

MINUTES
of the Special Meeting
of the SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD COUNCIL
of the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
September 22, 2010
Silver Springs/Martin Luther School, Plymouth Meeting, PA

Ms. Patricia Robinson, Vice President, called to order the Special Meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council at 7:00 p.m. The purpose of the meeting was for the Synod Council to consider whether to grant approval to the desire of Holy Trinity, Abington, to terminate its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Holy Trinity has stated its intention to become a member of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). Vice President Robinson introduced Ms. Paula Kadel, who would serve as timekeeper and teller at this meeting.

Members of the Synod Council and Holy Trinity, and synod staff, introduced themselves. Twenty-five members of Holy Trinity, including the Reverends Amanda Grimmer and Michael Tavella, were in attendance.

The Reverend Sandra Brown and Mr. Albert Hunter, Jr., led devotions.

The Reverend Raymond Miller, Secretary, reviewed the procedure by which a congregation may terminate its relationship with the ELCA as described in Chapter 9 of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, noting that the reason for this special meeting was found in **9.62.g.** and that Holy Trinity had been a member of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA).

PRESENTATION BY HOLY TRINITY LEADERS

Mr. Thomas Schied, President, Holy Trinity, read the resolution approved by the congregation on June 6, 2010, and September 12, 2010, indicating Holy Trinity's desire to terminate its relationship with the ELCA.

Behind Holy Trinity's desire to terminate its relationship with the ELCA, stated Pastor Tavella, was the ELCA's inappropriate and allegedly heretical use of liturgical language referring to God at a recent installation of a bishop. "Don't mess with the Name of God," he said. "Let us [Holy Trinity] go." He then invited those present to join the NALC.

Pastor Tavella added that Holy Trinity is now an NALC member and that he and Pastor Grimmer would be rostered in the NALC when they are approved.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Making reference to the concept of "the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren" found in the Lutheran Confessions, the Reverend Paul Beck, Synod Council member, said that it grieves him that two congregations in this synod [Holy Trinity, Abington, and St. James, Philadelphia, which has also stated its desire to terminate its relationship with the ELCA] "have engaged themselves in conversation but not with us" [other rostered leaders and congregations in this synod]. Pastor Beck acknowledged that the "God language", cited by Pastor Tavella, may have over-reached its intention and did not establish a norm for the future and then accused Pastor Tavella of establishing high criteria

for the use of liturgical language. Pastor Beck concluded that appropriate liturgical language should lead people to believe and to find forgiveness.

Pastor Tavella responded that he and his congregation were no longer able to remain in a church that "does not confess what it is supposed to confess," adding that the ELCA has opened the door to "profound heresy." Church leaders need to defend "orthodox teaching," he continued, charging that the ELCA does not practice what it claims to teach.

Acknowledging that "we have differences," Mr. Richard Reimet, Treasurer, thanked Pastors Grimmer and Tavella for their many years of service at Holy Trinity. Wishing the congregation and its pastors Godspeed, he concluded, "We will not hold you back."

Mr. Joshua Kelly, Synod Council member, asked how the congregation would care for those who opposed the termination resolution.

Pastor Tavella responded that good pastoral care teaches people what is essential about the faith.

Stating her intention to minister to all of Holy Trinity's members, Pastor Grimmer implored, "Let us minister to our people."

Ms. Kimerly Hinkelman, Synod Council member, requested that some of Holy Trinity's members respond to Mr. Kelly's question.

Citing her experience in working with Holy Trinity's youth, one Holy Trinity member assured Synod Council members that the congregation seeks to minister to those who disagree, adding that the true faith is "a soft place to land, but a hard place to hold on to."

Another Holy Trinity member said that the congregation welcomed her.

Mr. Lawrence House, Synod Council member, said that he was saddened but not surprised by Holy Trinity's decision to terminate its relationship with the ELCA. He thanked the congregation for being a strong partner with this synod in the past and requested that those, who disagree with ELCA positions, "tone down their language" and not "demonize" the ELCA.

Pastor Grimmer noted that she and Pastor Tavella have also been victims of demonization.

Ms. Barbara Spencer, Synod Council member, asked why Holy Trinity decided to join the NALC.

Pastor Tavella stated that the NALC was a confessional church, capable of "significant oversight" of its rostered leaders and congregations.

The Reverend Carol Ficken, Synod Council member, said that she was sorry that Holy Trinity was leaving the ELCA, adding that, "wherever you go, God goes with you."

Mr. Schied thanked those present for attending, stating he strove to be fair to everybody.

SYNOD COUNCIL DISCUSSION

The Synod Council entered executive session.

PRESENTATION OF THE RESOLUTION AND VOTE

Vice President Robinson presented the followed resolution:

S. C. 10.09.07 Whereas Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Abington, PA, a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), in two legally called and conducted special congregational meetings, held on June 6, 2010, and September 12, 2010, has approved a resolution by the required two-thirds majority of voting members present to terminate its relationship with the ELCA, and

Whereas Bishop Claire S. Burkat, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA, and additional synodical leaders, on two occasions, June 28, 2010, and July 18, 2010, have consulted with Holy Trinity members,

RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council, with sadness and regret, grants synodical approval of Holy Trinity's action to terminate its relationship with the ELCA.

Vice President Robinson offered prayer and then Synod Council members voted. Ms. Kadel collected the ballots and tallied them.

Secretary Miller reported the following results: 24 ballots cast, 24 "yes" votes, 0 "no" votes, no abstentions, no invalid ballots. He declared that the resolution was approved.

The Reverend Claire Burkat, Bishop, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, offered prayer. The Synod Council adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

The Reverend Raymond A. Miller
Secretary