

EASTERN DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

**Christ Memorial Lutheran Church-Malvern, PA
Friday October 2, 2020**

Attending: Chris Wicher, Carl Prostka, Carl Fretthold, Cyndi Alviani, John Pingel, Brian Smith, Susan Bell, Jon Allen, Garrett Nash, Jim Carr, Dan Hahn, Terry Miller, Fred Hoover, Melissa Fultz. (via Zoom: Mark Erbeding. Guests: Barb Williams & Barb Sigafos)

Meeting called to order at 1:07pm

Opening Devotion [Hahn] Dan shared a devotion based on Isaiah – “Here am I, send me.” At a 1989 sermon he heard from the preacher-in the midst of all the triumphs of democracy like the fall of the Berlin Wall-“the future is not in democracy, but in the monarch, for the King of Kings is born.” As Isaiah shared, “I see the Lord, high and lifted up.” God is still king, determining all things according to his eternal plan and for the good of his church. A second vision is that of Christ, high & lifted upon the cross”, reigning as king (with a sign to prove it), but not in the glory of majesty, but in the glory of mercy. The future IS in the monarchy of Christ!

Motion to approve the agenda by Terry Miller, second by Carl Fretthold. Motion approved

Board Sharing

Board Business [Carr]

- **Approval of Minutes**
 - **May 8 (Zoom) BOD Motion to approve by Susan Bell, second by Cyndi Alviani. Motion approved.**
 - **August 13 (Zoom) Special Meeting (Pioneer Loan & Reversionary Clause waiver) Motion to approve by Carl Prostka , Second by Carl Fretthold. Motion approved.**
- **Approval of Agenda (see above)** Dan Hahn asked if there would be time to add new items, especially considering President Wicher’s letter of intent. Information (i.e. Job Descriptions for any nominations) can be posted on the district website. President Wicher will explain the general elections process in his report.

PRESIDENT HARRISON VISITATION.

The Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, President-LCMS, is our district guest as he does every 3 years, this time only with the Board of Directors. (Joined also by Rev. Christopher Esget, the Eastern Region Vice President.) Dr. Harrison introduced the rationale for the visitation, tracing back to Luther’s Saxony visitation. Dr. Harrison responded to questions submitted, addressing his support and concern for the CVA lawsuits, the

increasing number of pastoral vacancies, Congregations & COVID-19. With regard to the latter, those congregations facing closure were those in consideration of the same before the pandemic; however, many gave positive feedback on the Synod/District support of them in the crisis. Approximately 70% of churches now report they've offered online services since the advent of the pandemic, though many uncertainties remain. Youth Outreach was another concern addressed to our Youth Ministry head. We face great losses, but we retain one of the highest percentage (perhaps 60-70%) of post-college students. It's important that they're invited into relationship and leadership within the congregation; with most reporting an interest in relationship over program. Top challenges we face: (1) COVID-19 & its long-term results (will people choose to remain online rather than attend in-person) (2) Church workers' well-being, (we're funding resources such as Doxology, Grace Places, Soldiers of the Cross, etc.), (3) Oppressive culture/secularism/racism/economic stress in the church. It's difficult to see Christians opposing one another without listening, especially on social media. We do, though, have the Gospel and God's promises and we are Christ's church. Jon Allen affirmed the value of Sabbaticals and encouraged further support for church workers in these. The "system pastor" (going through the educational system of the church from grade schools to synodical colleges & seminaries) process is undergoing changes, especially as education is becoming more difficult across the nation. Enrollment is up at the seminaries (50-Ft. Wayne, 60-St. Louis.) and an endowment at St. Louis helps to ensure the future. Bi-vocational training is certainly not the norm at the seminaries, but is a need at the district level. Regarding shared congregational ministries, there are concerns about expanding the ability of churches to vote, but this would require a constitutional change since we historically follow the one-church, one-pastor model of representation. President Wicher shared that churches would like to have input at the convention. Responding to racism: many conversations are going on, with black pastors providing input. We need to be prepared to respond to accusations of racism, hearing and providing a biblically-based response. Regarding District-Synod relationship, it seems we are able to work together and move beyond ourselves, especially in times of disaster. Synod & District should be communicating when working locally (i.e.. starting missions) for the sake of cooperation. New ministries in the district could best be facilitated by a joint protocol. The structure of Synod which allows for greater global mission, with local work being conducted in Districts, is large, but much work needs to occur by requirements of our constitution. President Harrison opened for Q & A. Terry Miller, from a shared ministry, shared concern about representation to the synod. President Harrison suggested Terry (the Board) contact Sec'y John Sias for clarification on this as a ByLaws consideration. Jon Allen raised a concern about local congregations not feeling the support on a district & synod level. Dan Hahn shared a concern about the synod organizing itself for division, citing departures of congregations into non-geographic districts. Vice President Esget shared an experience of healing through disaster that occurred within his present congregation, where unity was restored. He urged churches to encourage youth and to support sabbaticals. Dan Hahn closed our time in prayer.

Break: 3:43pm

PRESIDENT'S REPORT [Wicher]

President Wicher summarized his written report and began with a question about the Pioneer Event & the All District Worship & Conference. Eastern District: 32,700 baptized, 25,800 communicants: 123 congregations, 8 Christian Day Schools, 47 Preschools. We are 4 regions, 16 visitation circuits of which 7 qualify as electoral circuits. 17 calling congregations, 15 partnerships.

Constitutional changes:

Motion to approve constitution of Ascension Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh by Susan Bell, second by Dan Hahn. Motion approved.

Bread of Life in Rome, NY needs significant review. St. Matthew North Tonawanda needs substantial restructuring. Prof. Church Workers' Conference will feature a District-Wide worship.

District Section affirmation requires action of the Board. Each region has 2 lay directors, attempting to balance the number of circuits equally.

Motion to affirm the sections for representation as presented by Dan Hahn second by Carl Prostka. Motion approved.

If the new circuit configuration is approved, the BOD may need to meet at convention to approve new (updated at convention) sections.

CVA Lawsuits update: we're now named in 4 lawsuits, all from 1982 or before (2 from mid-1960s). We're not insured for these, but represented by Julia Hilliker of the Hodgson Russ Legal Firm. First case goes to court January 2022.

District Staff Transitions are proceeding with one surprise. Significant changes have occurred since Chris came on-board as District President: several positions have been eliminated. Summer of 2021 Bob will leave the position of IT & Communications. His responsibilities will converge to Lyle or become a new hire (10hrs/week), but someone who knows the district. Lyle Heggemeier will remain, but next year we will eliminate NCD, keep his other roles and possibly add IT & Communications. Kathy Fretthold's position (Education) is unchanged. Positions unchanged: Mary Ellen Sima (Admin. Ass't to D.P.) leaves at the end of this calendar year (Dec. 31, 2020). Ruth Marzano will take over Mary Ellen's position while the office administrative assistant role is eliminated as of January 1, 2020. Barb Sigafos retires October 1, 2021 & office manager position will be eliminated in favor of hiring a 10-15hr/week Bookkeeper and Building Manager. Auxiliary Staff: Rick Porter (LCEF) will transition to primarily working at home. Bob Wirth (LCMS Foundation & District Counselor) is leaving next year with no replacement. Rich Paul (LCMS Foundation Counselor Trainer) is leaving with no replacement. Beginning January 1st, it's possible that only Chris Wicher and Ruth Marzano will remain in the office, which is of concern to our District President.

2021 PROPOSED DISTRICT BUDGET [Barb Sigafos, Chris Wicher, Barb Williams]

Financially we're doing okay. Congregational contributions are down, but starting to pick up. Cash flow is good, mostly due to the PPP loan, which has kept us afloat. (By the way, our District has 10 men attending the seminary at this time!) The preliminary budget has been presented, and we'll delay based on congregational commitments. Our next budget is about \$6,000 less than last year with many internal changes, especially with staff transitions. No major changes beyond staff. The District President will begin at "new DP scale." Moving expenses for the new DP will be covered, but will be reflected in the budget.

Audit: Thanks to Barb Williams for assisting Pioneer with the books; as a result of her work, Pioneer had no issues or missing pieces on the District side. Pioneer's 2019 deficit was \$232,000. Audit report was received by the Board with thanks. Barb Williams noted that some of Pioneer's losses crept into the district side, but the 2020 statement will move over to the Pioneer side. Also, the structure of the property sold in Rochester (St. Matthew's) held us up, but is now fixed.

Motion to adjourn by Carl Prostka, second by Car Fretthold

Meeting Adjourned at 5:05pm

Meeting called to order, Saturday, October 3 at 8:44am

MORNING DEVOTION [Fultz] Melissa shared her new Thomas Kinkade Bible as compared to her personal (falling-apart!) Bible, seeking descriptors from the Board. Perhaps the church focuses on the new & improved (people, technology) and overlook what has been there (e.g. seniors). In COVID, many older people have missed out for lack of technology or familiarity with the new. It's important that our churches include them. "Now that I'm old and gray, don't forsake me 'til I tell of your power to the new generation." (Psalm 71:18) Psalm 92 reminds us that "they shall still bear fruit in their old age" ...like my old, torn-up Bible. Bear in mind that even as we age, we will still bear fruit for the Lord and for the benefit of others.

CIRCUIT RECONFIGURATION UPDATE

Chris shared a handout with 2 options – Option B being the most familiar, presented last May. Feedback was received; for example, the numbers of congregations are very tight, meaning there would be further reconfiguration. As a result, we looked at stronger numbers – option C suggests "super" circuits (11) with 2,000-2,300 members. These regions could organize into smaller units, with the Circuit Visitor appointing someone to assist as needed. This proposal will return in February after for approval before the convention; in the interim, President Wicher will communicate these with circuits.

2021 DISTRICT CONVENTION UPDATE

The Board reviewed the prescriptions outlined for conventions outlined in the Synod Handbook. COVID has raised the question of a virtual convention, especially since some areas are not allowing large gatherings. The Commission on Constitutional Matters responding that conventions must be held in-person within the 2020 calendar year; otherwise, no convention could be held and all elected officials would be asked to remain for another term. Among the Council of Presidents, approximately 25 (out of 35) indicated they preferred a one-day convention. Our planning committee has begun, and realized the need for COVID safeguards. Synod Secretary shared that voting and overtures must be done in convention (in person), with other items being done differently. The Board needs to take action as to which direction our convention will move: 1 day or 2 day. The committee recommendation is one day, with delegates strongly advised to be under age 65, and 36 sq. feet per delegate.

Jon Allen moved we have a 1 day in-person convention on a Saturday, second by Carl Prostka. Motion passed.

Meeting to adjourn at 10:07am

Meeting Evaluation and Board Calendar [Carr]

FUTURE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS:

February 19 & 20, 2021 – First Trinity, Tonawanda
May 7 & 8, 2021 - Salem, Buffalo

June 11 & 12, 2021 – District Convention @ First Trinity, Tonawanda
August (19), 20 & 21, 2021 – Orientation for New and Returning Board (with VPs
and CVs)

Motion to adjourn by Jim Carr, second by John Pingel. Motion approved.

Closing Prayer [Fultz]