

The Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod
Minutes of the Synod Council Meeting
September 25, 2010

The Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod Council met at Chinese Lutheran in Houston, Texas, on September 25, 2010.

In attendance:

Council Members: Evan Moilan; Bishop Mike Rinehart; Kurt Goedecke; Don Hodde; Paul Monroe; Sue Moehring; Grace Banks; Corey Heidt; Pastor Barb Simmers; Diane Campbell; Pastor Pete Lopez; Pastor Bradley Fuerst; Dudley Piland; and Arthur Murphy.

Synod Staff: Pastor Don Carlson; Pastor Kerry Nelson; and Peggy Hahn.

Absent: Gregory Goedecke and Pastor Sue Beall.

We were welcomed by Pastor Joshua Chen (Is this correct? Was it another pastor?) and approximately 30 members of Chinese Lutheran Church, and were invited to lunch with their leaders and families. Evan Moilan, Bishop Mike, and the rest of the Synod Council thanked them for their excellent hospitality.

Vice President Evan Moilan called the meeting to order at 8:50 a.m.

Bishop Mike led a devotion on Luke 16 and "Dwelling in the Word." The Synod Council (SC) discussed the Parable of the rich man and Lazarus in small groups.

SC.10.09.01 Motion to receive minutes of SC meeting from March 2010 as corrected. Motion by Sue Moehring. Motion passed.

SC.10.09.02 Motion to receive minutes of SC meeting from July 2010 as corrected. Motion by Kurt Goedecke. Motion passed.

Financial report by Paul Monroe. Discussion of synod finances, and congregational giving. Pastor Brad asked about yearlong stewardship with synod congregations, and Pastor Kerry affirmed that the synod practice is to embody stewardship and evangelism in all of our communications throughout the year. Bishop Mike added that we are emphasizing stewardship as a part of our four synod priorities of WISE (worship; intergenerational ministry; spiritual growth; and evangelism). We are stressing stewardship communications, but learning new ways to communicate with technology and social media in a new economic climate.

SC.10.09.03 Motion to receive the financial report as presented by Paul Monroe. Motion by Diane Campbell. Motion passed.

Synod Roster and Call Status updates. Changes in status have been received from Bill Bentzinger and Sharon Burns. Pastor Don and Bishop Mike reviewed the SC's duty to oversee the roster of the synod, and then reviewed the requests of these two pastors to change their status to on leave from call.

SC.10.09.04 Motion to grant on leave from call status to Bill Bentzinger and Sharon Burns. Motion by Don Hodde. Motion passed.

Bishop's Report. Bishop Mike discussed the Spiritual Growth priority from the last synod assembly. How are we passing the faith on, and how are we passing on basic Christian practices of prayer, tithing, daily Bible reading, etc.? One of the best ways is small group ministry. Some of our congregations are not used to high-test programming, and the amount of work involved in shaping the ministry of the congregation around small groups. Growing wider (worship attendance) and deeper (spiritual growth of current members) can happen at the same time. Both of these things lead to stewardship and greater financial giving as well.

Discussion of synod finances, cuts in staffing, and the hope that our finances will stabilize and we will not have to cut more synod staff or synod programming. Future cuts could radically reduce the services that the synod currently provides, possibly including an entire program area.

Discussion of synod program responsibilities among the synod staff. Synod Disaster Response duty will be moved from Peggy Hahn to allow her to focus on Youth and Family and Justice responsibilities again. Bishop Mike will oversee disaster response.

Lutherhill Ministries has just finished a great summer camp season and will finish its capital campaign later this year. Evan was thanked for his part in that ministry, and Bishop Mike celebrated Lutherhill's growth.

Ministerium training on sexual misconduct and sexual harassment has received great reviews and thanks from many synod pastors for meeting an ever-present and ongoing need.

Discussion of congregations that are closing and considering changing their property into synod retreat centers.

Discussion of churches taking a first vote to disaffiliate from the ELCA and the Synod. Salem of Welcome; Peace in Rosenberg; and St. Paul's in Rosenberg have all taken first votes to leave. Peace and Salem of Welcome have refused to give the Bishop their mailing list of congregational members so that the synod can notify all members of the

Bishop's consultation with the congregation. Experience in other synods has shown that the Bishop's consultation is not well publicized to the congregation's membership when congregational leaders refuse to give their mailing lists and try to control or prevent the Bishop's communications with congregational members.

Leadership Gatherings. Houston attendance was down slightly from 2009 to 2010, but very high in Brenham and New Orleans. Great comments and reviews came from the evaluations by participants in all three locations.

Interfaith Worship in New Orleans was well attended and a great event. Evan thanked the Bishop and staff for all of their hard work.

Thielemann Appeal. Evan Moilan reported on the Thielemann appeal. The full record on appeal was received this month. Appeal schedule has been set. The SC is now reviewing the record and all mailings from Mr. Thielemann. The SC will review the appeal briefs and filings of Mr. Thielemann and St. Peter's Lutheran Church of Gay Hill when they are received in the next two months in accordance with the schedule for the appeal. A subcommittee of the SC will make a recommendation to the SC on the appeal at our next meeting in November.

Pastor Don Carlson's Report. Pastor Don reviewed the congregations in transition and in the call process. Call Coaches are having another retreat for training on the call process, and the new call process is going well. Candidacy Committee is continuing to meet four to five times a year to oversee the call process. New nationwide database has allowed us "to mix our gene pool" for ministry around the country in a very helpful way for both pastors and congregations.

SALM (Synodically Authorized Lay Minister) education and training. Don referred us to his written report. A task force is overseeing this. Competency panel meets with SALM's to develop an education track, and upon completion, SALM's can be ordained at their worship site, and become eligible for service on the roster of the ELCA. All SALM contracts are up for renewal by February 15 of every year on an annual basis.

TEEM. Theological Education for Emerging Ministries discussed.

The Tri-Synodical Theological Conference is shaping up really well with Marcus Borg in January 2011. It will be held in Galveston, Texas.

Recess for lunch with Chinese Lutheran leaders and families.

Bishop Mike led a devotion on 1 Tim. 6:6-19 and taking hold of "the life that really is life."

Pastor Kerry Nelson's presentation on Evangelism.

As a Synod and as congregations, we must get the Great Commandment and the Great Commission right. Implicit in them both is ministry and mission. Ministry is inreach in the life of our congregations for the sake of our members. Mission is outreach that we do for the sake of the world. When Kerry became Director of Evangelical Mission (DEM) for the Synod, he began a new mission strategy. Kerry started with recruiting people who had a heart for mission and ministry in the synod. He began with monthly meetings of strategy tables to get this work accomplished in our synod.

The Strategy Tables adopted the synod mission statement as their own. They proposed 5 Core Values and 10 Best Practices. The second part of the Mission Strategy Document has to do with the mission of our wider church expressions: local areas of congregations working together, the Synod, and Churchwide. Pastor Kerry was thanked by Evan and the council for his presentation.

Recognition of Pastor Lura Groen. Bishop Mike reported on the decision by the Candidacy Committee on Lura Groen. On Nov. 7, she will be welcomed onto the clergy roster as the first non-celibate gay pastor in the gulf coast area in the ELCA since the Churchwide Assembly sexuality decisions in 2009. The policy change is that the local congregations are being given this decision to call non-celibate gay and lesbian pastors, instead of the denominational authority making these decisions on a Churchwide basis. Bishop Mike discussed the candidacy process, and the excellent qualifications that Pastor Lura has to serve Grace Lutheran Church. The SC reviewed the way in which Bishop Mike and Grace Lutheran, Houston plan to present this recognition of Pastor Lura Groen to synod congregations and the public.

Peggy Hahn's Report. Walkathon in Cat Spring in September and October. Central African Republic (CAR) and Peru updates. Food bank response by 17 congregations in the synod. Food banks are seeing an increase in need, and those 17 congregations alone are feeding many people a month.

Sexual misconduct and Safe Haven training at Leadership Events this fall were a big success, and congregations can host a similar training session at their location for leaders who could not attend. Highly recommended for church leaders, parents, young adults, and Sunday School, Day School, and Mother's Day Out administrators and teachers.

Intergenerational Ministry will be the focus of the next Synod Assembly (SA) in May 2011. Peggy introduced the book, Almost Christian, which may be the recommended book for voting members and guests to study during the 2011 SA.

SC.10.09

Pastor Kerry Nelson's Report. Joyful Life and Celebration have moved out of schools and moved into more usable worship spaces. We have already talked about the Mission Strategy for the Synod earlier in the day. He would welcome SC member presence on the Mission Strategy Table and the Mission Support Table.

Next SC meeting will be Nov. 19 and 20, 2010, in Conroe, Texas.

Meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m. for worship in the Chinese Lutheran sanctuary with Pastor John Han.

Respectfully Submitted,

Arthur Murphy
TLGC Synod Secretary