

Minutes from the
SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING
August 1, 2022
Via Zoom

Present: Bishop Susan Canda, Nancy Nagel (Vice President), Scott Schulte (Treasurer), Rev. Chad Langdon (Secretary), Ben Bennight, Susan Boxberger, Rev. Janice Hawley, Rev. David Frerichs, Joanie Saltzman, Tullia Hamilton, Chelsea Deines, Mindy Tillberg, Dallas Rakestraw, Terrance Freeman

Absent: Rev. David Strommen

Also present: Rev. David Whetter, Bishop's Associate

This is a special called meeting to address the situations with at Hillside Community in Spring Hill, KS and Bethany Lutheran in Webster Groves, MO. Proper notification was given and a quorum was present.

CALL TO ORDER

7:00 Nancy opened with prayer and introductions.

HILLSIDE COMMUNITY

Bishop Canda summarized the current situation with Hillside Community Lutheran. Hillside owes the ELCA \$94,000. The lawyers of all in the interested parties have worked out an agreement in mediation. The ELCA is willing to reduce the debt to \$60,000 with \$15,000 as a down payment and the remaining amount paid annually over the next 15 years, securing the debt to the mortgage on their building. Payments are due on January 31 of each year; they will have 45 days before we can foreclose for lack of payment. They also want the Synod Council to approve their disaffiliation within 30 days of the deposit of the down payment and signed agreement. We essentially have two options before us:

- Option A – The Synod Council could approve their disaffiliation contingent on the deposit of funds and signed agreement so once we have those things, they are out of the ELCA
- Option B – The Synod Council could wait to see and read through the signed agreement and then call another special meeting to vote on approval of their disaffiliation.

SC 22.08.01.A64 It was MSC (Scott, Mindy) to approve the disaffiliation of Hillside Community from the ELCA pending a receipt of the approved agreement and the initial amount of payment specified.

BETHANY LUTHERAN

Prior to the meeting, Bishop Canda sent out a written summary of the events to date. Bethany Lutheran has not worshipped together in over 2 years. They have not paid their pastor, Rev. Stephen Starr, since February 2020. The bishop was alerted of this situation just after Easter and has been actively involved with them ever since.

Bishop Canda brought the Synod Council up to date on the latest events, including communications with the congregation, the pastor, the pastor's family, and Churchwide. The Synod Executive

Committee has recommended invoking S13.24 of the constitution for Bethany Lutheran (SEC 22.07.19.A63).

The Synod Council discussed the options before us and the various ramifications of possible decisions.

SC 22.08.01.A65 It was MSC (Dallas, Susan) to adopt the following resolution concerning Bethany Lutheran Church in Webster Groves, MO:

**Resolution of the Central States Synod Council of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Re: Bethany Lutheran Church, Webster Groves, MO**

Whereas:

- 1. The Synod Council of the Central States Synod met on August 1, 2022 at a special called meeting to discuss the situation at Bethany Lutheran Church in Webster Groves, MO. Proper notice was given for this special meeting and there was a quorum present.**
- 2. Bishop Susan Candeia was informed by a member of Bethany on Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022 via an e-mail that no worship services or activities had taken place at the congregation since March of 2020.**
- 3. Subsequent phone calls to the Pastor, Rev. Steven Starr, and Council President, Robert Willman, revealed that no worship, either in person or on-line had taken place in the past two years, nor had there been any council meetings or annual meetings. There exists no functioning council of at least 8 people as required by their constitution. The pastor had not been paid for two years, but there was no clarity about who and why that decision was made.**
- 4. At a meeting with Bishop Candeia and seven members of the congregation, with the pastor joining by phone, on May 25, 2022, all but one member agreed that it was time to close the congregation, recognizing that they could no longer fulfill their purpose as a church. Wanting to make sure all members were informed, an additional meeting was scheduled for June 30, 2022. At that time a "straw" vote was taken, but no member of the congregation took minutes. Another meeting was scheduled for July 10, 2022, and a "vote" was taken without adherence to the constitutional requirements to call such a special meeting, giving proper notification and verification that those voting were voting members.**
- 5. The pastor is unable to resume ministry responsibilities due to health concerns because of Covid 19 and unwilling to resign his call.**

6. Concerns have been expressed to the mayor's office of Webster Groves by neighbors concerning the vacant church building which currently has an individual living in the basement.
7. The synod council has determined that the membership of the congregation has become so scattered or so diminished in numbers that it cannot provide required governance or that it has become impractical for the congregation to fulfill the purposes which it was organized. (S13.24d)

Now, therefore be it resolved that the synod council of the Central States Synod,

1. The Synod Council invoke S13.24 of the constitution - *The Synod Council itself or through trustees appointed by it, may take charge and control of the property of a congregation of this synod to hold, manage, and convey on behalf of this synod, if any of the following apply: (see above S13.24d)*
2. The Synod Council close the congregation of Bethany Lutheran Church in Webster Groves effective October 1, 2022 which will end the call of the pastor.
3. The Synod Council authorize the bishop to appoint trustees, one of whom will be a member of Bethany Lutheran Church, to oversee the closure of the congregation as well as the disposition of the building and property. All funds from Bethany Lutheran Church will be transferred to the synod to manage the property until such decisions are made.
4. The synod council informs the remaining members of Bethany Lutheran Church that they have until October 1, 2022 to inform the bishop's office in writing if they wish to appeal this decision at the next synod assembly as provided by the constitutional provision (*The congregation shall have the right to appeal any such decision to the next synod assembly.*) If no such intention to appeal is received, the synod council will proceed with disposing of the property.
5. The bishop work with the remaining members to:
 - a. Disperse church items, such as artwork, historical items, church records, and receive input regarding the assets of the congregation
 - b. To schedule a closing service and celebration of ministry

FURTHER DISCUSSION

We had a brief discussion of what it would like to help prepare congregations for closing and be more proactive with congregations that are struggling, so that we can possibly avoid in the future situations similar to what both of these congregations have gone through.

CLOSING

Janice closed us in prayer and Nancy adjourned the meeting at 8:35pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Chad Langdon
Secretary of the Central States Synod