

**SYNOD COUNCIL OF THE METROPOLITAN NEW YORK SYNOD**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 08, 2025

**APPROVED ON JANUARY 17, 2026**

**SYNOD COUNCIL MEMBERS (23)**

<b>The Rev. Leticia Alanis</b>	<b>2027</b>
<i>Mr. Devon Brooks</i>	<b>2029</b>
<b>* Ms. Monique Davis</b>	<b>2027</b>
<b>Ms. Mary Downing</b>	<b>2029</b>
<b>* S. Dcn. David Ehlers</b>	<b>2027</b>
<b>* The Rev. Dr. Katrina Foster-Bishop</b>	<b>2031</b>
<i>S. Dcn. Philip Jenks</i>	<b>2027</b>
<b>* Mr. John Litke, Treasurer</b>	<b>2027</b>
<b>The Rev. Sonja Maclary</b>	<b>2029</b>
<b>Ms. Lily Sage Mathias</b>	<b>2029</b>
<i>Ms. Sonja Meberg (Young Adult)</i>	<b>2029</b>
<b>The Rev. Ernie Mossi</b>	<b>2029</b>
<b>* The Rev. Kevin O'Hara</b>	<b>2029</b>
<b>The Rev. David Parsons</b>	<b>2029</b>
<b>Ms. Cynthia Roberti</b>	<b>2029</b>
<b>* S. Dcn. Denise Rutherford Gill</b>	<b>2029</b>
<b>* Mr. Thomas Sargent – Secretary</b>	<b>2029</b>
<b>Mr. Cecil (Chip) Spurlock-Shackelton</b>	<b>2027</b>
<b>Ms. Cirah Spurlock-Shackelton (Yth)</b>	<b>2027</b>
<b>The Rev. Arden Strasser</b>	<b>2029</b>
<b>The Rev. Gary Squire</b>	<b>2029</b>
<b>Mr. Peter Teichmann</b>	<b>2029</b>
<b>* Mr. Christopher Vergara, VP</b>	<b>2029</b>
<b>The Rev. Kristin Wuerffel</b>	<b>2029</b>

**STAFF (13)**

**The Rev. Patricia Avila**  
**The Rev. Dr. J. Elise Brown, PhD**  
**Ms. Regina Daniels**  
**Mr. Brandon Dupree**  
*Ms. Karen Falco*  
**S. Dcn. Donna-Mari Fieldsa**  
*Mr. Mark Goodwin*  
**S. Dcn. George Guinan**  
*Ms. Aniah Nieto*  
*Kevin Ritter-Jung*  
**S. Dcn. Gayle Ruege**  
**The Rev. Nicole Schwalbe**  
**Ms. Blessing Tawengwa**

**GUESTS**

none

**Bold = present**

*Italics = excused absence*

Normal print = absent

\* Member of Executive Committee

The meeting was called to order by VP Christopher Vergara. Prayers by Bishop Foster.

**1. CONSENT ITEMS** – the following were all approved.

**A. Adoption of the Agenda**

**B. Adoption of the Synod Council Minutes of 13 September 2025.**

**2. NEW BUSINESS/ACTION ITEMS**

**A. Calls:**

**a. Pastor Callista Isabelle: Vassar College Specialized Call**

**ACTION SC25: 11/01**

**“RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan New York Synod Council approve a call to the Reverend Callista Isabelle to Vassar College to serve as Associate Dean of the College for Religious Spiritual Life and Contemplative Practices effective 08 November 2025.”**

**ADOPTED.**

**b. Pastor Jonathan Westerlund (A2B) – start date 01 January 2026**

**ACTION SC25: 11/02**

**“RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan New York Synod Council approve a call to the Reverend Jonathan Westerlund to serve as Assistant to the Bishop for Congregation Relations and Children, Youth, Young Adult, and Family Ministries effective 01 January 2026.”**

**ADOPTED.**

**B. Retirements**

**a. The Rev. Robert Gahagen – effective 31 January 2026.**

**ACTION SC: 11/03**

**“RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan New York Synod Council approve retirement status for The Rev. Robert Gahagan effective 31 January 2026.”**

**ADOPTED.**

**b. The Rev. Phyllis S. Haynes – effective 31 January 2026.**

**ACTION SC: 11/04**

**“RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan New York Synod Council approve retirement status for The Rev. Phyllis S. Haynes effective 31 January 2026.”**

**ADOPTED.**

### C. Staff Updates

#### a. New Hires: Kevin Ritter-Jung, Director of Media and Communications

**ACTION SC: 11/05**

**“RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan New York Synod Council approve to hire Kevin Ritter-Young to serve as Director of Communications and Media effective 14 October 2025.”**

**ADOPTED.**

### 3. REPORT OF THE BISHOP

#### A. Appointments

##### a. Candidacy Committee

- i. Pastor Dave Dockweiler will be chairperson.
- ii. Pastor Justin Lathrop will be vice chairperson.
- iii. Pastor Leticia Alanis will be a Candidacy Committee member.

#### B. Pastor Meetings (1:1 with pastors/congregation & specialized ministry)

Individual meetings with pastors serving congregations are being scheduled through December. Meeting stats as of 29 October 2025: met with 43% of pastors, 31% conferences covered, 67% of preaching Sundays completed.

#### C. Congregation/Conference Updates

##### a. Grace Chinese, East Elmhurst: Disaffiliation request.

**Request Received:** The Office of the Bishop received a formal request for disaffiliation from the ELCA on August 3. **First Consultation (October 12):** Bishop Foster, accompanied by Branden Dupree, met with Pastor Lu and the congregation.

**Purpose:** To fulfill the constitutional requirement (C6.05) for a consultation *before* the first special disaffiliation meeting. **Financial Disclosure:** Synod provided the congregation with documentation on: ELCA Partnership Grant funding: \$210,000, Metro NY Synod Partnership Funding (to Grace Overflows): \$39,458.

**Congregational Vote and Next Steps: Disaffiliation Vote (October 26):** Branden Dupree attended the congregational vote at their request. **Result:** Out of 90 attendees, 86 affirmed the resolution to disaffiliate, and 4 abstained.

**Administrative Follow-up:** Bishop's office will receive and file the meeting minutes, ballots, and attendance sheet on Thursday.

**Repayment:** Since the vote to disaffiliate passed, the synod will provide the congregation with a repayment agreement (with assistance from Churchwide on the agreement (need to confirm)). The entire process is governed by Section C6.05 of the model constitution for congregations.

**b. Christ, Floral Park: Sale of parsonage (33 Cherry St., Floral Park)**

In the September meeting, the Synod Council (SC) voted to table the resolution to sell the Christ, Floral Park parsonage until the November meeting. Bishop Foster asked for the delay to give her time to meet with Pastor Bob Cederstrom and the Christ council to explore alternatives to selling.

**c. Kalam Church, Roslyn: Disaffiliation request.**

Kalam's first affirmative vote to disaffiliate from the ELCA/MNYS was taken on July 13. Bishop Foster asked the Synod Council to require Kalam to have a consultation meeting with her before calling a second congregational meeting for a second vote, as mandated by the constitutional provision \*C6.05. **Consultation Scheduled:** Sunday, November 9, 2025, from 3:15–4:15 PM.

**Financial obligation:** as a congregation established by the ELCA, provision C6.05.g.3 requires Kalam to satisfy all financial obligations for ministry development and established funding. The ELCA provided no funding, but the MNYS provided a total of \$38,220.43 in partnership grants between February 2005 and January 2008. Pastor Chu committed on October 14 to sending a check. Dcn. Fieldsa will advise upon receipt.

**d. Zion - St. Mark's (Final Service)**

Meeting was held Leaders (including Pastor Danielle) met on October 11 at Zion-St. Marks. The building will be taken under synod administration in November. The transition will be finalized with a holy closure service and the receipt of records.

**e. Fordham update**

Bishop site visit 10/8. Weekly ½ meetings start November 5. Key next steps include keeping the church's façade. The Synod facility will be on Walton Ave. (not Morris). The design of the facility should allow for a multi-purpose use and include two apartments on the 3rd floor (Synod facility on 1st/2nd).

**f. United Lutheran Church of Long Island: Consolidation**

Update 10/30: We received notification from Joe Milano that all three petitions have been formally approved by Justice Peter R. McGreevy. The three court orders must be filed with the Suffolk County Clerk, which will be done next week, but for all practical purposes, the consolidation of Gloria Dei, St. Peter's and King of Kings is completed.

**g. Saint Thomas Lutheran Church – Nyack: Transfer of property and final service**

Congregation wants to close and transfer all its assets and property to the MNYS due to diminished, unsustainable membership. The property transfer is not finalized by the congregational vote alone; it is dependent upon Synod Council determination. There is no date yet for the council vote, which will take place after the bishop's visit/preaching on December on 12/7/2025.

**h. Grace, Uniondale: Sale of property contract amendment**

On 9/25/25, Tom Sargent received email from the firm assisting the buyer of Grace, Uniondale. Summary of the Amendment: The buyer is doing further environmental testing at their own expense, and regardless of what is found, the buyer, not the seller, is responsible for handling and paying for any environmental cleanup, without delaying the sale. (No vote required – just an update).

#### **4. REPORT OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF**

##### **A. Legal/Property Updates**

###### **a. Citadel of Praise: Mortgage Payments**

The case predates Karen Falco tenure and began because Citadel of Praise, the purchaser of a synod property, defaulted on its mortgage payments held by the MNYS, leading to litigation. The Synod will now receive all the funds the court approved.

##### **B. Events Updates**

**a. 2025 Bishop's Retreat** – attended by 80 clergy and 46 deacons.

**b. Bishop's Installation** - as of 10/28 we have 630 registered (goal is 1000). The new Communications Director will handle publicity. Menu and liturgy are complete.

**c. Retired Pastors Gathering** – December 4, 10 AM, Wartburg Home.

##### **C. Staff Updates**

###### **a. New Hires**

**i. Candidacy Committee** – Pastor Danielle Miller has been hired (not a call) as Candidacy Coordinator effective 01 December 2025. Pastor Becca Seely (current coordinator) will overlap in the role until 31 December 2025.

**ii. Communications Team** – 2 contractors hired for Graphic Design and Social Media.

**b. Staff Departure** – Leticia Silva.

**c. Open Searches** - Full-time, Full Charge Bookkeeper; Full-time Administrative Assistant to the A2B's and DEM.

#### **5. REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT**

**A. Innovation Leadership Academy** – participated in this program.

**B. Presiding Bishop Installation** - participated as a reader.

**C. Consultation Team: Good Shepherd, Brooklyn** – update provided.

#### **6. REPORT OF THE SECRETARY**

**A. Model Constitution Update** – revisions adopted at the 2025 CWA for congregations have been provided by the Office of the Secretary and will be mailed to all congregations. Revisions to the Model Constitution for Synods is also being worked on.

#### **7. REPORT OF THE TREASURER (EXHIBIT A)**

**A. Overview of MNYS Funds Flow** – provided by Treasurer for SC. See Exhibit A.

**B. Mission Support (YTD September 2025)** – provided by Treasurer to SC. See Exhibit A.

**C. Financials (September 2025)** – provided by Treasurer to SC. See Exhibit A.

**8. Observer's Evaluation** – Thank you Pastor Kristen Wuerffel. Monique Davis volunteered for January 2026 meeting.

**9. The meeting was concluded at 11:05 AM with a closing prayer by Christopher Vergara.**

Executive Committee: 1/8/26 (10 AM) and Synod Council: 1/17/26 (9 AM) – both via zoom.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas M. Sargent – MNYS Secretary