

EASTERN DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2015

St. Paul Lutheran Church, North Tonawanda, New York

SPECIAL MEETING - VISITATION OF THE SYNODICAL PRESIDENT

Voting Directors Present: Mark Erbelding; Deaconess Jacqueline Duke; Claire Carlson; Terry Miller; Melissa Fultz; Rev. Carl Prostka; Maureen Grunder; Bradley Dreier; Rev. Daniel Strussenberg; Rev. Murray Brindle; Rev. Chris Wicher; Gordon Tresch, ESQ.; Rev. Karl Haeussler.

Voting Directors Absent: Jacqui Green and Rev. John Pingel.

Guests: Rick Porter; Jim Brese; Rev. Matthew Harrison (President, Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod); Rev. Christopher Esget (Sixth Vice President, Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod).

Meeting called to order by President Wicher at 9:03 a.m.

Opening Devotion was given by President Wicher. He gave general guidelines on giving devotions to the Board. His devotion centered on the theme of our recent District Convention, "Proclaim Him (Jesus) from the Rooftops" (Matthew 10:27). He encouraged us to do this as a Board and in our lives, and to encourage those whom we represent in our District to do the same. He reference Psalm 147 and explained the active power of the Word of the Lord for our Board and for our lives.

Visitation of the Synodical President to the Eastern District. President Wicher introduced President Matthew Harrison and Vice President Christopher Esget to the Board. He then turned to meeting over to President Harrison. President Harrison asked each member to introduce themselves. He himself shared his biographical information with the Board. He then gave to each Board member a binder containing many documents and data containing information about the Synod, her Districts, and many of our Missions and Ministry. Some of the points brought up during this time were as follows:

* The purpose of his visit is to get to know the Eastern District better and to facilitate our working together in Mission and Ministry. He is encouraging each District to take a closer look at itself, especially how it functions, its purpose and goals along with how to achieve those goals.

* He led a review of "Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony (1528). He then noted that District were founded for the primary reason that the Synod had grown to the point where the Synodical President could not longer visit each congregation during the triennium.

* He noted that ecclesiastical supervisors spend far too much time with congregations that are experiencing a time of crisis. Visitations should be done when all is going well with a congregation.

* President Harrison addressed the recent Supreme Court decision concerning gay marriage. He is confident that, over time, we will win the court of public debate. Until then, there are concerns about our universities losing federal money given for students loans. Some good news is that where our Synod is divided over issues such as forms of worship, these pressure will work to unite us in the strong foundation of our Confessions and in our Christ-like love for one another.

* He stated how the faith is growing dramatically in Africa. He shared how leaders there are coming to us for help in getting organized. (President Wicher shared information about our District Mission in Liberia.) President Harrison gave the encouraging news that our Mission presence is increasing throughout the world.

* President Harrison observed the good news that our Seminaries are healthy and in the black (though their present incoming classes are smaller), the movement among Pastors to fill vacancies is better, the Concordias are financially healthy, and that after years of decline our parochial schools are showing signs of rebounding.

* He made comments about a task force examining the issue of great student debt of all too many Seminarians. It has been learned that most of this debt was incurred before entering Seminary. Efforts are presently underway to provide financial counseling beginning with Concordia students who are on track for Seminary.

* A question was raised by a Board member about the Synod wide discussion about licensed Lay Deacons. President Harrison stated that he only wants those who are Ordained or on track to toward Ordination to be able to preach and administer the sacraments at any congregation. Synod is working on a process to oversee this properly. He shared that he has been received complaints from both sides of this issue. One of the Board members stated the great benefit licensed Lay Deacons have been to many of the congregations of our District and that those need is only going to be greater. (There are presently 12 licensed Lay Deacons in the Eastern District.)

* Responding to a question about the ramifications of gay marriage issues for our churches. President Wicher referenced the recent District Pastors' Conference featuring William Huseman, legal counsel for the Florida - Georgia District. He suggested that we talk to our schools and preschools about setting policies along with counseling them on what to expect and how to respond.

* President Harrison strongly believes that one of the major reasons for our Synod's declining population is our low birth rate, that we are not even replacing ourselves. Board members also mentioned that lose most of our youth during college, and that when kids reach Confirmation they have been secularized - if they even come to Confirmation.

* President Harrison present "Top 10 Important Findings" from the information in the binders. Some of them were as follows:

+ While there has been an overall decline in membership, we have more congregations.

- + There is an increase in giving, yet the average age of a member is much older.
- + The style of worship doesn't seem to affect attendance. Whatever you do, do it well.
- + There is an increase in the number of parish pastors.
- + The Eastern District has shown decline in all areas over the past 40 years (as have the state of New York and the commonwealth of Pennsylvania).
- + Overall, the Synod is in good financial shape. Internal indebtedness has been paid off and the university debt has been reduced significantly.

In closing, President Harrison thanked us for what we do. Even though the times are challenging, he asked us to remember that the Lord is with us always and is always working all things for good.

Lunch. The Board recessed for lunch at 12:14 p.m. We went to eat at Fairways, part of the nearby Deerwood Golf Course in North Tonawanda. The blessing was given by Rev. Ernest R. Green III, Associate Pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church.

Respectfully submitted in service to the Lord and His Church,

Rev. Karl W. Haeussler
Secretary, Eastern District, Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod