

Church Council Meeting
January 10, 2023

Present: George Nederhoff, Bob Saathoff, Craig Blanchard, Maureen Hanson, Lisa Arenholz, Danielle Terrell, Julie Creeden, Chris Hansen, Mike Christiason (via Zoom)

Staff Present: Angie Rath, Julia Voss

Opening Prayer: Pastor Steve Brackett from the Northeastern Iowa Synod office opened in prayer.

Synod Office Presentation: The Council welcomed Bishop Kevin Jones and Pastor Steve Brackett to the meeting. They were invited by President Nederhoff to discuss the Letter of Dissent with the entire council. Bishop Jones said that some of the ELCA remarks that were issues of concern in the council's letter of dissent are coming from Bishop Eaton and those would need to be addressed by her. He continued by stating that he had recently been in conversation with Bishop Eaton and that the council should also expect a response from her very soon.

He went on to say that "faithful people can come to differing interpretations about the Scriptures." He explained that the application of "Historical Criticism" of the ancient texts has shown us that the Bible **does** contain many inconsistencies. Pastor Brackett agreed. Discussion occurred with council member Julie Creeden, who disagreed with their stance that Scripture is not inerrant. Creeden stated that there are no inconsistencies in God's Word. Discussion followed. The Bishop concluded his views by stating that "faithful people can come to differing interpretations about Scripture. The ELCA believes we can still be one church even though we have different ideas about the inerrancy of Scripture."

Regarding homosexuality, the Bishop shared that he feels this is a social justice issue. He explained that there are some ELCA congregations, such as Nazareth, who take the conservative Biblical stance which is evident in our "Speaking the Truth in Love" document. While other ELCA congregations have "conscience bound release," believing homosexuals should be able to have the same life-long and monogamous commitments as heterosexuals. He shared that the ELCA believes we can co-exist with these differences. He explained that issues have arisen between some congregations and the ELCA since the release of the Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust (2009 Churchwide Assembly.) It is Bishop Jones' view that these issues have arisen due to the larger church moving closer to the "conscience bound release" interpretation over the years. The bishop believes that congregations who hold beliefs similar to Nazareth, are "feeling unwelcome and unheard."

He said that He is sympathetic to the divide that is happening at Nazareth and the struggle among congregation members. He asked the question, "Is God being obeyed?" He reminded us all to "love thy neighbor" even when we may disagree on issues. He referred the council to the book of Galatians where Paul says "I do something out of love, because I'm free. I'm bound by your conscience, not mine." He continued by reminding the council that "Paul says you can't draw a line and say you're in and you're out to others." He concluded this portion of his comments by sharing that votes have to be taken at the Church-wide Assembly. People are allowed to make statements at the meeting.

Regarding the current unavailability of ELCA pastors, Bishop Jones and Pastor Brackett said that the retirement of Baby Boomers has hit hard across the entire country and we are not seeing as many students going into the Seminary. There is a shortage of pastors nationwide.

Bishop Jones suggested not rushing to get things done because conversations need to be heard first. He said the Synod office is still looking for an Interim Pastor for Nazareth and also suggested that Nazareth hire consultant to help the congregation get through this period. He suggested the Council look at the Mennonite Peace Center for guidance. He suggested finding a donor from the congregation to pay for this. He went on to say that he may be able to find a Reformed Church in America (RCA) interim pastor as well, and to let him know as soon as possible if the Council would like him to research this possibility. He feels that an interim pastor from the RCA would “fit the theology of Nazareth Church a little better” than a pastor from the ELCA. The council thanked him for his offer and said they would look into any RCA candidate he could find.

Bishop Jones went on to discuss a possible By-Law change that the Church Council was planning on recommending to the congregation for their approval at the upcoming Annual Meeting. He indicated that if the congregation were to reduce the required waiting period between votes to disaffiliate from 90 days to 30 days, some people in the congregation could bring a lawsuit that Nazareth left in such a way that would be deemed illegal based upon the Constitution of the ELCA – this opinion came straight from ELCA council. He encouraged the Council to follow the ELCA’s Constitution very carefully for the sake of the congregation.

Discussion took place on some miscommunication regarding a possible Interim Pastor. Those issues were cleared up with Bishop Jones and President George Nederhoff.

A question was raised by council member Lisa Arenholz, who had attended two break-out sessions at the most recent ELCA Synod Assembly. Lisa found the topics of the sessions very troubling and asked the Bishop whether or not he approved of these topics. He said he was unaware of the content of all break-out sessions held at Synod Assemblies, but that he would look into these concerns.

The Council thanked Bishop Jones and Pastor Brackett for taking time out of their evening to attend.

Tour of the Underground: The Council toured the Underground Kits and Quilts area with Donna Kirshenmann, Barb Ericson, Diane Hamer, Donna Schmeidel, and Kristie Lehman. They learned more about this Nazareth ministry and were provided with a hand-out of some background of the ministry that was formed in 1945. Kits and Quilts representatives expressed their desire/vision to have a “dedicated” room for the work they do – a secure, permanent space that would allow tables and sewing machines set up at all times so members of the ministry could work without having to move items and set up every time they come to the church – taking away valuable time to make items to help and support people/places around the world. The only expense they would incur, they believe, is the cost to add/change the locks on the two doors that open into the large room. The Church Council thanked the women present and the Kits & Quilts Ministry for all they do and for the tour of their space. Danielle Terrell will follow up with Nazareth and Marc Rath, Facility Director, on some of the requests presented.

Congregational Input:

Peg Smith and Helen Duncan, Nazareth members, presented to the Council. Helen Duncan distributed a letter she had written to the Council expressing her concerns with leaving the ELCA. The letter referenced several Bible verses.

Peg Smith thanked the Council for letting her speak. Peg talked about “Why we are Lutheran” and referred to Martin Luther. She said that the Sacrament of Baptism and the Sacrament at The Altar (communion) are essential to being Lutheran and that we are all here because we are saved by grace. She felt that both baptism and communion were missing in the inner circle of the bullseye in our slide presentation for the congregation. Peg went on to express views that the discontent at Nazareth is not pleasing to God. She talked about the ELCA views and cautioned the Council on how they research information on the ELCA.

She shared the ELCA social statement on abortion and said that the Council had stated an untruth about what the Bishop said about abortion during our presentation. Peg felt that these are women’s choices – and that we are a church, not a governing body. She shared her opinion that Jesus never mentioned abortion or anything about homosexuality in the Bible.

Peg said she loves Nazareth - it is her home, and she is disappointed with the perceived agenda by the Council. She encouraged the Council to end the discontent by:

1. Accepting help from a source that is reputable and unbiased, one who works from facts and not fallacies and half-truths.
2. Call as soon as possible an Interim Pastor who has been trained specifically to help with this type of situation.
3. Stop listening to outside influencers who want to push their own agenda.

She concluded her comments stating that she does not care whether or not Nazareth remains in the ELCA, but she shared her strong belief with the Council that Nazareth should always remain Lutheran.

The Council thanked Peg and Helen for attending and sharing their comments/concerns.

Jim Glaspie, Nazareth member, also presented to the Council. Jim had concerns with the presentation on January 8, 2023 regarding the ELCA. He felt that the presentation was full of opinions rather than facts. He encouraged the Council to support their opinions-shared within the presentation with data and explain the “why” behind it. He questioned the decline in Nazareth’s membership, and thought that blaming any decline on the ELCA was misleading. He also questioned whether other churches are really growing and encouraged the Council to share that data.

He went on to say that he had called Portico (Nazareth’s current insurance company for staff benefits) and found out that “yes, we can stay with Portico if Nazareth disaffiliates with the ELCA, but that the rates will be much higher.” He said that if Nazareth looks at different insurance companies, the Council should be careful of any perceived “conflict of interest” that could come from several of our members being associated with local insurance companies. Jim went on to express his opinion on the inappropriateness of having a non-council member present information at the ELCA Informational Session and that the Nazareth leadership is presently failing the congregation. He said that the information presented by the Council appears biased and that the author and sources need to be listed for fact-checking purposes.

The Council thanked Jim for attending and for sharing his comments/concerns.

LCMC Presentation: The Council welcomed Pastor Stephen Anenson, current Coordinator for the Iowa district and Pastor Mark Vander Tuig, retired National Coordinator from Lutheran Churches in Mission for Christ (LCMC.) They spoke on the purpose of the LCMC and what they do to support congregations and help them enhance their local and worldwide work for the extension of God's Kingdom. LCMC's purpose is to "support the common mission to bear witness to the good news that sinners are put right with God by faith alone in Jesus Christ, to resist any corruptions of this Gospel, and to serve and support fellow congregations who seek to do likewise. Looking only to the cross of Christ, we proclaim God's work as law and gospel for the redemption of His people today." Pastor Vander Tuig added that LCMC values the local church as the highest good, and that the association exists to serve the local church. The National coordinator works to help local congregations to work together. LCMC's emphasis is on evangelism and church planting. They greatly encourage mission work, and provide leadership training by supporting pastors with Continuing Education opportunities and other resources.

LCMC was founded in 2001 and currently has approximately 790 congregations in the U.S. and just under 200 congregations in 15 countries for a total of 971 churches. Their congregations are served by:

- 1261 pastors on their clergy list,
- a national full-time staff of 5,
- an 8-member board of trustees,
- a 7-member ministry board,
- and a growing number of districts and fellowships.

LCMC is a Lutheran association and is under the authority of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. LCMC pastors can stay on Portico for the same rate as ELCA pastors. LCMC has their own health benefit package for staff through an agency in Sioux Falls. He said that the name of the Sioux Falls, SD company can be found on the LCMC website: LCMC.net

The Sacraments of baptism and communion are celebrated. LCMC strives to maintain their Lutheran theology integrity. They host a Youth Gathering every summer in Des Moines, Iowa. Pastor Vander Tuig shared that the LCMC website is a marketplace of resources and ideas. Congregations are **not required** to give anything financially to LCMC, but they do hope and pray that congregations would consider helping to support their five total administrators, nationwide.

Pastor Vander Tuig expressed to the Council that they know transition is difficult. They are willing to help us find an Interim Pastor, but know that we, as a church, have difficult decisions to make right now. LCMC will provide "call committee coaches," who will work with a call committee to help navigate the process of calling a new pastor without directly telling the call committee what to do. LCMC has a working relationship with 9 seminaries – some specifically Lutheran, others with a Lutheran track. An example of the latter is Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts.

The Council thanked Pastor Anenson and Pastor Vander Tuig for sharing their presentation on the LCMC.

Pastor Bob Ericson: Council welcomed Pastor Bob Ericson to the meeting. George Nederhoff explained to Pastor Ericson the thread of emails that transpired between Bishop Kevin Jones and George Nederhoff regarding the possibility of hiring an interim ELCA pastor. Pastor Svingen accepted another interim position and was going to only be able to be at Nazareth a few days a week. Some miscommunication was cleared up regarding the Council's hesitancy to call Pastor Paul Svingen.

Pastor Ericson reminded the Council that the decisions they are making are affecting people, and clear communication ahead of time is going to be essential moving forward. He warned the Council about the perception of micro-managing the Teaching Team or any staff. Some council members agreed with Pastor Ericson's assessment of micromanagement, while others disagreed and felt that Council oversight of preaching is essential during this time of transition when we have no Senior Pastor. The Council reassured Pastor Ericson that George and Lisa will be meeting with the Teaching Team on January 12 to make introductions and ensure there will be clear communication moving forward.

Council thanked Pastor Ericson for attending the Council meeting and for his faithful service to Nazareth.

Call Meeting to Order: George Nederhoff called the meeting to order at 9:00 p.m.

2023 Budget Proposal: The Council welcomed Anne Carlson, Dean Meier, and Adrian Talbot from the Personnel Committee. Dave Welter sent his regrets as he had another meeting commitment that evening. Anne gave a thorough and detailed presentation of the proposed 2023 balanced budget to Council. Anne has been working hand-in-hand with Angie Rath and Lori Haag on crunching numbers, and she said she was proud of the sacrifice made by staff and Mission Committees to cut budgets even further. Finance and Personnel Committees have consulted with one another to present this year's budget.

Adrian Talbot thanked the Council for having them attend the meeting and gave a brief background of his 34+ years of Human Resource experience, in addition to having experience as being a past president of Church Council, as well as sitting on call committees during the time of interim pastors in the past. He has been at Nazareth for many years and worked through challenges and crises that have arisen over the years. He urged the Council that if the Lord is gracious enough to bless Nazareth with additional funds, that they consider giving the dedicated staff a modest bump in pay or a one-time lump sum "bonus" as an affirmation of gratitude and compassion.

Dean Meier reiterated Adrian's words and said that the staff was put on a spending freeze and then made additional significant cuts to their ministry budgets; and with the rate of inflation in our country of 8% or more, and no raises, the staff is going to be hurting financially with inflation. Dean asked the Council to continue to find ways to thank the staff and give them praise and a pat on the back.

Julia Voss on behalf of the Nazareth staff, thanked Anne, Dean, and Adrian for their care of staff. Angie Rath, Administrator, reiterated the thanks and gratitude for their hard work and their concern.

The entire Council thanked Anne, Dean, and Adrian for sharing their presentations. Julie Creeden specifically thanked the committee for their clear and concise explanation of a very complicated budget in a way that all council members could fully comprehend.

Opening Prayer: George Nederhoff opened the remaining portion of the business meeting in prayer.

Financial Update: Craig Blanchard gave an update on the November Financials. A motion was made (Saathoff) and seconded (Terrell) to place the November Financials on file. Motion carried. Approved

Approval of Minutes:

- A motion was made (C. Hansen) and seconded (Blanchard) to approve the minutes from the December 20, 2022 Council meeting. Motion carried. Approved.
- A motion was made (Creeden) and seconded (Saathoff) to approve the minutes from the special Council meeting on January 3 where Council met to plan for the ELCA presentations on January 8 and January 15. Motion carried. Approved.

Recommendations:

- A motion was made (Saathoff) and seconded (Blanchard) to approve the following Memorials:
 - Given in memory of Arnie Flessner to Capital Fund: \$25
 - Given in memory of Dennis Gaede to Welcome Home Appeal: \$925
 - Given in memory of James Floyd to Welcome Home Appeal: \$975
 - Given in memory of Ray Pearson to Capital Fund: \$290

Motion carried. Approved.

- A motion was made (Christiason) and seconded (M. Hanson) to approve the 2023 Budget as presented. Discussion took place regarding particulars and the use of the Reserve Fund for certain items. Angie Rath will work with Anne Carlson to put together a few proposals so that Council can look at these on Sunday, January 15 at 2 p.m. Motion carried. Approved.

President Report: George Nederhoff reported that he will contact Bishop Kevin regarding Interim possibilities from the RCA and will also reach out to the LCMC.

George gave an update on the names that will be presented at the Annual Meeting for 2023 Church Council. Julie Creeden and Chris Hansen will be on the ballot for (2) 2-year terms; and Kristina McBurney, Wayne Jacobson, Kristie Lehman, and Nate Greiner will be on the ballot for (3) 3-year terms. 5 candidates will be need to be voted in on January 29. Nominations will also be taken from the floor.

The Teaching Team will meet January 12 at 8 a.m. to make introductions and talk with Andy Walser, Pastor Bob Ericson, Nathaniel Parrish, Calli Tystahl, Derrick Akers, Kristin Sauerbrei, Tim Boettger, Steve Kramer, and Matt Reisetter. Discussion took place on details of hiring fill-in pastors and contracts signed.

Administrator Report: Angie Rath referred to the Draft Agenda for the Annual Meeting needing approval from Council. A motion was made by (C. Hansen) and seconded (Creeden) to approve the agenda. Discussion took place. A motion was then made (C.Hansen) and seconded (M. Hanson) to approve the agenda as amended. Motion carried. Approved.

2023 Nominating Committee: A motion was made (Nederhoff) and seconded (Saathoff) to appoint Lisa Arenholz and Craig Blanchard to serve on the 2023 Nominating Committee. Three other people will need to be elected from the congregation on January 29 at the Annual Meeting. Motion carried. Approved.

By-Laws Revisions: Discussion took place that Article IV that will be presented at the Annual Meeting will need to be stricken based on the ELCA discussion with Bishop Kevin. Article VIII, Article IX, and Article XVI will be voted on at the Annual Meeting. Dan Olsen will be contacted to run the technology and sound booth on January 29. Maureen will present the By-Law proposed revisions at the Annual Meeting.

New Business: The Church Council decided that with the late hour of this meeting, the remaining agenda items would be discussed at the next Council meeting. The Council decided to change the Council meeting from February 14 to Tuesday, February 7 at 5:30 p.m. Julia Voss will notify Sam Madson to get a notice in the Naz News.

The recommendation from the Local Missions Committee to approve \$2016 for Alternatives; \$4625 for Christian Crusaders; and \$6945 for CF Bible Conference was tabled due to budget questions/concerns.

Reminders:

- The next informational meeting for the congregation regarding our ELCA affiliation will be Sunday, January 15 from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. in the Worship Center.
- The next regular Council meeting will be Tuesday, February 7 at 5:30 p.m. in Room 160. Craig Blanchard will speak on Apostle Simon the Zealot.
- The Annual Meeting is Sunday, January 29 at 12:30 p.m. in the Worship Center.

Adjourn: A motion was made (Blanchard) and seconded (C.Hansen) to adjourn the meeting at 12:00 midnight. Motion carried. Approved.

Closing Prayer: The Council prayed The Lord's Prayer.

Minutes submitted by Julia Voss
Executive Secretary