Montana Synod Council Draft

February 17-18, 2023

VIA ZOOM

**February 17, 2023**

*Opening prayer by Lorrie Vennes*

Present: Bishop Laurie Jungling, VP Dick Deschamps, Secretary Doris Tollefson, Treasurer Dave Scholten, Kimberly Bloch, Lana Buerkle, Peter Erickson, Scott Hedegaard, Natasha Morton, Bonnie Novak, Charlie Parker, Celeste Pogachar, John Sheppard, Lorrie Vennes, DEM Peggy Paugh Leuzinger, A2B Brenda Frelsi.

Absent: Allan Hansen and Gretchen Wagner

Guests: none

Bishop Laurie Jungling welcomed the council members.

Vice President Dick Deschamps called the meeting to order.

**Adoption of Synod Council Agenda**

Motion

Second: Adopt the agenda with the privilege of the chair to revise.

**VOTE: SC.23.02.01 ADOPT THE AGENDA WITH THE PRIVILEGE OF THE CHAIR TO REVISE.**

Members checked in with each other and Bishop Laurie introduced the new office manager Lori Jara.

Secretary’s report

**Accept the minutes of September 16-17, 2022, meeting as written.**

Motion

Second: Approval of minutes of September 16-17, 2022, as written.

**VOTE: SC.23.02.02 ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 16-17, 2022, AS WRITTEN.**

Report of the Treasurer

Dave Scholten presented a narrative of the good news and bad news of the finances of the synod. The balance sheet remains strong and liquid, but liquidity has decreased over the past year. Cash and long-term investments decreased but some cash increased. Gifts to the synod were higher than budgeted, and administrative expenses were lower than budgeted. Total expenses were lower than budgeted, but revenue is substantially lower than budgeted and lower than historical levels. Mission support was at an all-time low. 2022 revenue minus expenses resulted in a $66,000 deficit, but strong cash surpluses from 2022 and 2021 helped weather this storm. Alternative revenue streams need to be explored in the future; the synod cannot just rely on mission support from congregations for revenue. Churchwide is moving away from relying on mission support from synods for their revenue.

Dave also presented two budgets for 2024. The proposals for 2024 are: 1) bring staff compensation up to the compensation guidelines; 2) cut administrative and overhead expenses where we can; 3) shared mission for the social ministry agencies we support; 4) program delivery, supporting our congregations and pastors; 5) reduce travel expenses to a level closer to 2022; 6) change back to a percentage for mission support rather than a fixed amount; 7) cut back in all agency and social ministry except to Rocky Boy.

The two budget proposals were presented with much discussion on each one. The 1.2 proposal of the $830,000 budget reflects the trend of declining mission support from the congregations and seems to be the one to consider. To balance the budget, cuts that need to be made especially for Agency and Social Ministry benevolence. Points to consider are: 1) Revenue to the Montana Synod is at its lowest level in the history of the Synod; 2) The Synod has reduced administrative expenses by 14% in the last five years despite recent inflation; 3) Travel expenses for Synod personnel have been reduced by 21% from 2018 levels primarily by making use of technology; 4) Program delivery costs have been cut by 45% in the past five years; 5) Compensation and Benefits are up by 6% since 2018 compared to a 19% cumulative inflation rate over this period; 6) Benevolence/Giving outside of the Synod has decreased by 22% over the past five years including: a) a 29% reduction in giving to the ELCA churchwide; b) a 19% decrease to agencies and social ministries which were based largely on how reliant the organization was/is on our donations and gifts.

**Receive Report of the Treasurer**

Motion

Second: Receive report of the Treasurer

**VOTE: SC.23.02.03 RECEIVE REPORT OF THE TREASURER**

**Accept the minutes from November 8, 2022, as written.**

Motion

Second: Accept the minutes from November 8,2022.

**VOTE: SC.23.02.04 ACCEPT THE MINUTES FROM NOVEMBER 8, 2022, AS WRITTEN.**

Reports

Bishop

In her report, Bishop Laurie Jungling updated the council that the transitions within the office staff as well as across the synod has occupied much of her time. A new office manager was hired, then let go, and another office manager was hired. During this time the search for a new Associate to the Bishop (A2B) was conducted. Pr. Brenda Frelsi began her duties as A2B on January 1, 2023, and this has been a welcome change.

In the synod, there are 34 congregations or more that do not have a pastor and aren’t even looking for one since they cannot afford to hire one. They are being served by LPA’s or SAM’s. They are 21 congregations presently that don’t have a pastor but are actively looking for one. That’s over 40% of congregations in our Synod without a pastor, congregations that often need more of the staff’s time and attention than congregations with pastors. It is important that new ways of growing and encouraging our own ministry leaders in the Montana Synod be lifted up in the clusters.

Bishop Laurie has created a video Bible study on Ephesians 4:1-16 which is almost ready to record, and she is completing a written study on the Vision, Calling, and Values document. The Bible study will go out during Lent, and the study will go out in the next few months.

As far as the state of the Synod, the Bishop stated that there is a need for pastoral leaders, and also as people come out of the “doldrums” of the pandemic, they are engaged in conversation as to how we can do ministry for this time and place and not as “we’ve always done it.” Finances are a concern, and new ways need to be explored outside of mission support without turning off the mission support faucet.

On the churchwide side of her duties, the bishop is chair of the Theological and Ethical Concerns Committee of the Conference of Bishops as well as the director of worship at Churchwide to lead a conversation among bishops about the topic of online Holy Communion. The bishop also participates as an advisory member for the Quality of Call for Women Initiative. Ecumenically, the Montana Association of Christians has dissolved, and NRIT will be receiving some money to offer ecumenical educational opportunities. The bishop has been invited to participate in a conversation with the Roman Catholics who are doing a world-wide synod listening experience.

The situation with Prince of Peace has been put on hold as transitions have taken place, but the process may get go forward this spring. The lawsuit involving the Boy Scouts has also been put on hold. There has been no movement on the pastoral or financial situation at Our Saviour’s at Rocky Boy. Options are being explored to raise funds for the physical plant needs but no word on finding a new pastor for them.

Associate to the Bishop

Associate to the Bishop Brenda Frelsi is beginning to learn about the value of the LPA’s as well as the training involved for them. Supporting, identifying mentors, and possibly organizing more training are current goals as well as calling at least one LPA per day while in the office.

The Nominating Committee is working hard to fill vacancies on committees, and travel to congregations as to other events is beginning to increase. The A2B is planning LPA 2.0 with a date and place to be determined.

Transitions: 1) Our Savior’s in Great Falls is working on the final details to extend a call; 2) Atonement in Billings has extended a call and is waiting for a reply; 3) Circle and Richey have a possible SAM for the next six months; 4) Shepherd of the Valley in Townsend and New Life in Helena are in the process of possibly sharing a pastor in the future; 5) Milk River Group is in the planning stages of shared ministry, and Broadus is working with the UCC congregation to find a pastor to share.

Director of Evangelical Mission

DEM Peggy Paugh Leutzinger continues to meet with the Stewardship Task Force nearly every month. Because of the conversations of the task force and through some other intentional conversations, listening posts in areas around the Synod may be created to engage congregational leaders and pastors in conversation. Hopefully, by listening and being in relationship with leaders in the Synod a feeling of trust can develop between congregations and the Synod staff and leadership which can carry over to mission support. The task force will also continue to offer zoom conversations around the topic of stewardship.

The Congregational Vitality Task Force is a bit less active now that Faithful Innovations is not directly tied to the Task Force, but it continues to meet. DEM Peggy has shared with the Task Force that the ELCA has provided a revised Congregational Vitality Survey. There were some concerns regarding some of the questions in this survey. Congregations who are interested in taking the survey may contact Peggy. There is a push from churchwide to help the church become younger and more diverse, but a majority of the Montana Synod congregations have older and not very diverse members. A lot has changed since the pandemic, and there may be a desire “to go back to normal,” but there have been serious shifts in our congregations. There is some progress being made but still much to do.

There are four congregations involved in the Faithful Innovation Process, three of them were involved last year. There has been a significant change in the leadership team, but there are three lay people now serving on the leadership team. They met in November and will meet in March and then in late summer.

Regarding the Freedom in Christ Prison Ministry, Rob Nedbalek retired as of January 1, 2023, and the board voted to extend a call to Pastor Marlow Carrels who accepted the call. The board feels Pastor Marlow will engage in expanding the ministry in the prison and will help spread the message of the ministry for the purpose of fundraising around the Synod.

The Confluence Collective meets twice a month under the leadership of Rebekah Cochrane and a leadership team. DEM Peggy will meet with them in March.

At Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church on the Rocky Boy Reservation, a member is leading worship regularly on Sundays, and the Methodist pastor from Havre comes once a month to lead worship. There are some building maintenance issues that need to be addressed, and a different parsonage needs to be provided.

Regarding coaching, there are about eight people trained and serving in the Synod who are coaching or are a Faithful Innovation guiding team. Marilyn Hall, a lay person from Missoula, is the Synod’s coaching coordinator. Anyone interested in being trained as a coach or interested in having a coach may contact DEM Peggy or Marilyn.

Twelve people in the Synod have completed or will have completed the Excellence in Leadership training.

Vice President

VP Dick Deschamps is seeing that the work done at the Synod Assembly is starting to find its way back out to the synod and congregations. The first task, which will be dealt with at this meeting, is bringing our Synod constitution in line with the updated model constitution for synods. The second task is to present nominees from our Synod to the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC). This committee was formed at Churchwide Assembly to determine if the ELCA should go in a new and different direction or if changes should be made to the way things are currently done. There is concern that the east will have a greater influence on what is decided, so we need good nominees to represent the west on the CRLC. VP Dick announced that he will not be seeking re-election to a second term in June.

Commission for Renewed Lutheran Church Nominations (New Business)

The council was asked to think of people to nominate for this position, especially lay leaders from our synod. Getting representation from rural/frontier areas of the ELCA for the wider church is important to us. This is not the usual open nomination process, and if chosen it will require a tremendous time commitment. This is a big deal that could mean big changes for the ELCA, and our voice needs to be heard. The deadline to fill out nomination paperwork needs to be done by March 9.

Freedom in Christ Prison Ministry Update

FIC is a synod ministry, and the synod needs to issue a call to Pr. Marlow Carrels to serve in this ministry. Alan Hansen is the current representative, and he has become more and more dedicated to this ministry. Alan will become the VP of the board, so therefore, a Synod Council Representative on Freedom in Christ Board of Directors needs to be appointed. A motion will be made at the June meeting to appoint a representative from the council to the FIC board.

Draft Synod Assembly Agenda

Bishop Laurie presented a draft agenda for the Synod Assembly at the Heritage Inn in Great Falls on June 2-3, 2023. The Assembly this year is a business meeting, and the theme for the assembly is Equipping for Generosity. The Executive Committee will meet on Thursday, June 1,2023 with the Synod Assembly beginning on June 2, 2023, and concluding with worship on June 5, 2023. The LPA’s will be recognized and honored during worship, and Bishop Laurie has excused all pastors, SAM’s, and LPA’s from leading worship in their congregations on that day. Resources are available on the Synod website for alternatives for congregational worship.

*Meeting was recessed until tomorrow, and Lorrie Vennes sent us out with prayer.*

**February 18, 2023**

*Opening devotions by Lorrie Vennes*

2023 Synod Assembly

**Adopt the rules of the Synod Assembly as amended and corrected.**

Motion

Second: Adopt the rules of Assembly as amended and corrected.

**VOTE SC.23.02.05 ADOPT THE RULES OF THE SYNOD ASSEMBLY AS AMENDED AND CORRECTED.**

Constitutional Changes

The changes made to the Synod Constitution were presented by the bishop. Some of the changes are required while some are recommended changes. Bishop Laurie encouraged the council members to read through the Montana Synod Constitution to see if any of the non-daggered portions need to be changed, removed, or updated. The Synod Assembly will vote on the changes in the Constitution.

Report of Racial Justice Task Force

This report was reviewed by the council. The bishop wants to direct this task force to focus on developing educational opportunities that can be used in short periods of time such as a workshop as well as developing a reading list to share. It would be helpful to have a second representative on this task force.

Report of the Care for Creation Task Force

The council representatives for this task force think this group is working well on reaching their stated goals. Solar energy and regenerative ranching and grasslands goals have been two of the strongest goals of the task force. They have also developed a liturgy for use in congregations.

**New Business**

Endowment Funds—Distribution Use/Restricted Funds (re-designation)

**Use of Ramseth for student loan repayment**

Motion

Second: Use of Ramseth Fund for Student Loan Repayment

1. Earnings from this fund to be used to pay one month per year of student loan payments for any actively serving rostered minister (clergy or deacon) who request the payment by submitting the appropriate documentation.
2. Remaining amounts from the previous year’s annual distributions may be used for financially supporting pastoral leadership development for active rostered ministers (clergy or deacon) and LPA’s in the Montana Synod.

**VOTE: SC.23.02.06 USE OF RAMSETH FOR STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT**

1. **Earnings from this fund to be used to pay one month per year of student loan payments for any actively serving rostered minister (clergy or deacon) who request the payment by submitting the appropriate documentation.**
2. **Remaining amounts from the previous year’s annual distributions may be used for financially supporting pastoral leadership development for active rostered ministers (clergy or deacon) and LPA’s in the Montana Synod.**

**Use the distribution of the Emmaus Fund to support functioning rural and frontier congregations, for the use of active ministry needs.**

Motion

Second: Use the distribution of the Emmaus fund to support functioning rural and frontier congregations, for the use of active ministry needs.

**VOTE: SC.23.02.07 USE THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE EMMAUS FUND TO SUPPORT FUNCTIONING RURAL AND FRONTIER CONGREGATIONS, FOR THE USE OF ACTIVE MINISRTY NEEDS.**

**New Business**

**Accept the 2023 budget as revised.**

Motion

Second: Accept the 2023 budget as revised.

**VOTE: SC.23.02.08 ACCEPT THE 2023 BUDGET AS REVISED.**

**Adopt the proposed 2024 budget as submitted.**

Motion

Second

**VOTE: SC.23.02.09 ADOPT THE PROPOSED 2024 BUDGET AS SUBMITTED.**

**Adopt the Consent Agenda as presented.**

Motion

Second: Approve Consent Agenda as presented by Executive Committee

**VOTE: SC.23.02.10 ADOPT THE CONSENT AGENDA AS PRESENTED**

**Set Synod Council Meetings for September 14-16, 2023, in Great Falls, and February16-17, 2024 on Zoom.**

Motion

Second: Set Synod Council Meetings for September 14-16, 2023, in Great Falls, and February 16-17, 2024, on Zoom.

**VOTE: SC.23.02.11 SET SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING FOR SEPTEMBER 22-23, 2023, IN GREAT FALLS, AND FEBRUARY 16-17, 2024, ON ZOOM.**

*Sending prayer by Lori Vennes*

**Adjourn the meeting.**

Motion

Second: Adjourn the meeting.

**VOTE: SC.23.02.12 ADJOURN THE MEETING.**

Upcoming Meetings:

Synod Council—June 1, 2023 (Great Falls)

Synod Assembly—June 2-3, 2023 (Great Falls)

**SPECIAL EMAIL VOTE DRAFT**

**March 6, 2023**

VP Dick Deschamps sent an email to the synod council members calling for a vote to nominate Don Buerkle, an LPA from Baker and John Mundinger, an LPA from Helena, to the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church from the Synod.

Replies to the email: Doris Tollefson, Allen Hansen, Kimberly Bloch, Peter Erickson, Scott Hedegaard, Natasha Morton, Celeste Pogachar, John Sheppard, Lorrie Vennes, Gretchen Wagner

**Don Buerkle, LPA-Baker and John Mundinger, LPA-Helena are nominated for a position on the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC).**

Motion

Second: Don Buerkle, LPA-Baker and John Mundinger, LPA-Helena are nominated for a position on the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC).

**VOTE SC.23.03.01 DON BUERKLE, LPA-BAKER AND JOHN MUNDINGER, LPA-HELENA ARE NOMINATED FOR A POSITION ON THE COMMISSION FOR A RENEWED LUTHERAN CHURCH (CRLC).**