to the mission priority areas they support.

Reverend Dr. James Hendrickson, our Synod's rostered representative on National Church Council, shared information from the recent NCC meeting:

- This was a joint meeting with COGS (Council of the General Synod of the Anglican Church); Together our national churches are working on addressing racism.
- Since convention this past summer, three task forces have been established and are working on their assigned areas: ableism, racism, and xenophobia.

- NCC is adapting the Code of Conduct policy to include online meetings.
- Funds from the CECF – Church Extension and Capital Fund will be distributed again to each of the five Synods.
- This is the twentieth anniversary of the full communion partnership between the ELCIC and the ACC.
- NCC is revising their strategic planning process to make it coincide better with the three-year convention cycle.

Bishop Larry shared much information during his written and verbal report, including the following:

- An update on the measures he and the Assistant to the Bishop, Pastor Prema Samuels, are taking amid the COVID-19 pandemic to stay connected with rostered ministers to enhance and support their work in their congregations. Weekly Wednesday zoom meetings have been initiated and all rostered ministers have been invited to participate. The *Light One Candle* initiative is also available on the website as are the latest information documents from Health Canada, ELCIC and from our Synod. Members are encouraged to send a one sentence prayer to Bishop Larry to be included on the website as another way to connect with and support each other during the pandemic. Our companion partners in Colombia and El Salvador have also been invited to prepare and submit prayers.
- Bishop Larry has also participated in a webinar with other denominational leaders and he, Assistant to the Bishop, Pastor Prema, and Area Deans participated in a Tele-Town Hall provincial meeting with the Premier, the Provinces' Chief Medical Officer and the Minister of Health. Brief notes of the Tele-Town Hall meeting are available on the synod website.
- The Area Gatherings scheduled for later this spring have been cancelled.
- Bishop Larry updated us on his work with the LWF – Lutheran World Federation, although much of this work is being undertaken via zoom and many future face to face meetings have been cancelled.
- Bishop Larry reported of his ongoing connection with Bishop Atahualpa and our sisters and brothers in Columbia and with Brian Rude in El Salvador as the situation changes in those countries. We were urged to continue to pray for these partners in ministry especially amid their changing circumstances as well.
- Marg Daly, Administrative Assistant at the Synod Office has concluded her work with the Synod. Marg has served in this capacity for 1 ½ years. We thank her for her good work and wish her well in her future endeavors.
- Bishop Larry presented the names of three candidates who are in their final stages of preparing for a call and ordination.
- Bishop Larry also brought forward the names of rostered leaders who have requested changes to their status on the Synod roster. Some requests were for retirement while others were for a continuation of their leave from call.
- A recommendation was introduced for Ponder Anew: Beyond 2020. This will be modelled on the previous Ponder Anew events with the addition of a sixth gathering in Grande Prairie. The proposal was approved, and we will continue to monitor the current health situation to determine if these can be hosted this fall.
- Much work that has been done to revise and update the Synod website. Additional room for more of our ministries has been added along with a new and fresh layout.

Reverend John Lentz, Chair of the Council's Constitution and Bylaw Review Committee brought forward the revised constitutions for two congregations that have been reviewed by their committee. These two

constitutions were approved by Synod Council. Terms of reference for this Council Committee were presented and approved for inclusion in our governance manual.

In order to address ongoing financial concerns for the Synod, a Resource Generation Task Force has been created. The terms of reference for this task force were presented and approved.

The Bishop's Performance Review Committee met to review the written and verbal responses Bishop Larry provided to the questions posed to him. The committee was very appreciative of the work that the Bishop does on behalf of the Synod, noting particularly his leadership to the Synod, the quick response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the continuous focus and progress on the mission priorities, his positive and prayerful outlook for the entire Synod family, and for his thankful spirit that governs everything he does.

Future meeting dates were determined although circumstances may dictate that additional meetings via zoom may have to be called. The fall Synod Council retreat will be held September 18 – 20, 2020, with the spring retreat scheduled for March 18-20, 2021. And looking ahead, Synod Convention has been scheduled for the University of Alberta - Augustana Campus, Camrose for July 15-17, 2021.