

Sask Synod Council Meeting, March 14-15, 2024
Luther College Campus, University of Regina

Sask Synod Council's meeting open with worship lead by Bishop Sid Haugen, attended by Council members, John Nilson and Dr. Marc Jerry. This was Bishop Sid's last regular Synod Council meeting and in his report he reflected on the fact that on August 1, he will have served 10 years in this ministry. He started fearfully, worried that he may have a target on his back and received counsel from Bishop Allan Grundahl: 'no, for the most part, bishops work day-by-day with some of our most dedicated, faithful people.' Bishop Sid shared that it has been a challenge that demanded every ounce of his ability and strength to even begin to address the needs of our Synod, and who could have foreseen the COVID crisis and its continued challenges.

Synod Chair, Rev. Doug Schmirler, tendered his resignation before the meeting due to health treatments. We accepted his resignation, and that of Dave Sheirer, who had filled in a vacancy on council, with regret. Vice-Chair, Cindy Hoppe, chaired the meeting. We welcomed John Nilson, National Church Council member to review our meeting practices as per our governance schedule. We granted him voice without vote, as well as executive assistant, Judy Parker who serves as convention manager.

Some events of note from the past 5 months of activities: Bishop Sid Haugen attended the Shellbrook/Canwood final vote to leave the Sask Synod in November. He attended the funeral of Rev. Paul Nostbakken. Call processes are underway in Naicam, Kipling/Strasbourg. A Telemiracle project with LutherCare Communities and 20 partner churches, got him off of 'church island' and presenting a cheque of \$5,000 to this cause.

- Staff: 1.5 FTEs (Anna-Maria; .8; Judy; .5; Monica; .2) continue to work together to support the Synod and keep the Bishop and Assistant to the Bishop on track with all the congregations and ministries. Rev. Dr. Ali Tote will be completing his second year as Assistant to the Bishop. His call is co-terminus with Bishop Sid Haugen. Anno Bell has a contract with Canada Lutheran. Rev. Dr. Ann Salmon has a volunteer contract as Lay Ministry Program Developer. Rev. Michael Diegel is our volunteer Synod archivist. Kathy Haugen is our volunteer IT person.
- Communication with the Synod continues with 700 on the mailchimp list and the website being the repository of many resources for congregations to access. The National Church data base is being rebuilt with Kathy Haugen and Keith Myra from the Eastern Synod devoting many hours to this task. It should be done sometime in 2024.
- A Part Time Ministry agreement was reviewed and approved to be added as a resource on the website. Bishop Sid thanked Council member Lynda Erlandson from the Radisson/Borden parish for the base of this document.
- LutherCare Communities and the Sask Synod representatives have participated in a joint task force to review and re-imagine governance as a response to the last convention. This has resulted in a rebuilding of the relationship with amended bylaws to be presented at the LutherCare corporation meeting at the Synod convention.
- Lutheran Campus Ministry (LCM) and Synod representatives met in a strategic planning process led by Assistant to the Bishop Ali Tote. Council approved the revised Memorandum of Understanding. LCM is exploring a path to transition as operating funds are depleted.
- John Nilson and Bishop Sid gave an overview of the National Church Council (NCC) meeting they attended earlier in March, and their adventures getting home from Winnipeg in the storm. The Bishop's role on NCC is advisory. There will be 3 new Bishops chosen this year; Eastern,

Alberta and the Territories, and Saskatchewan. Bishop Sid presented a 'Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats' analysis of our Synod at the NCC March meeting. All Synods are struggling with the loss of momentum since COVID; declining attendance and revenues; congregation closing. We are not alone in our struggles but reduction of our financial support to NCC this year was due to our shortfall in revenues. We hoped to bring these struggles more into focus at the National table. Bishop Sid has orientation of a new Bishop high on his agenda to help our new Bishop have a better understanding of the challenges in communicating and working with the National church.

- Lutheran Theological Seminary met in Calgary. Very few candidates across the country; none in Saskatchewan at present. Getting out of Saskatoon, helped re-imagine that the campus is across the western partner synods and not bound by place.
- Sask Synod Convention manager Judy Parker reported on plans. Lutheran Campus Ministry was designated for our offering. A Call for Nominations for Synod Council was approved, with discussion about possible candidates for vacant positions. Two workshops have been planned: Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) of the Synod and House churches. Rev. Gordon Jenson will be the guest speaker for convention.
- The Youth ministry of the church was restarted with a bus leaving Regina and picking up youth and leaders in Saskatoon and Prince Albert on their way to Kinasao. There were 50 youth and 5 leaders who also participated in learning opportunities. It was a very well received event and will be followed up with another retreat in the fall.
- Connections to our global companion in Uruguay and Argentina (IELU) were strengthened. Rev. Greg Kiel and Bishop Sid attended an event sponsored by the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). In meeting with Nebraska and Southeastern Pennsylvania ministry partners, it was learned that the church and personnel crisis is similar in the United States.
- Rev. Dr. Ali Tote, Assistant to the Bishop has lead 6 visioning sessions with congregations; taken the lead on revitalizing Children, Youth, and Young Adults Ministry; increased engagement with LutherCare, Luther College, LCBI, Kinasao and strengthened the relationship with IELU (Argentina and Uruguay). A new Synod Indigenous Advisory Committee with focus on reconciliation is planned to begin work in April. Brother Ali has also helped revitalize clusters and other supports to rostered leaders, focusing on our minority leaders. As stated by Bishop Sid in previous reports, 'being there' is very important in these uncertain times, and Brother Ali has risen to that challenge.
- Treasurer, Jeff Barber spoke to the financial challenges we are facing. We will be reviewing the audit next week. Our benevolence was down 12% from 2022 and some of our expenses were higher than budgeted. Our cash is down \$214,000 as we have used reserves to pay our bills. This reduces our interest income going forward. On a positive note, meetings with our Synod partners at National Church is helping to harmonize structures, parochial reporting and bring up other pressure points that need attention.
- Work of various committees was reviewed and motions approved for the work coming out of those committees including a grant to Lutheran Campus Ministry.
- The next National Church Convention will be in Winnipeg in July of 2025. The process for appointing Delegates will be presented at the Synod Convention.

The meeting adjourned at noon with prayer and thanksgiving for the work of all in the Synod.