

**THE EASTERN DISTRICT, LCMS  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MINUTES  
February 11, 2022**

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

Opening Devotion by John Pingel on Jesus' victory over satan and spiritual warfare.

Meeting Call to Order at 10:16am

**BOARD BUSINESS** [Erbelding]

Roll call was conducted by Secretary Brian Smith and is noted above.

**Motion to approve the October 2021 Minutes with corrections by Carl Fretthold, second by Carl Prostka. Motion carried**

**Motion to approve the Agenda by Jim Carr, second by Jon Allen. Motion carried.**

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT** [Wicher]

President Wicher offered a summary of his written report (submitted) with the highlights below.

**General comments:** Thanks for prayers for our family; we're doing well, God is good! John Fretthold (who replaced Barb Sigafos) has "taken a fine-toothed comb" to the finances over the past few years and has been transparent and helpful. Bruce Sutherland began this year, serving in the areas of Discipleship Development (replacing Lyle Heggemeier) and Building Management, among others. Like John, he has hit the ground running. One of the causes of good financial health in the district office has been the sacrifices made to bring us to a point of carrying no debt, with legal fees as our only major output. There are 10 calling congregations in our district, with other congregations seeking guidance. I serve in various roles (including East Coast Common Endeavor, Council of Presidents) and the convention has made for a busy schedule this year. Staff has been outstanding.

**CVA update:** To date, the Eastern District has been named in seven New York State Child Victims Act lawsuits; the window for CVA closed in August, 2021. Our attorney (Julia Hilliker of Hodgson-Ross law firm in Buffalo) commented, "This [first] case should be dismissed." This may be the case with five of the other cases. I was called for deposition, which was postponed until March, 2022. An Alternative Dispute Resolution may be pursued where the attorneys, defendants and plaintiffs enter discussions out of court. It was clear in discussions that the district has no insurance coverage (at the time) and has no responsibility in the case; Should these fail, however, court costs may prove prohibitive, which could mean consideration of an out of court accommodation (settlement) to avoid such costs. A concern was raised that such a decision might set a

precedent for future cases as an apparent admission of guilt. The Board expressed its confidence in the District President's decisions with legal counsel.

**Constitution Changes** were submitted by Our Savior (Buffalo, NY), St. Luke (Cabot, PA), St. Paul (Batavia, NY), St. John (Millvale, PA), St. Paul (Tunkhannock, NY), and St. Matthew (North Tonawanda, NY). Our Savior's was returned for minor changes to be approved by the congregation and returned to us for approval (predated) and ratification by the Board. St. Matthew's requires no board action at this time.

**A motion to approve the constitutions of Our Savior (Buffalo, NY), St. Luke (Cabot, PA), St. Paul (Batavia, NY), St. John (Millvale, PA), and St. Paul (Tunkhannock, NY) was made by Carl Prostka, second by Dan Hahn. Motion carried.**

### **Miscellaneous:**

**Pastors' Wives Retreat:** May 13-15 in Corning, NY. We hope to encourage congregations to cover the cost of \$200 for their pastor's wife to attend.

**Pastors' Conference:** Sept 26-28 at Antiochian Retreat Center in Bolivar, PA. Efforts led by Pastor Berry Keurulainen.

**LCEF Partner Plus: 2 investments** as per Board direction at the October 2021 meeting. Some has been invested, with remaining funds to be used for attorney fees.

**LCEF Enhanced Earnings Distribution application:** This annual distribution from LCEF was defined in a grant written and approved for \$44,000 to be used for various ministries, training and assistance. District will be accountable to and follow-up with LCEF.

### **BOARD BUSINESS [Erbelding]**

**John Fretthold (Financial Services):** John explained the case of fraudulent activity in our Regents Bank Account and the corrective steps that were taken. Some 17 unauthorized ACH transactions (totaling \$15,140) were identified and traced as late as July 2021. The representative at Regents who monitored our account died of COVID, so the account went unchecked. We were able (eventually) to recoup the entire \$15,140. This account was closed, with a new account opened at M&T Bank in Buffalo. We'll formalize and document the controls to be implemented.

**2022 Budget:** Contributions were down slightly from budget, but we ended well this past year. The final budget was presented to the Board in October, with a minor change of \$1,000.

**Motion to approve the 2022 Budget (as presented) by Jim Carr, second by Terry Miller. Motion carried.**

**Convention updates:** President Wicher reported that we may wish to increase the current per-communicant assessment of \$2.50 at a future meeting, perhaps an increase of \$ District changes (decreasing membership, increasing expense. \$.15-\$.25 per person). This assessment functions like a bill to cover the costs of required conferences

(pastors and teachers) and conventions, both District and Synod; revenue has been approximately \$60,000/year

Planning Team has been hard at work as well as the Nominating Committee (as of January with nominations closing on the 27<sup>th</sup>). A second notification was made to some congregations. At present, there are several nomination gaps on the Board of Directors as well as the 2025 Nominating Committee. If none are forthcoming, the filling of those gaps falls to the Board of Directors in October. Our district convention will be held at First Trinity in Tonawanda, which reduces overall costs, while (hotel) lodging is higher. One major change is lodging for delegates at the Marriott Hotel in Amherst, where the banquet will also be held. Board members are encouraged to attend at no expense as per district bylaws.

Two memorials for Board Action today (submitted). The Regulations of the Eastern District include references to Pioneer Camp and Retreat Center, which need to be removed. President Wicher submitted a Resolution to change the Regulations appropriately. A friendly amendment was made to incorporate a notation of the date and approval by the Board.

**Motion to adopt the Resolution to change the Regulations of the Eastern District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod by Dan Hahn, second by Carl Prostka. Motion carried.**

At the recent Zoom meeting for convention delegates, the District President presented information on the Circuit realignment, allowing the circuit visitor to enlist help within the circuit and empowering congregational representation to the Synod. An electoral circuit is a visitation circuit that meets the requirement set by Synod: a minimum of 7 congregations and 1,500 congregational members. A Resolution was presented by President Wicher on the realignment of circuits in the Eastern District.

**Motion to adopt the Resolution to realign the circuits of the Eastern District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod by Susan Bell, second by Jon Allen. Motion carried.**

*Break for Lunch*

**Housing Allowance:** Presented by President Wicher with explanation.

**A motion to approve the District President's 2022 Housing Allowance by Carl Prostka, second by Terry Miller. Motion carried.**

**District Policy Changes and Recommendations** (Policy Committee). Jon Allen explained the rationale and process for updating policies. The final documents will be presented to the Board for approval at the May 2022 meeting in advance of a vote at the district convention.

**Triennial Visitation Report (completed Fall of 2021):** Visitations were held virtually with (groups of congregations-about 1/3 participating) in order to listen and learn, to discuss strengths and weaknesses. COVID was significant as it kept congregations from their communities, but God's Word was not bound. Increases were noted in attendance, giving, schools. Challenges were perceived in the exit of youth and young families from the church; however, we also have exemplary congregations in these

areas. Understanding how we connect to generations will be significant. Key words on purpose of the district summarized: growth, guidance, resource, support, and protection. This report will be included in the convention workbook in the hope that the delegates, incoming District President and congregations will benefit from the insights that were shared.

**MEETING EVALUATION** [Erbelding] Zoom as meeting venue was appreciated in winter.

Our next meeting will be this particular Board's last meeting together at Salem in Buffalo, May 13-14.

Circuit Visitors, Vice Presidents and Board of Directors Orientation, tentatively August 19 and/or 20.

**Motion to adjourn by Carl Fretthold, seconded by Carl Prostka. Motion carried.**

Meeting adjourned at 1:21pm with closing prayer by Terry Miller.

### **FUTURE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS**

May 13/14, 2022 - Salem, Buffalo

August 19, 2022 – Orientation for New and Returning VPs and CVs – place TBD

August 20, 2022 – Orientation for New and Returning Directors – place TBD