

Report of the Vice-President

In 2012, I had the honor of being a member of the first internship committee in memory at my congregation, St. Paul's Santa Monica. Under the leadership of our pastor, Rev. James Boline, in partnership with Lutheran Church of the Master and SoCal Lutherans, and with generous grants from the synod, St. Paul's made an intentional decision to serve as an internship site for LGBTQIA+ seminarians. This is a commitment that the congregation has been able to repeat, except for the pandemic year 2021, every year since.

Like a proud mother hard-pressed to choose a favorite among her children, I would say that all our interns have been gifted, and I am thrilled that each is using their gifts to spread the Good News in various ministries throughout the United States. But the first one, my first internship committee intern, will always have a special place in my heart, and at her farewell party from our congregation, I spontaneously shared with other members of St. Paul's that I would "follow her anywhere." This is when the Holy Spirit chuckled – have you guessed the punchline?

That intern was our bishop, Brenda Bos. Last year, at our synod's assembly, out of many possible permutations of candidates, she and I were elected to serve as Bishop and Synod Vice President respectively. Truth be told, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. Truth be told, this is the first SWCA synod assembly that I will ever have attended, and I have no idea exactly what I should be sharing with you in a Vice President's report. But truth be told, I am confident that God who brought both Bishop Brenda and me to this moment will not leave us now, and that you will forgive my rookie mistakes.

In S10.03(g) our SWCA constitution describes one of synod council's functions as reporting to the Synod Assembly what the Council has done on its behalf in the intervening year. I have discharged this responsibility at the end of my report by listing the different motions and actions passed by the synod council or its executive committee between May 2021 and April 2022. But this dry recitation of resolutions does not really give you the flavor of how God is working in our synod through your elected representatives. Let me just give you a brief summary of where we have been and where we are going.

Change, Change, Change. Since 2019, the synod has bid farewell to its Bishop of many years, Guy Erwin, who departed unexpectedly to take on new responsibilities as a seminary president, has learned how to function virtually through a pandemic with the guidance of interim Bishop Murray Finck, and has elected new Bishop Brenda Bos, a new Vice President after seven years of dedicated leadership by Randy Foster and 13 out of 26 new synod council members. That is a lot of change for any organization to process in a relatively short period of time, and it has taken all of us a while to learn how to work effectively together while not being together. (We have yet to meet as a council in person – all our meetings have been via Zoom.)

There also was significant turnover among the administrative and financial staff in the synod office during this period and consequently, our synod lost a lot of institutional memory. I have discovered that many of our operational policies resided in the minds of people, but not on paper. Since September 1, 2021, when the Bishop, the new council and I began our duties, we have spent a lot of time on operational reconstruction and learning by doing, but I think we now have a good foundation on which to build. I am hopeful that, along with the five new council members who will be elected at this assembly, we will be able finally to meet in person this August in an orientation/retreat setting to build our workplan to support Bishop Bos in realizing a post-pandemic vital and viable SWCA for the sake of the Gospel.

The more things change, the more they remain the same. A few weeks ago, I spent the morning reading a decade's worth of old synod council meeting records. Panning for nuggets of wisdom and a better understanding of what the synod was like pre-pandemic, I was struck by the fact that those minutes could have been written today. Skimming through years of deliberations, I revisited eerily familiar sounding discussions about multi-hundred-thousand-dollar synod budget deficits and declining mission support and congregations under synod administration or planted in dilapidated synod owned buildings and what to do with excess real estate and how to be good stewards of these resources to support SWCA congregations and advance the mission of Jesus Christ in this territory. I must admit that this affirmation of how systemic some of the synod challenges have been set me off into simultaneous hyper fretting and hyper problem-solving mode. The immediate result was not answers, but a kind of decision-tree of questions about our finances and resources that the synod

council will examine at the retreat and throughout the next year to build that workplan. Here are some of the items we need to dig into:

1. Unrestricted Income: Mission Support from Congregations
How are our congregations doing post-pandemic? Have we reached a level of stability in mission support?
2. Unrestricted Income: Individuals
Do we have philanthropic individuals in the synod who will support strategic mission?
3. Unrestricted Income: Return on Invested Funds
Do we need to re-examine our investment strategies and partners?
4. Income from Existing “Endowments” and Funds
What restricted and unrestricted resources does the synod have to deploy for ministry?
5. Sales proceeds from property – what formula should we use to share proceeds?
6. Property held by synod not currently being utilized by congregation. We need to get current appraisals. Who are the stakeholders in determining best use of these properties – synod property committee, budget and finance, synod council? What are the carrying costs of these properties? What maintenance is required? What are the current lease terms with tenants, and should these be renegotiated? What is the process for deciding on repair/maintenance – who is involved?
7. Property under synod administration. What maintenance is required? What is the process for deciding on repair/maintenance – who is involved? Must involve pastors, congregation, DEM, Treasurer, synod Property committee at least.

8. Internal Loans. Each of these needs to be analyzed with respect to source. Which do we need to pay back? Which can/should be written off? How can that be done?
9. Grantmaking – What are the sources of grants for non-operational purposes? Who are the granting decisionmakers/stakeholders? What are the controlling constitutional section, bylaw or continuing resolutions? What are the strategic synod missional goals to be achieved and is our granting following that rubric? What is the follow-up reporting and who receives it to evaluate impact? How are grant opportunities publicized? Should we consider a different granting process?

As you can see, we have a lot to process, and it probably sounds more fiduciary than missional. Fortunately, I think we can achieve both goals. Even without all the answers to my questions in hand, I am sure that one key strategy must be selling excess real estate - meaning property owned and managed by the synod that has no realistic prospect of being used “as is” for ministry. Managing this property is a drain on synod time and resources, and we are landlords for buildings which now have significant deferred maintenance issues, including basic safety issues and very big-ticket items like extensive roof repair in properties where congregations of our synod worship.

I know our God is one of abundance, and our synod has been richly blessed. We have enough money to address these needs locked up in real estate that should be sold, and the proceeds redeployed to support strategic ministries throughout the synod and synod operations. Bishop Bos has indicated in her vision for the financial future of the synod her strong preference to sell excess synod property and steward the proceeds for the benefit of mission for the whole synod. I concur.

Blessings,
Sarah Stegemoeller
Vice President, Southwest California Synod

ACTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS OF THE SOUTHWEST CALIFORNIA SYNOD COUNCIL (SC) AND SOUTHWEST CALIFORNIA SYNOD COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (EC) FROM MAY 2021 THROUGH APRIL 2022

“**MSC**” means a resolution or action was moved, seconded and after a vote was carried.

SC 5.15.22

a. **MSC** – Appoint Zekiah N. Wright to fill the remainder of Shirley Greene’s term as the LA Metro Conference Representative to the Synod Council after affirmation by Dean Caleb Crainer that the LA Metro Conference had already voted to approve such possible future action by the Synod Council, and, furthermore, to nominate Zekiah N. Wright to the Synod Assembly for ratification as the LA Conference Representative for a three-year term.

b. **MSC** – Refer to the Budget & Finance Committee the following matter with the Synod Council’s recommendation that funding be identified for programmatic years 2022 and beyond: the use of translators and interpreters at Southwest California Synod Assemblies.

c. CONTINUING RESOLUTION S7.22.A21

MSC – The Bishop of this Synod shall present to the Synod Secretary and Synod Council a listing of all those Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Ministers of Word and Service who are on the roster of this Synod but who are currently: on leave from call; disabled; retired; or persons who are serving in synod-approved or synod-appointed pastoral capacities in congregations and other ministries of this synod may be voting members at this Synod Assembly (i.e., TEEM candidates) (Constitution S7.26 & S7.27). Congregations under development or an authorized worshipping community must be in good standing with this Synod prior to the Call to Order of each Synod Assembly. Providing that such persons are in good standing with this Synod at the time of the assembly, such persons shall automatically be granted both voice and vote at the assembly.

d. CONTINUING RESOLUTION S7.26.A21

MSC – The Bishop of this Synod shall present to the Synod Secretary and the Synod Council a listing of all congregations under development and authorized worshiping communities of the synod, which have been authorized under Evangelical Lutheran Church in America bylaw 10.01.04., prior to the Call of Order of each Synod Assembly. Providing that such congregations under development and authorized worshiping communities are in good standing with the Synod at the time of the assembly, such congregations under development and authorized worshiping communities shall automatically be granted both voice and vote at the assembly consistent with S7.21.

e. MSC – to approve the following resolution as well as to approve En Bloc the accompanying document prepared by Interim Bishop Murray Finck herein referred to as Exhibit B, granting the Executive Committee permission to further edit the document if needed to update any and all corrections:

Whereas Chapter 7 of the Constitution of the Southwest California Synod allows the Synod Council to determine voting member privileges for persons in a variety of involvements and capacities who are not included as voting members from synodical congregations as provided for in +S7.21;

Therefore be it resolved that the SWCA Synod Council grant voting member privileges to the following ministers of word and sacrament from a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been declared and established, namely the Reverend Julie Morris, the Reverend Doctor Cynthia Jew, and the Reverend Violeta Sanders, and be it further;

Resolved that the SWCA Synod Council grant voting member privileges to the following minister of Word and Sacrament from another ELCA Synod wherein the Interim Pastor continues to hold membership, namely the Reverend Richard Rollefson, and be it further,

Resolved that the SWCA Synod Council grant voting member privileges to the following TEEM candidates: Maria Paiva, Johnel Barron, Edgardo Ramirez, David Lyn, and Jade Ortiz, and be it further,

Resolved that other appointed minister serving in established congregations within the SWCA Synod be granted by the Synod Council voting member privileges namely the Reverend Esteban Salazar, and be it further,

Resolved that other persons subject to ordination in the program year of this assembly shall be granted by the Synod Council voting member privileges, e.g., Andrew Stever and Erik Rude, and be it further,

Resolved that the Synod Council permit the same voting member privileges as is listed in +S7.21 to the following synod authorized worshipping communities: Fruit of the Spirit, Glory, Another Level, Finnish Ministries, Bethlehem Chinese, Redimidos, Trinity Faith, AdoreLA, Iglesia Luterana Santa Cruz, and Lord of Life at CLU, and be it further,

Resolved that the Synod Council permit those serving in ministerial capacities in the above mentioned synod authorized worshipping communities be granted voting member privileges, and be it finally,

Resolved that the Synod Council revisit the constitutional provisions In Chapter 7 of the SWCA Constitution in a timely manner in preparation for the 2022 Synod Assembly.

f. MSC – that the Southwest California Synod, on behalf of Dr. Cecelia Travick-Jackson, request an exception from the ELCA Conference of Bishops to issue a Synod Call for a non-stipendiary Word and Service ministry.

g. MSC – to appoint the Assistant to the Bishop for Authentic Diversity to the Nominating Committee as an advisory member for the remainder of the 2021 Synod Assembly cycle.

MSC – to transmit documents to members of the Council at least 24 hours in advance of all meetings, and, when documents must be prepared after that deadline, to instruct staff to email them out as quickly as possible.

SC 6.19.21

a. MSC - to approve the following roster changes:

Pastor Steven Simpson – Request a Synodical Letter of Call for a part-time associate rector position at St. Patrick's Episcopal Church.

Pastor Deborah Andersen – Request On Leave from Call status, leaving interim call at Our Savior's, Oxnard, effective June 1, 2021

- b. **MSC** – to approve Bp. Finck’s “Letter of Authorization for Eric Rude to Serve in Word and Sacrament Ministry at Prince of Peace Covina” until the time of his ordination.
- c. **MSC** – to end the Synod Administration of Angelica, Los Angeles effective August 1, 2021 returning financial agency to the congregation after further training with Treasurer Mike Metzger.
- d. **MSC** - to approve the Constitution, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of Olivet Lutheran Church, Hawthorne.

EC 7.6.21

MSC – to direct our Real Estate Agent to enter into a purchase contract with HRI for the sum of 4.45 million dollars for the sale of the Pasadena property on Orange Grove with a recommended escrow period of 195 days.

SC 7.17.21

- a. **MSC** - to approve the following additions to the executive committee effective September 1, 2021:

Rev. James Boline
Deacon Cecelia Travick-Jackson
Rev. Marta Salazar Moscoso

- b. **MSC** - to approve the Constitution, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of Mt. Carmel Lutheran Church.

- c. **MSC** - Whereas, the Rev. Stephen Fiechter is currently granted by the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America a two-year extended On Leave from Call status as a Word and Sacrament rostered minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and

Whereas, Pastor Fiechter is serving in a vital and pastoral capacity as Senior Director of PATH, whose mission offers compassion, care, and resolve to end the scourge of homelessness in the City of Los Angeles, and

Whereas, Pastor Fiechter remains open to continue to serve as an ordained Word and Sacrament minister of the Southwest California Synod as he is able and as he is called upon by this synod, be it

Resolved, that the Synod Council of the Southwest California Synod (SWCA) extend a synodical call of Non-Congregational Service to the Rev. Stephen Fiechter to continue his specialized ministry on behalf of this synod and church, and be it further

Resolved, that Pastor Fiechter's ministry be lifted up before the Southwest California Synod as it touches and impacts the lives of many people in this synod's territory who are living in poverty and on the margins, and be it finally

Resolved, that the SWCA Synod Council remain connected with Pastor Fiechter and the ministry to which he is called; and that the SWCA Synod Council will annually review this synodical call and extend it from year to year as would be appropriate.

d. **MSC** - Holy Cross Lutheran Church, due to its declining membership elected to alter its congregational status to a Synod Authorized Worshiping Community (SAWC). The congregation requested that it be allowed to retain its preschool and continue its operations following the transition. Instead of creating a SAWC for Holy Cross Preschool and Chapel, the synod council voted previously to close the congregation. Holy Cross Preschool and Chapel has been functioning under the SAWC constitution and with a SAWC board since the congregation passed the resolution in August of 2016. This synod council honors their status and hereby recognizes them as a SAWC of the SWCA synod. This motion further authorizes synod administration to file formal documents regarding this action with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

MSC – to tentatively set the dates for the 2022 Synod Assembly as June 16-18; and the 2023 Synod Assembly as June 1-3.

EC 8.23.21

MSC – to approve Bishop Bos' compensation for the period September 2021 – June 2027

SC 9.18.21

a. **MSC** – that Karen Moyer be appointed to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Renee Brandt as a Member-at-Large (Laywoman) of Synod Council, and to serve until the next regular meeting of the Synod Assembly.

b. **MSC** – THAT in supersession of any previous resolutions naming authorized signatories for any account at any bank, credit union, trust company or similar institution held in the name of the Southwest California Synod of the ELCA, these persons be removed as authorized signatories:

- Murray Finck, Bishop
- Randall Foster, Vice President
- Pr. Marj Fink-Pihl
- Sherri Dillon, Chief of Staff

and these persons be authorized in their places:

- Brenda Bos, Bishop
- Sarah Stegemoeller, Vice President

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the signatory authorizations for the persons holding the offices of Secretary and Treasurer of the Southwest California Synod of the ELCA remain unchanged;

FURTHER RESOLVED, that any form resolutions required by any such institution which relate to the authorization of signatories with respect thereto and substantially incorporate the authorizations contained in these resolutions, are adopted and approved.

c. **MSC** - that the Synod Council approve a special \$5000 grant from the First Lutheran Los Angeles Fund (FLLAF) to aid in the parallel development project going on at Peace/Paz, Lompoc;

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Synod Council approve a special \$5000 grant from FLLAF to initiate the strategic ministry grant at St. John's Gardena so as to complement the commitment from Churchwide.

EC 10.20.21

- a. **MSC** – to appoint Enid McGraw and Jaffa Castaneda-Carrera to serve on the Board of Convocators of California Lutheran University as representatives of the Southwest California Synod.
- b. **MSC** – to buy out Taylor Dariarow’s contract with Apple One employment agency to retain her services as Executive Assistant to the Bishop/Office Manager.
- c. **MSC** – to buy out Holly Walker’s contract with Apple One employment agency to retain her services as Accounting Assistant.
- d. **MSC** – to continue to cover the dependents of full-time Synod employees under the Portico benefits plan.

SC 11.20.21

- a. **MSC** – that Jonathan Chao be appointed to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Mark Witte as Synod Council Representative for the Foothills Conference, to serve until the next regular meeting of the Synod Assembly.
- b. **MSC** – that Rev. David Berkedal be appointed to serve as Nominating Committee Chair for the 2022 Southwest California Synod Assembly.
- c. **MSC** – that the request of Solheim Senior Community to appeal to the congregations of this synod for the raising of awareness and funds on a date in 2022 to be known as Solheim Sunday is approved.
- d. **MSC** - the creation of a clear Synod Policy that the Synod will provide spousal and dependent Portico Benefits for full-time Synod Staff, rostered or lay.
- e. **MSC** – to approve the Synod’s roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Ministers of Word and Service with needed updates forthcoming from the Bishop.
- f. **MSC** – to approve the list of those On Leave from Call.
- g. **MSC** – to approve family leave of three years for Pr. Amber Bergeson.

- h. MSC** – to accept the approval of the Conference of Bishops for a non-stipendiary call for Dr. Cecelia Travick-Jackson’s to serve as a deacon of the ELCA, with anticipated service at Mt. Cross, Camarillo.
- i. MSC** – to issue a Synodical Letter of Call to Pr. John Miller to serve as an Interim Pastor in the Synod.
- j. MSC** – to extend for three years Pr. John Yu’s Synodical Letter of Call to serve at a Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community.
- k. MSC** – to issue a Synodical Letter of Call to Pr. Marj Funk-Pihl from September 1, 2021 to serve continue her work as director of Living the Resurrection.
- l. MSC** – to issue a Synodical Letter of Call to Pr. Chryll Crews to serve as Assistant to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission.
- m. MSC** – to issue a Synodical Letter of Call to Pr. Joseph Castaneda Carrera to serve as Assistant to the Bishop.
- n. MSC** – to approve the EOMT request to distribute \$82,000 from the First Lutheran Los Angeles Fund (FLLAF) fund for New Starts and \$58,000 from the proceeds of the sale of the North Hollywood property for Strategic Ministries.

EC 12.15.21

- a. MSC** – to approve the grant request for \$100,000 for Twin Valleys Parish from the Christ the King, Van Nuys in keeping with the expressed wishes of the membership of Christ the King, Van Nuys, and as a portion of, and in line with, S15.52.F11: *“The remaining two-thirds (2/3) shall fund new, transitional, and renewal synod ministries. The Synod’s Mission Team for Evangelical Outreach, Mission Director and Bishop shall determine those which would be viable communities of faith as a result of this support.”*
- b. MSC** – to hold the 2022 Synod Assembly on Saturday June 11, 2022 at The Lutheran Center with technical assistance from Big Dog.

- c. **MSC** – the Executive Committee, acting on behalf of the Synod Council, grants the Bishop the sole discretion to place Faith, San Dimas under Synodical Administration [EXHIBIT E] in accordance with the ELCA and Synodical Constitutions to aid the congregation in the discernment of its future.
- d. **MSC** – to adopt the formula of the other California Synods of granting .5 years credit for prior secular professional level employment with the Executive Committee to revisit the matter in the future to give greater guidance on the matter.
- e. **MSC** – to begin the foreclosure process in January 2022 on The Connection, Long Beach employing the services of Old Republic.

EC 1.12.22

MSC – that the Executive Committee of the Southwest California Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America places Hope Lutheran Church, Mojave under Synodical Administration and hereby appoints the following to serve as the Board of Directors for Hope Lutheran Church, Mojave, California: The Rt. Rev. Brenda Bos (President); Ms. Sarah Stegemoeller, Esq. (Vice-President), The Rev. Secretary Keith G. Banwart, Jr. (Secretary); Mr. Michael Metzger (Treasurer).

SC 1.29.22

- a. **MSC** – that Pastor Amber Bergeson be granted a two-year extension on her original six-year family on leave from call.
- b. **MSC** - that Pr. Scott Maxwell-Doherty be the Chair of the 2022 Synod Assembly Planning Committee.
- c. **MSC** - that the amended congregational constitution of Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church of Morro Bay, California be approved.
- d. **MSC** - that a “noisy offering” for Lutheran Social Services Long Beach parking lot repair be approved.
- e. **MSC** – to adopt the proposed 2022-2023 Budget.

f. **MSC** – to issue Synod authorized credit cards to the following staff: Pr. Joseph Castaneda-Carrera, Pr. Chryll Crews, and Taylor Dariarow.

g. **MSC** – to recommend the Proposed Rules of Procedure to the Synod Assembly.

EC 2.16.22

MSC – to sell the Synod’s Volkswagen through a Used Car Dealership with the proceeds returned to the Synod’s general fund.

EC 3.8.22

a. **MSC** – to recommend to the Synod Council to authorize the Executive Committee, under the direction of Treasurer Mike Metzger, to sell the property in Chatsworth after good faith negotiations with a goal of a sale price in excess of \$2,100,000.

b. **MSC** – to return the Synod Council to its regular quarterly meeting schedule (January, May, September, November/December) with the September 2022 meeting to be held in person (public health situation permitting)

c. **MSC** – to recommend adoption of the Proposed Synod Council Covenant to the Synod Council.

d. **MSC** – to order inspections of the properties in South Gate (including the Lincoln House) and Compton.

SC 3.19.22

a. **MSC** – to authorize the Executive Committee, under the direction of Treasurer Mike Metzger, to sell the property in Chatsworth after good faith negotiations with a goal of a sale price in excess of \$2,100,000; and,

to order inspections of the properties in South Gate (including the Lincoln House) and Compton; and,

to return the Synod Council to its regular quarterly meeting schedule (January, May, September, November/December) with the September 2022 meeting to be held in person (public health situation permitting).

b. **MSC**– to accept the Treasurer’s Report subject to Audit.

c. **MSC** - *Whereas S9.07 of the Constitution of the Southwest California Synod of the ELCA provides that if a synod treasurer is elected, the Synod Council shall nominate at least one person for treasurer, and that other persons can be nominated from the floor; Therefore,*

Resolved, that Michael Metzger is nominated by Synod Council for the position of Treasurer.

d. **MSC** - that the Synod Council Covenant of Relationship be adopted; Further Resolved, that each current synod council member annually review and sign a copy of the covenant; Further Resolved, that each newly elected synod council member be introduced to the covenant during synod council orientation and sign the covenant prior to taking office.

e. **MSC** - The Southwest California Synod moves to encourage Synod Council members and synod congregations to participate in direct aid opportunities and intentional and interpersonal support for the Synod Staff in the Sierra Pacific Synod affected by the “disabling and traumatic” events begun on December 12

EC 4.5.22

a. **MSC** – to set the Assembly registration fee at \$400 per congregation with a fee of \$100 for each additional lay voting member and rostered leader. Retired

rostered leaders seeking voice and vote to be charged at the 2021 rate. In person guests to be charged \$50. The Bishop is granted discretion to adjust fees in cases of special necessity. Due to Covid-19 protocols there will be no vendors allowed.

- b. MSC** – to place Pr. Jeffrey Kallevig “On Leave from Call” as of February 28, 2022.
- c. MSC** – to begin the process to evict all tenants in the “Lincoln House.”
- d. MSC** – to reduce the asking price on the Pasadena property to \$2.75 million and to engage the services of Keller-Williams on the sale.