

EASTERN DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES FRIDAY MAY 7 – SATURDAY MAY 8, 2021

Faith Lutheran Church 2576 Browncroft Blvd. Penfield, NY 14625

Attending: Chris Wicher, Mark Erbelding, Dan Hahn, Jon Allen, Brian Smith, Terry Miller, Garrett Nash, Susan Bell, John Pingel, Cyndi Alviani, Carl Prostka, Jim Carr, Carl Fretthold (Friday only), **Excused: Fred Hoover, Melissa Fultz**

OPENING DEVOTION [Erbelding]

Mark shared his experience of watching “The Chosen”, a crowd-funded production that depicts the life of Christ and the choosing of the 12. “Get used to different” is what Jesus said (video clip) to Peter when he invited Matthew. Jesus did things differently and we’ve recently become accustomed to living with “different” in the pandemic. We’re meant to be agents of change in a world that needs to be changed. (Acts speaks of “these men who have turned the world upside down.”) As the Psalms say, things and people will perish but God remains the same. The message we share remains the same, but the strategy is different. Paul spoke of becoming all things to all people in order to save some; he met people where they were, he adapted and became like them-maximizing his effort in order to win them with the Gospel. Are we willing to change in order to likewise reach the most people with the Gospel?

BOARD BUSINESS [Erbelding]

- **Meeting called to order**, at 1:15pm
- **Roll call** was conducted by the secretary with result noted above
- **Approval of Minutes.** Motion to approve the Feb. 19 minutes by Dan Hahn, seconded by Carl Prostka. Approved. Motion to approve minutes of the Feb. 26 special meeting by Susan Bell, seconded by Terry Miller. Approved. Motion to approve the March 4 Executive Session minutes by Jon Allen, seconded by Jim Carr. Approved.
- **Approval of Agenda.** Motion to approve by Susan Bell, seconded by Jim Carr. Approved.

PRESIDENT’S REPORT [Wicher]

Stats Chris shared that we’re below 6,000 congregations in LCMS, 1.8million baptized, 1.4million confirmed (which is consistently dropping. District is currently 121 congregations with 31,960 baptized and 25,475 communicant members, 26 active commissioned ministers, 99 active ordained pastors and about 160 total with emeritus.

Pastoral Vacancies and Interims: Chris noted the 11 vacancies (and their respective pastoral support) of which 10 are calling. There are 5 congregations not in a position to call at this time, the 14 congregations served by Deacons or on a part-time basis, the 14 partnership (comprising 29 congregations), and two satellite congregations.

Installation of Joshua Obermann took place at Calvary-Murrysville, PA.

Candidates: Donn Woolweber (Bethel-Glenshaw & Zion-Pittsburgh, PA), Jake Bellinghausen to Grace-Vestal, NY. Number of candidates is lower and will climb in the coming years.

CVA (Child Victims Act) lawsuits: A brief summary was given about current attorney engagement, with more interaction expected as the process continues. Hodgson-Ross is our primary defense attorney. The first case is in the deposition phase.

2021 Eastern District Convention has been scheduled for June 17-18, 2022. Hotels, banquet, voting system are all in place and congregations have been notified for nominations, etc. Assessment letters were sent.

LEO (Leadership Enhancement Opportunities) have been well-received. These are monthly gatherings of congregational leaders on a given topic.

District staff (whole) now meets monthly, with senior staff biweekly, and a new part-time (16hrs) receptionist-Cheryl Grzyski-has been hired.

Fall Conferences include Pastors' (Nov. 1-3) and Educators' (Nov. 3-5) at Notre Dame Retreat Center in Canandaigua, NY. Theme is "Work Hard, Rest Well" with Dean Nadasdy as keynote speaker on "Bold, Biblical, Timeless Preaching" capturing the values shifts & trends and how these challenges impact preaching.

District Zoom Gatherings were held regularly since the advent of COVID, allowing workers and laity to meet, discuss relevant topics and share concerns. While on summer hiatus, they will resume in September and we will begin Zoom visitation with all our congregations to survey and hear from them (perceived & long-term needs) by end of January and present a report for the next District President.

Bread of Life Lutheran, a small congregation in Rome, NY (a spin-off of St. John's Lutheran-Rome) submitted their constitution-approved by the Board of Directors in Feb. 2021-and has signed the Synod's Constitution and ByLaws, allowing them to be received.

Motion to receive Bread of Life Lutheran Church in Rome into membership of the Eastern District, LCMS by Jon Allen, second by Jim Carr. Approved.

Bethlehem, PA is the home of an ELCA congregation that has invited the District President to learn about our LCMS (among other bodies).

Peter & Stephanie Johnson, our new Communications and Networking Specialists are in the process of updating our District Website.

St. John's Lutheran School in North Tonawanda was recently accredited (an accomplishment!) with the assistance of Kathy Fretthold. District would like to offer schools about 50% of the accreditation cost.

Sabbatical: Brian asked about the previously-approved Sabbatical for the District President. He will plan some extra down time with family this summer, but the approved sabbatical will not be used. Jon shared concerns about Pastors that are

feeling COVID fatigue and encourages congregations to consider the needs of their pastors.

(Break)

BOARD BUSINESS, [Wicher]

- **Financial Report** was submitted by Barb Sigafos, with a typical budget deficit. Audit report will likely be ready in June. Loan forgiveness is expected for our PPP Loan. Applications are being received for scholarships and church worker student debt retirement. Pioneer loans will be satisfied upon receipt of proceeds from the sale. The St. Matthew (Rochester, NY) 10-year loan is still held by the District.
- **District Needs List:** In consideration of the pending sale of Pioneer, Chris shared a needs list for the District for the Board's consideration that would amount to approximately \$100,000. The needs would include legal fees, scholarships, accreditations, building improvements, equipment upgrades, reception area, 10% gift to Concordia Cares Program, and EIIT (Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology) in which we have a man from Trinity-Deaf in Pittsburgh who plans to participate in the program. Synod expects District would pay 1/3 of the program, though his particular bill may be completely underwritten. (Separate from Pioneer: LCEF operation results mean about \$40,000 for the District, which would go toward the debt retirement program, Pastors' Wives Retreat and Ministry Clarity Process.

Jon & Jim asked about the District Office building (suggested renovations/ADA compliance); however, the District President has determined to leave this decision to the next District President in case other uses may be made for the space. Hunt Realty indicated we might be able to draw \$35,000 from renting the first floor. (Dan suggested we host day 2 of the Feb. 2022 meeting at the District Office.)

Mark asked about scholarships, which Chris explained are determined from conventions.

- **Circuit Reconfiguration** was presented. The hope in moving from 16 to 11 Electoral Circuits is that they would be the same as Visitation Circuits. Due to increasing geographic requirements, we're suggesting a Circuit Visitor might be able to appoint a representative with the permission of the District President. Proposed changes to the circuits are required in order to meet the requirements of LCMS ByLaws for purposes of representation and voting at (synod) conventions: at least 7 churches, 1,500 members.

**Motion by Dan Hahn, seconded by Susan Bell, to propose the circuit reconfiguration plan for action at the 2022 District Convention.
Approved.**

- **Board Governing Policies,** Moving forward, it will be necessary to review our policies (which began 2 years ago and was delayed by COVID). Jon, Dan, Brian, Garrett, Jim, Chris and Mark were part of this process which has been facilitated

by Rick Porter. Mark recommends we energize this effort by the Fall meeting of the Board.

Dan asked a question about the LCMS Statistical Report for attendance. Brian shared that according to the Office of Rosters and Statistics, only those worshipping live at the church are to be counted.

**Motion to adjourn by Brian Smith, seconded by Terry Miller.
Approved.**

CLOSING PRAYER – [Erbelding]

- **Saturday, May 8, 2021, 9am**

DEVOTION [Wicher]

Chris spoke of God's call to mothers, sharing the story of Athaliah-daughter of Jezebel who claimed the throne in Judah after the murder off her husband, Joram.. She put to death the royal family to prevent others taking her power. Jehosheba, however, was faithful and hid away her nephew Joash, who would be placed on the throne. Lessons? God was at work. Jehosheba rescued the royal family & preserve the line of Jesus. Sometimes you can't save everybody and everything, but she saved the one who over generations would save all.

Meeting called to order at 9:22am

BOARD BUSINESS

- **Pioneer Sale Update:** The Friends & Concordia are working out the final (insurance) detail on their end. Jay Pohlman is preparing to present the sale to the NYS Attorney General for review & approval. The check may be in-hand by end of June. Cyndi noted that Friends of Pioneer has gone public with news of its interactions with Concordia, but until we have further information, there's no need to make a public announcement. We have 1,200 donor letters ready to mail and an e-Blast (2,400 recipients) on the ready. Cyndi raised a question about the use of the name; Dan suggested "Pioneer on the Lake" has been mentioned online.
- **Restructuring *Pioneer, Inc.* ByLaws.** The Board reviewed the key points of the June 2020 resolution about the sale of Pioneer Camp and Retreat Center. *"To hold and steward net assets until such time as the Members determine and give direction"* will be a next step in this process; in short, the assets from Pioneer cannot be distributed apart from the decision of the Members. Rick Porter & Chris Wicher met to propose new ByLaws for Pioneer, Inc. in order to facilitate this next step. The proposal would allow the Eastern District Board of Directors to release control of decisions to this new and smaller organization, which would henceforth oversee the funds and make decisions about distributions. In order to accomplish this, we'll need to make changes to the Eastern District ByLaws which would sever the Board's ties to Pioneer Camp and Retreat Center; these changes would be presented at the District Convention. The new organization

would expand the Members (by 3), bringing the Members from 15 to 18, at which point we approve the new ByLaws, which results in the new Members of Pioneer, Inc. A special meeting will need to take place (perhaps by October) after the sale in order to facilitate this process. The District President requests the Board of Directors begin to submit names for consideration of these 3 positions.

- **Sabbaticals and Pastoral Care.** Jon Allen submitted the following proposal via email: *With the past 15 months of turmoil and uncertainty due to COVID, the lay members of the ED BOD are very concerned with the fatigue and possible burnout of the clergy and called staff within the ED. We believe that most clergy will likely not admit fatigue or burnout. However, but we strongly encourage the lay leadership of all ED churches to have frank dialogues with their clergy and called staff regarding the effects of the past 15 months on not only themselves but their families. While sabbaticals maybe not timely for a number of reasons or are not within the constitutions of ED churches, we highly recommend finding ways to give your clergy and called staff a chance for some downtime, particularly with their families. Even one or two weeks of downtime over and above this year's vacation allocation would be beneficial and demonstrate that we care for our clergy and called staff. COVID presented numerous challenges that our clergy ad called staff have never been trained for. They need time for the themselves and their families. We urge you to strongly consider finding ways to give them this needed downtime away to refresh, reconnect, and reenergize. We know that this may be a challenge for some congregations, but we believe this is important for the long-term health and well-being of your clergy and your staff.*

Sincerely,

[Names] ,Lay members - Eastern District Board of Directors.

Motion to share this respite recommendation with congregations, servant leaders and workers by Jim Carr, seconded by Cyndi Alviani. Approved

Motion to adjourn by Jon Allen, second by Susan Bell. Approved.

Meeting closed at 10:48am

Closing Prayer [Wicher]