

SYNOD COUNCIL MINUTES
Central/Southern Illinois Synod, ELCA
Saturday, May 7, 2022

VISIONING MEETING

The Synod Council of the Central/Southern Illinois Synod ("C/SIS" or "synod") met at Grace Lutheran Church in Springfield, Illinois on Saturday, May 7, 2022, for visioning, with the following members in attendance:

Present

Bishop S. John Roth	Mr. Austin Byer (Youth Representative)
Ms. Carey Mayer (Vice President)	Mr. Mark Harms
Pastor Christine McNeal (Acting Secretary)	Ms. Doreen Klages
Pastor Peter Hinrich (Dean)	Mr. David Miller
Pastor Linda Strader (Dean)	Mr. Steve Mitze

Absent

Pastor Greg Busboom (Dean)	Ms. Jolyn Allison (Youth Representative)
Pastor Richard Hertenstein (Dean)	Ms. Cynthia Davis
Pastor Marlin Otte (Dean)	Mr. Ken Finkle
Pastor Amy Zietlow (Dean)	Mr. Bill Hartley
	Ms. Paula Hasty
	Ms. Marcia McGaughey
	Ms. Cheryl Predmore

Staff Present

Pastor Ken Tegtmeier
Ms. Laura Lee

Staff Absent

Pastor Ken Sandlin
Pastor Maureen Stein
Pastor Elise Rothfusz

Visitors Present: None

Call to Order

Vice-President Carey Mayer called the meeting to order at 8:41 a.m.

Devotions/Hymn

Bishop Roth led Dwelling in the Word with Luke 9:10-17.
Those assembled sang *Christ the Lord is Risen Today!*
Bishop Roth led an opening prayer.

Takeaways from November 13, 2021 Visioning Meeting

Bishop Roth shared these items brought to light from the presentation from Kristin Wiersma of The Joshua Group and the discussion that followed:

- Discernment is not something that we do; it is a clarifying realization or comprehension that comes to us. Spiritual discipline opens us up to recognize what God is calling us to be and do.
- Discernment process begins with an awareness of our need to discern.
- Name key issues around which we are seeking discernment.
- Discernment arises out of intentional listening – to Scripture, to the stories of people inside and outside our system – and prayerful synthesis of information and stories heard, using mission and values as guardrails.
- Prayer – for trust that the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us; for indifference to everything but the will of God, letting go of personal preferences, agendas, and opinions; and for wisdom
- The “Why” question is the question of identity – who we are, whom we appear to others to be, and whom we aspire to be. Start with the “Why?”

Naming key issues around which we are seeking discernment

Attendees split into small groups for discussion of key issues, returned to the whole group and reported areas identified for a larger discussion.

Group 1

- The number of available pastors and the call process. Unfortunately, some in congregations think the synod doesn’t do enough to find potential pastors, which leads members into a “scarcity” mentality. How do we help others reflect differently?
- What is a congregation? COVID taught us church is not just a building, so how do we take advantage of lessons from the last two years?
- Diversity and inclusion in the synod and in our churches.

Group 2

- Discomfort with ambiguity. Holy waiting. It’s hard for us to not have a plan, so how do we wait in faith?
- Distrust of all institutions today.
- Need to acknowledge where we are versus where we used to be. How do we look forward rather than backward?
- How do we help people expect transformation? God is constantly transforming us!

Group 3

- Transitioning congregations. How to support and care for both congregations that are getting smaller and those that are gaining in members? Each is undergoing changes that might require guidance.
- Racial justice. Where do we go from here? What do we do with it?
- Declining number of pastors through retirements etc. How do we recognize and encourage people to go into ministry? We must ask God to guide us to inspire those who are called, while recognizing ministry is a *call* and cannot be a matter of “recruiting.”

- Making safe spaces, which looks different in every community.
- Finding ways to disagree well.

The whole group discussed the tension between discernment and planning. While it's difficult to just sit, we must discern that the work is Spirit led. Of course, every church is different so there is no "one size fits all." Yet what resonates in the heart? Jesus' followers *felt* something. So, from all this the group wondered together what is it we *do* versus who we are called to *be*?

Establishing the guardrails

Attendees split into different small groups. The groups considered what the C/SIS constitution identifies as our key values, mission and safe spaces. Groups then reported back for a larger discussion regarding our guardrails – those things that are non-negotiable. Groups shared:

- Created, empowered, called and sent. (Statement of Purpose S6.01)
- Proclaim, carry out, serve, worship, nurture, manifest (Statement of Purpose S6.02)
- To create safe spaces, we need to get out of our spaces and be around people not like us.
- Focus on God's word in all that we do.
- Focus on what's agreeable and not what's disagreeable. State first what we agree on, then talk about our disagreements.
- Understand that we're never completed. The transformation continues.

Bishop Roth noted that sometimes our terminology might get in the way, causing us to curl into ourselves rather than reaching out in God's mission.

Hymn

Those assembled sang *Halleluiah! Jesus Lives!*
Bishop Roth led a prayer.

Based on conversations in Dwelling in the Word, key issues and guardrails:

Those in attendance shared ideas on the listed topics.

Where might God be nudging us and why?

- In the nudging... be listening to God.
- Have Synod Council form a Dwelling in the Word group. By Dwelling together, we would be better prepared to listen for God – and would look forward to the time together in community.
- The question arose: How do we take this back to churches and individual lives? How is God nudging congregations?
- Consider helping congregations talk of where God is at work instead of focusing on all that isn't happening. Share God sightings. Yet, also make it safe for people to say "I haven't seen God" amid grief, sorrow or loss.

Do we continue to advocate for synod-wide practice of Dwelling in the Word, and why?

- Encourage congregations to begin meetings with Dwelling in the Word.
- Encourage Sister Congregations to Dwell in the Word together each month. The Synod would provide the text. Sister Congregation A would choose three people

from the congregation to participate, as would Sister Congregation B. Each congregation in the Synod – no matter what size – should be able to find three members who would want to study and Dwell in the Word together. This way different size churches can be in relationship together despite any distance (with sessions held via Zoom).

Sister Congregations

- Sister Congregations will be reassigned by Synod Assembly.
- Talk about new Dwelling in the Word initiative at Synod Assembly.
- Encourage congregations to find time for coffee or conversation during Synod Assembly with its Sister Congregation.

Next steps on anti-racism work

- Bishop Roth shared several documents, including: A Statement of the Synod Council of the Central/Southern Illinois Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in response to the Brutal and Unjust Killing of George Floyd (Adopted June 6, 2020); Report to the Synod Council by the Anti-Racism Working Group; and the Analysis of Central/Southern Illinois Synod Anti-Racism Survey Results.
- Synod Council discussion on next steps was postponed to the June C/SIS Council meeting.

Sharing our stories

Council members shared inspiring stories about an event, conversation, observation, or situation that happened sometime during the past three years involving the storyteller and/or the storyteller's connection with something having to do with the church and God at work.

Book ideas

Throughout the morning attendees shared books that they found inspiring. Among those offered:

- *Today Everything is Different: An Adventure in Prayer and Action* by Dirk G. Lange
- *Know What You're FOR: A Growth Strategy for Work, An Even Better Strategy for Life* by Jeff Henderson
- *High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out* by Amanda Ripley
- *Churches and the Crisis of Decline* by Andrew Root
- *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* by Richard Foster
- *All things made new* by Ian Lyall
- The Bible!

Hymn/Closing Prayer

Those assembled sang *I Know that My Redeemer Lives!*

Bishop Roth closed in prayer.

Vice-President Mayer declared the meeting adjourned at 1:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Pastor Christine McNeal, Acting Secretary

SYNOD COUNCIL VISIONING MEETING NOTES

Central/Southern Illinois Synod, ELCA

Saturday, December 3, 2022

The Synod Council of the Central/Southern Illinois Synod ("C/SIS" or "synod") met for the purpose of visioning at Peace Lutheran Church, 524 S. Fifth St., Springfield, on Saturday, December 3, 2022, with the following members in attendance:

Present:

Bishop S. John Roth
Mr. Ken Finkle
Ms. Carey Mayer
Pr. Christine McNeal

Pastor Greg Busboom
Pastor Rick Hertenstein
Pastor Peter Hinrich
Pastor Marlin Otte
Pastor John Rothfusz
Pastor Amy Zietlow

Ms. Cynthia Davis
Mr. Mark Harms
Ms. Doreen Klages
Mr. David Miller
Mr. Steve Mitze
Dr. Eileen Setti
Ms. Jean Welch

Absent:

Ms. Jolyn Allison
Mr. Austin Byer
Mr. Bill Hartley
Ms. Paula Hasty
Ms. Cheryl Predmore

Staff Present:

Pastor Elise Rothfusz
Pastor Ken Sandlin
Pastor Maureen Stein
Pastor Ken Tegtmeier

Ms. Laura Lee

Visitors Present: None

Opening Prayer

Vice-President Carey Mayer called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m. Bishop S. John Roth led Dwelling in the Word.

Emerging from the butterflies at the 2022 Central/Southern Illinois Synod Assembly

Pastor Greg Busboom and Pastor Amy Zietlow reminded the council both visually and verbally of the 2022 C/SIS Assembly project in which attending participants answered questions throughout the gathering by writing on pieces of paper. In devotions, at worship, and in forums, people were asked to write prayers, laments, and hopes on paper shaped to resemble the bark, leaves, drops of water, and butterflies. These reflections and responses engaged our ongoing discernment as a synod. By the end of Assembly a wall of art had been created.



After Assembly, the art was taken down and Pastor Zietlow transcribed each word from each written piece into a 42-page document. Pastor Busboom described to the group the painstaking care of taking what seemed an art project and turning it into a data-driven process with eight axial codes.

Axial coding is a qualitative research technique that involves relating data together – such as the words written on the butterflies at C/SIS Assembly - in order to uncover categories and subcategories ground within participants' voices. In other words, axial coding is one way to build linkages and collect data where it might not seem “obvious.” Using the document of information from Pastor Zietlow, the C/SIS Conference Deans created a document of eight axial codes. While listed as such, these are not meant to be in any particular order. The preamble to the codes reads, “The Triune God acts in our lives and in our church to give us hope as we...”

After the introduction and process explanation by Pastor Busboom, Pastor Zietlow led the council in the following exercise:

- 1) She read the preamble to the code, read each axial code, and then asked, “What does this say about what God is calling us to be as a synod?” Each person was asked to write an answer on a Post-it note for each of the eight axial codes.
- 2) The council was then split into teams of two to bring together answers to each. Pastor Zietlow again read the preamble to the code, read each axial code, and then asked, “What does this say about what God is calling us to be as a synod?” This time each team was asked to write an answer on a new/combined Post-it note for each of the eight axial codes.
- 3) The group returned together using a “Dwelling in the Word” approach of “What did you hear?”

AXIAL CODE 1

The Triune God acts in our lives and in our church to give us hope as we...

Hear God’s song leading us into a new and Spirit-filled vision for our future;

“What does this say about what God is calling us to be as a synod?”

From the Post-it notes:

- Focus isn’t us. God is always showing the way. The Spirit with each of us has a voice – but it’s the Spirit’s voice that needs to lead us, not ours.
- As a synod we have to listen in order to create something new and throw out some of the old (this is the way we’ve always done it). We have to be fearless explorers as we try new things. Adjustments can be made. We have to take action.
- Be open to listen to new and different ideas and actions to which Go’s Spirit is guiding us.
- Be like musicians who innovate on a theme, with Spirit’s leading.
- Provide tools to better listen to God’s song and sing with other congregations.
- To embody move fully the new life that is ours in Christ through renewed energy, renewed “song,” renewed mission.
- Trust in the Holy Spirit as we listen to those outside our congregations seeking hope for their future.
- Continuing to sing God’s song as we are attentive to God’s new leading as will.
- To be led by the Spirit as we experiment and learn.

Major themes heard:

- Listen
- Be Spirit-led
- Experiment

AXIAL CODE 2

The Triune God acts in our lives and in our church to give us hope as we...

Rediscover abundant joy and encouragement even as we name our fears and losses;

“What does this say about what God is calling us to be as a synod?”

From the Post-it notes:

- We can change. It may make us uneasy, but God is with us. What are our non-negotiables?
- Be aware of our fears and losses and don't let them blind us to what God is calling us to do.
- As a synod, we have to name our fears and be non-judgmental and give assurance that we are still loved regardless of our fears. Being open to new ideas gives others the joy they need or seek.
- Knowing God's with us we can name and embrace fears and joys and realistically own them. WE MUST NOT SETTLE FOR LESS.
- To embody more fully what it means to be a church of both death and resurrection... Acknowledge our losses and celebrate our joys.
- Knowing we are one with Christ, children of God, allows us to know joy & be honest about loss & lament & encouraged by one another & faith practices.
- Find expressions of joy in the midst of suffering and loss as a path to celebrate who we are as church today and as the people of God.
- Be resilient. Acknowledge fears. Become active. Listen for God's voice.
- Important to acknowledge losses and grieve them. We can focus on those or we can turn to God and ask for help seeing the joys in what remains and the new ones to come.

Major themes heard:

- God is WITH us.
- Themes of fear and loss but also resurrection and life.
- Resilience > struggles > hope.
- It's not joy in the absence of fear and loss - but living in the midst of them!

AXIAL CODE 3

The Triune God acts in our lives and in our church to give us hope as we...

Listen deeply to God, to one another, and to the world around us;

“What does this say about what God is calling us to be as a synod?”

From the Post-it notes:

- As a synod, point to potential resources: our neighbors and partners learn from one another. (We don't have to have all the answers.)
- Continue and grow “Dwelling in the Word.” Be face-to-face to listen to people we know and people we don't know.
- As a synod as need to listen to different opinions and fuse into new ideas and actions. It's not about debating but working together to serve all. This requires the time and space to allow conversations to happen.
- To facilitate spaces in which we can listen deeply to differing voices in a loving, respectful safe way ... and embrace the mystery of what we do not yet know.
- Suspending judgment. Open our hearts and minds to those around us who we consider “different.”
- Listen before we speak and develop tools for listening to hear ALL voices.
- Be willing to sit with God to allow God to fill us and He will show us how to listen to one another with intention and concern.
- We need to deepen relationships with God and neighbors (local, state, global) by listening and serving.
- To listen to what God and others are calling us to do and let it be seen in our actions.

Major themes heard:

- Again, listen. In fact, facilitate spaces to listen deeply.
- Not about debating.
- Suspend judgment.
- We have much to learn from one another.

AXIAL CODE 4

The Triune God acts in our lives and in our church to give us hope as we...

Embody the wide diversity of all God's people;

"What does this say about what God is calling us to be as a synod?"

From the Post-it notes:

- Bear a degree of tension and disagreement. Welcoming in all forms.
- Lead by example in offering education, even if the "why" not always understood. Enter the spaces of those who are not like us.
- As a synod, invite a diverse spectrum of people and accept them. Meet people where they are – it might not be in church. If we are truly serving – God loves all and therefore we love them, too. We are all children of God.
- To create spaces for those who are excluded from the church and from our communities to share their voices so that we can learn from them.
- To be open to those not like us, to be aware of them, to advocate for them and accept them.
- Lift up current diversity, acknowledge and value differences, always showing deep care and respect for others.
- We need to engage a welcome and welcome people who are not like us. It will cause conflict as we change.
- Acknowledge diversity and sit everyone at a bigger table.
- Pushes us to become one and seek out the people who need our help and to hear about God. We can't wait for them to come to us.

Major themes heard:

- Engage.
- Respect and care for others.
- We can't wait for "the other" to come to us.
- Diversity is a strength because ALL are children of God.
- But... what is your definition of diversity?

AXIAL CODE 5

The Triune God acts in our lives and in our church to give us hope as we...

Follow Jesus through daily acts of love and service to others;

"What does this say about what God is calling us to be as a synod?"

From the Post-it notes:

- Be conscious of doing "acts of love" in a campaign, something like "random acts of kindness" throughout the synod.
- Share what we are doing in our congregations so others can expand their ministries.
- As a synod, highlight where and how we respond to needs of people around us. Identify new ways to love and serve.
- Never look past opportunities to love and serve others; even those we do not want to love and serve.

- The Synod needs to be actively training, equipping and leading congregations in more fully and actively living out the practice of discipleship.
- As a synod ensure that we are not just doing things for ourselves but have a willingness and joy of serving each other every day – not just Sunday. We have **(have)** to listen to others' needs, and not impose our solutions. Do good all the time.
- Synod can be a communicator/resource for new and different ways to serve others. How can the Synod be a resource for ministries that include those from home?
- Habitually prioritize the welfare of others as Jesus did.
- God is calling us to daily service. Leaders can challenge people and congregations to go out to impact people with God's love.

Major themes heard:

- Identify new ways to love and serve.
- SHARE.
- Challenge people to show God's love daily.
- Find and share joy in serving.
- Promote welfare of others, wherever you are.

AXIAL CODE 6

The Triune God acts in our lives and in our church to give us hope as we...

Work together through the building of relationships;

"What does this say about what God is calling us to be as a synod?"

From the Post-it notes:

- We need to intentionally know and love one another more deeply – inside church and into wider community.
- Instead of being so "independent," our churches need to become collaborative.
- The Synod needs to facilitate ideas between congregations so that trust is built to share. Idea sharing can spark more work in communities (beyond church walls) to build relationships and save all.
- Synod to communicate the work of congregations to the whole synod. Synod to find ways to do a joint racial project at Synod Assembly.
- Synod needs to help congregations develop and articulate a shared mission that unites us together as one church, working together.
- To be an extended family, where we grow together despite our differences and even to embrace our differences.
- Strengthen sister congregation relationships. Practice radical hospitality – open our lives to each other.
- Intentionally cultivate and inspire relationships between individuals, congregations and synods that lead to shared experience of God's presence in each relationship.

Major themes heard:

- How do we open our lives to each other?
- Facilitate ideas between congregations.
- Embrace differences in congregations while building relationships.
- Idea: Joint project (perhaps with possible local spinoff?) at Synod Assembly.

AXIAL CODE 7

The Triune God acts in our lives and in our church to give us hope as we...

Extend God's mission beyond the walls of our congregations; and,

"What does this say about what God is calling us to be as a synod?"

From the Post-it notes:

- We are church for the sake of the world. God is calling us to go make a difference in Jesus name.
- Engage in our communities and beyond their and their needs.
- Be present in public arena; have activity meaningful to those outside the church. Invite others to experience Christ's grace and community.
- See our community as our faith, and join with others – both ecumenical groups and civic groups. Get Third World experiences. Think globally.
- Recognize that we are representing God wherever we go. This is a major mindset/vision change.
- Extend God's call to serve beyond our congregation, community, and Synod, to serve and accept and love all people.
- Find places outside church buildings to meet with and know people as followers of Jesus.
- The Synod can help congregations understand what is happening in communities and remind them to be involved in creating solutions and making sure that lots of voices are at the table.
- To equip congregation how to be a church that exists to make a better world more than to make a better church... leaving our building to be a church on the move in the world.

Major themes heard:

- See communities as parishes.
- Be a church on the move in the world.

AXIAL CODE 8

The Triune God acts in our lives and in our church to give us hope as we...

Experiment with new models of leadership for ministry in the church.

"What does this say about what God is calling us to be as a synod?"

From the Post-it notes:

- Encourage/raise up people to serve and lead in a variety of ways. Try new ways of "being church."
- Let God guide how we structure ourselves so that ministry and not tradition is the driving force in all that we do.
- The Synod leads by example by finding new ways to present innovations in a non-threatening manner because we tend to not like change. Changes don't have to be complicated, just practical. More training and tools will help create new models of leadership at all levels (church, synod, community.)
- Extend programs of care like BeFrienders to help stretched pastors, interims and congregations without leaders.
- Shared leadership. Pastor/leader gifted in a particular area and share in other congregations. Lift up, train, support, encourage, empower lay leadership! Team with secular professionals.
- To be ready to try with an openness to failure. Develop criteria for effective leadership. Involve youth.
- We will need to experiment and be open to God working with a variety of leadership models and new kinds of leaders.
- Move from a pastor-centered form of leadership to a form of leadership that equips lay leaders for Word and Sacrament Ministry not only in the church, but also in the world.

Major themes heard:

- Let God guide us.
- Don't fear change.
- Encourage lay leaders.
- Try new things and be open to failure.
- Who might be included in shared leadership?

Throughout the eight-axiom discussion, the council talked about what God is calling us to BE as we also talk about what to DO. As a Council the group often talks about “the Synod.” It was noted that the Synod *is* made up of our congregations. A conversation continued about adaptive change versus technical change and how to infuse a more collaborative process into the DNA of the Synod. Pastor Zietlow noted this discussion was not meant to move to action steps, but rather continue the conversation around from Synod Assembly. Council Member Mark Harms noted that many congregation members see the Synod as top down yet this process has been very “bottom up” in nature with the concepts coming from individuals writing on butterflies at Synod Assembly. He wondered how we might share that more broadly. It was said that the hope is to not stop with Synod Council, but to get information out to conferences and congregations as well.

Election process for bishop

Vice President Mayer said that clearly the axial code work set up by the deans, as well as the process during the visioning session so far, called for listening to the Spirit. So how do we get some of this process into the call for bishop? Questions and conversation continued about how to get the tremendous amount of work around the axial codes, and the continued visioning conversation in Synod Council, out to membership. These concepts of who we are as a synod are crucial to the discernment in a bishop’s election.

- Bishop Roth noted the large readership of the Synod Newsletter. It was decided the deans will write a newsletter article.
- Vice-President Mayer and Synod staff will create a Temple Talk for use.

The group continued with the second agenda item, the bishop’s election.

- 1) Bishop Roth highlighted the basics of the election process.
- 2) Nominations will be made at first Synod Assembly meeting Saturday, March 25. Names can then be withdrawn or move forward.
- 3) Basic biographical information will be gathered for names moving forward. (Name, current position, congregation membership, date and year of birth, date and year of ordination, education and degrees earned. Other?)
- 2) Council Member David Miller suggested some asking questions in writing, noting that it’s important that a bishop have the skill of written communication. Answers to questions would only be distributed after the Thursday Synod Assembly ballot, thus limiting quantity.
- 3) Conversation continued regarding holding Friday afternoon forums for the three final candidates versus having them answer responses in front of the entire assembly. Pastor Otte suggested a hybrid in which the candidates answer one or two of the same questions in front of everyone and then have longer discussions in three breakout rooms. (Candidates would move from room to room.) It was suggested that each forum be moderated by a non-voting member. Some thought a brief 20 to 30 minutes would be best for the forums; others thought longer would allow for more discussion.
- 4) Bishop Roth said the election committee will make final decisions about the process, taking into account other Synod Assembly timing needs. Some members of the election committee have already met with ELCA Secretary Sue Rothmeyer and churchwide representatives regarding the ELCA election toolkit and other guidelines.

Anti-Racism Working Group

The Anti-Racism Working Group informed the council that many members of the C/SIS staff, along with members of the Anti-Racism Working Group, joined our siblings in Christ from four other synods at the Region 5 Diversity and Inclusion Gathering in late fall 2022. The Rev. Sunitha Mortha of Metro Chicago Synod began her presentation with the following words: “We are story-dwellers. Each person is steeped in story, informed by story.” The group described their transformative experiences and how they debriefed the important learnings and insights from the day. The following statement was read:

“As the ARWG is tasked with holding Synod Council accountable to their commitment to the work of anti-racism in our synod, we debriefed our experiences of this transformative event and pondered how to share these important learnings and insights in the context of our synod. In order to better understand our own stories and how they influence our lives, to be reminded of God’s story of radical love for all people, and to be encouraged to listen to and believe our siblings’ stories, the ARWG offers to put together a similar diversity gathering for members of Synod Council.”

The ARWG proposed the event be held in our synod before the season of Lent begins (prior to February, 22, 2023). The group envisions the event would be experiential, conversational and interactive where participants will be invited and encouraged to examine their own stories and listen to and learn from the stories of others.

Those gathered enthusiastically encouraged the ARWG to move forward with planning such an event.

Having concluded the agenda conversations, Vice-President Mayer declared the meeting adjourned at 1:37 p.m. Pastor Marlin Otte closed with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,
Pastor Christine McNeal, Secretary