

Minutes for the
SYNOD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

August 24, 2021

Via Zoom

Present: Bishop Susan Canda, Nancy Nagel (Vice President), Scott Schulte (Treasurer), Rev. Chad Langdon (Secretary), Rev. David Frerichs, Dallas Rakestraw, and Joanie Saltzman

CALL TO ORDER

At 7:00pm Nancy opened the meeting by reading Romans 8:27-28 and with a prayer.

HILLSIDE COMMUNITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

This was a special called meeting to discuss the issue of Hillside Community Lutheran in Spring Hill, KS. Prior to the meeting, Bishop Canda & Bishop's Associate Rev. Dave Whetter send out a written summary of their meeting with Hillside Community Lutheran that happened on August 22, 2021.

Bishop Canda gave us a verbal summary of her thoughts & reactions to the meeting. She said that there are 2 primary issues that need to be addressed:

- 1) They have a person filling the pulpit who has been denied candidacy. Aaron Heilman has been hired as the "Director of Ministries" and has been preaching on a weekly basis. His sermons & theology are not consistent with the beliefs & practices of the ELCA, which is why he was denied candidacy. At the meeting there was a show of hands and the congregation clearly wants Aaron to be their pastor.
- 2) They have not been following their constitution. There are no council meeting minutes from all of 2021. They have recently had a congregational meeting that did not follow the by-laws for publicizing or holding it. At that meeting they elected two council members in an election that did not follow the constitutional guidelines. The next week they had another election to add a third council member, and this process also did not follow the constitution. All three new council members appear to be friends & close allies of Aaron Heilman.

The Bishop told us that it was a contentious meeting on August 22. They accused her of not being honest or forthright. They do not seem to want to recognize her authority or be part of the ELCA anymore.

From 2013-2017, Hillside Community Lutheran received \$70,000 in grants from the ELCA Churchwide. It is unclear how much they received before or after that, but we do have documentation of at least \$70,000. Per the stipulations of the grant money, if they disaffiliate from the ELCA, they will be required to pay this back in full.

We also know that they still owe about \$226,000 on their mortgage. It is unclear what their current property is valued at.

The Executive Committee discussed the possibilities that lay before us and them.

The Bishop laid out two basic questions that we need to answer:

- 1) How much time, effort, and emotional energy do we want to spend on people who are antagonistic and do not want to be affiliated with or follow the processes of the ELCA?
- 2) What is our role as we possibly go down the legal process of disaffiliation with them?

It was noted that they will likely need to hire an attorney if they want to fight things or go beyond the processes laid out in their constitution.

It was asked if we can maybe find middle ground as soon as possible? Would they maybe be agreeable to leave the ELCA sooner if the cost of disaffiliation wasn't so high?

The financial issue is really with ELCA Churchwide, but it is probably on us (as the Synod Council) to work out a deal with them.

It was asked that if we don't find a way to let them out the door, are we going to be stuck with underwater assets? If everyone leaves the congregation or if the congregation ceases to be able to operate, it reverts to administration by the Synod Council. If they owe more on the property than what it's worth, will we be assuming a financial burden that we don't want to bear?

Someone noted that we seem to be left with 2 choices:

- 1) We can highly encourage them to disaffiliate.
- 2) Or, we can go in & take over administration of the congregation. (This would be the more hostile option, although it is permitted by the synod constitution.)

NEXT STEPS

The next steps seem to be to write them a letter that includes the steps that they need to take to disaffiliate, and outlining the financial consequences of this action. They will need to work out these financial obligations with the ELCA Churchwide and come to a repayment agreement with them. Otherwise we will have no choice but to implement a takeover. A letter should also say that we can help them follow the constitution and negotiate with ELCA Churchwide, but we do need to ensure that all votes, meetings and process are valid and according to their constitution. This will likely mean that we will send observers to the necessary congregational meetings where these things are decided.

The Bishop will also continue conversation with Tom Cunniff, the attorney for the ELCA. Per his legal guidance, she will draft a letter and follow up with the rest of the Synod Executive Committee before she sends it.

ADJOURNMENT

Nancy adjourned the meeting at 8:07pm.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Rev. Chad Langdon
Central States Synod Secretary*