

SEPA Synod vs Redeemer Lutheran Church Timeline (more detail at 2x2virtualchurch.com)

January 28, 1998

- Bishop Almquist sends three representatives to Redeemer's annual meeting. Mid-way through the meeting they declare the meeting to be over, declaring Redeemer to be under synodical administration. They leave with the church books to attend Synod Council meeting which votes Synodical Administration after the fact.
- Former interim pastor visits Redeemer's bank and conveys \$90,000 to the synod. Congregation had received a large endowment a few years before.
- Congregation protests. Bishop Almquist releases Synodical Administration a year later.

2000

- After an additional year, Bishop Almquist returns app. \$82,000. Appeal letter is issued to all churches to make up a Synod shortfall in its Mission Fund of almost exactly that amount. Synod subtracts its legal fees from Redeemer.

2001

- Redeemer refuses to "regularize" a call to a Pastor who wants to work only 10 hours a week. Congregation is agreeable to a term call, thereby not locking into a long-term relationship for minimal service. Bishop Almquist says, "Regularize this call or there won't be any pastor for a very long time." For the next 8 years, Redeemer finds its own pastoral help. Synod has little contact with us.

2005

- Synod Treasurer reports that Synod is within \$75,000 of depleting every available resource.

May 2006

- Claire Burkat elected bishop.
- Redeemer is in 2nd year of hosting Epiphany with covenant to work toward unification, sharing Pastor Timothy Muse. As far as we know things are going fine.

October 2006

- We receive email from Pastor Muse that Epiphany will break their covenant and close.
- Muse gives ten days notice (constitution calls for 30 days)
- We learn that Muse and the president of Epiphany have met privately with the Bishop. Redeemer is not part of discussion.
- REACTION: We had combined our council with Epiphany's but with their closing, Redeemer immediately sets out to fill council seats independently. We achieve this within two months. We know we must shift mission strategy. Swahili members want to reach out to their greater community. We put all effort into this even if initial leadership comes from English. We expect low attendance at English services in the start-up phase. Outreach is immediate success. 49 join under Prs. Ipyana and Mutashobya's leadership. Mutashobya meets with all new members and reads constitution. Redeemer works to incorporate new members into active participation as soon as possible. We report this to Synod. No response to letters and phone calls. We are told off the record "It doesn't matter what you do, the bishop intends to close your congregation."

December 2006

- Bishop says she wants to meet with congregation. Leaders want to meet with her alone to discuss sensitive concerns without stirring up congregation. None of us had ever met Bishop. Dean Saraka is at meeting but says nothing. We never see him again. He does not return calls.
- Bishop opens meeting by telling us the place looks junky. (Epiphany had moved their things into our fellowship hall.)
- Bishop says "A small church like this with no parking lot has no chance."
- We shared our successful Swahili outreach. Bishop's response — "You're not allowed to do that."
- We talk about money and the value of the property. Bishop says "You are not allowed to mortgage your property." (Constitution says otherwise.)
- Meeting is cut short by the death of Bishop's father. Bishop promises to get back to us in 3 to 5 months. We hear nothing for 11 months.

Easter 2007 (April 10)

Rev. Karl Schneider, pulpit supply, creates a scene at Easter breakfast and ruins worship.

May 2007

We are using four supply pastors (two Swahili and two English). Council wants more continuity. We inform Pastors Schneider and Ipyana that we will be using the services of Pastors Jenkins and Mutashobya. Schneider sees this as punishment for the Easter incident and writes vindictive letter to bishop.

June 6, 2007

Without checking the back story, bishop takes Schneider's letter to Synod Council and asks them to place Redeemer under Synodical Administration. Synod Council does not inform Redeemer of its actions for nearly five months.

Mid-July 2007

Rev. Lee Miller calls Stanley Meena (president) and insists on meeting with council with three days notice. Stanley informs him that many council members are vacationing. Four members of Synod Council come and tell us they are "fact finders" who "want to help." Three Redeemer council members are present and are candid about our problems and successes. They thank us but never reveal that we are under Synodical Administration and they are the appointed trustees.

October 12, 2007

Bishop calls a meeting of congregation (not constitutional). We are mindful of the coups of 1998 when Almquist sent synod council members to our annual meeting and walked off with our bank accounts. We agree to meet off site but want a meeting first with our leadership. This was our FIRST notice that we have been under Synodical Administration since June.

November 1, 2007

- Meeting with eight of ten council members, two members, church organist and Rev. Mutashobya and Redeemer's counsel. Bishop, synod attorney and three trustees are at this meeting. Bishop says Dean Saraka is on his way, but he never comes. Good meeting. We present our mission plan and the congregation's resolution to call Mutashobya.
- Ministry plan lays out budget and plan to borrow money and repay. Ministry plan also

includes the call of Mutashobya who has agreed to payment terms and committed to five years.

- Ministry plan includes complete membership list. Bishop looks at list and says "A lot of these names look African to me." She adds "White Redeemer must be allowed to die. Black Redeemer . . . we can put them anywhere."
- Bishop promises we can work with Davenport and that she will review our plan and resolution. This never happens.
- Congregation leaves meeting in song! We are confident progress has been made.

November 2, 2007 to mid February 2008

- We hear nothing despite calling the Synod office regularly. Mutashobya tries to contact synod and fails.
- At last, Bishop suggests to Mutashobya that he visit another church with the intent of removing Redeemer's black membership. Mutashobya follows through but reports that he was received coldly. African members are hurt that their membership is not respected by Synod. All of Redeemer is hurt that their successful outreach ministry is not recognized.
- About February 9, Davenport returns Meena's call (the only returned call in three years). She leaves message that she has nothing to report.

February 10, 2008

- Davenport visits congregation and tells us bishop wants to come on Feb 24 (pm) and we inform her that congregational annual meeting has already been properly noticed for that morning and we do not want to meet in the afternoon. (Party planned for Pastor Mutashobya's birthday in the afternoon.)

February 12, 2008

- Mutashobya and Davenport are to meet.
- Prayer vigil is held that the meeting will be productive. On her way out the door to meet Mutashobya, Davenport is handed a letter from the bishop announcing she is closing the church.
- Letter announcing a congregational meeting on Feb 24 to "plan a closing service" is sent to all parishioners with no consultation with the parish. Parish has not voted to close. Council informs bishop in writing that the congregation will not meet this day. (2nd notice.)

February 24, 2008

- Annual congregational meeting is held in the morning. Congregation votes to continue its ministry.
- Pastor Mutashobya encourages us to stand firm.
- Congregation asks Meena and Gotwald to be at church in the afternoon as neither are involved in the planned family party. Bishop arrives with 10 people. Meena and Gotwald refuse to open the church since the congregation is not present. After bishop's party leaves, Meena and Gotwald discover a locksmith van waiting behind the church with synod lawyer in front seat. Lawyers talk and confrontation ends when two police cars happen by. Trustees falsely report that we tried to have bishop arrested.

February 26, 2008

- Mutashobya is called in to talk with Davenport. Fasting and prayer vigil is held. Pastor Mutashobya never returns to Redeemer.

February 28, 2008

- Redeemer files suit to protect property.

Same week

- We inform bishop of congregational intent to appeal. They tell us a synod rep must be present for the vote. Larry House comes to worship. The vote is taken again and is unanimous. Verification of the quorum is provided.
- Despite vote, Synod informs us we cannot appeal. Redeemer asks for procedures or rules for making an appeal. Synod provides nothing insisting we cannot appeal.
- We contact presiding Bishop Hanson. He advises us to negotiate with Burkat. We write Burkat monthly for 10 months. No response.

Sometime prior to April 2008

- Synod offers all of Redeemer's property for sale to Ken Crest (Redeemer's 25-year tenant) without consulting the congregation. We learn about this from a letter Ken Crest wrote dated April 12, 2008 in which they inform us they are declining the offer of sale. This is a direct violation of Synod's Articles of Incorporation.

May 2008

- Five days before the May 8 Synod Assembly, we are informed that our appeal is scheduled! We still are not provided with guidelines.
- Synod Assembly. Synod Council reads a report they had never shared with us. It is filled with inaccuracies and outright falsehoods.
- Meena reads statement that we cannot appeal because of the law suit.
- After Synod Assembly we respond in detail to the trustees inaccurate report. We are ignored.
- Redeemer member approaches Synod Council member and asks for help. In a rant he is told "Synod has no intention of negotiating." He is warned to get out while the getting is good.

June 2008

- Synod sends court server to Redeemer Council meeting suing congregation and two members personally (Gotwald and Meena—Gotwald had gone off council in February).

July 2008

- Judge New dismisses Redeemer's case citing no jurisdiction in church matters. Redeemer decides not to appeal because the issues are contained in Synod's suit against us and we are trying to deescalate the litigation. (Synod later uses failure to appeal against us in court.)

August 2008

- Ken Crest renews lease with Redeemer but then whites out their names, stating they don't want to be in the middle of a landlord dispute. This lease is Redeemer's main source of income, so church looks for ways to fund budget until we can rent the space.
- We insist again on our right to appeal. Synod insists we have no such right.

Christmas 2008

- Redeemer had lined up a pastor for Christmas Eve well in advance. On December 23, he notifies us by email that he cannot "go against the bishop" and cancels. We never use a supply pastor again. We develop lay leadership and use the excellent sermons of a pastor in Australia.

January 2009

- At the height of the recession we are able to secure a loan for \$275,000 to prepare the parish building for rerenting, renovate the kitchen and bathrooms, and prepare for calling a minister. It

is a ONE YEAR BRIDGE LOAN at a high rate of interest because we are a small church with no recent credit history. Plan is to repay a third and refinance at more competitive rate at the end of the year. We are on target to achieve this when Synod interferes again.

Late April, early May 2009

- Redeemer holds congregational meeting and votes to withdraw from the ELCA. Resolution is sent to Synod. Synod lawyer responds that we cannot withdraw because we are "officially terminated." We are told we may not send representatives to Synod Assembly except to make an appeal. (Synod had already accepted our registrations and fees and even challenged *one* of the four registrations.) This is our first notice that we are terminated — AFTER we present a resolution to withdraw. Less than a week before Synod Assembly we are informed by fax that we would have 15 minutes to make a presentation. Synod Council would follow. We would not be allowed to rebut anything Synod said. There would be 10 minutes of "discussion." Synod is writing rules as they go.

May 9, 2009

- The appeal is orchestrated. Synod extends the discussion to 20 minutes at last minute and has witnesses lined up at the microphones. We learn that Synod had contacted one member of our congregation and offered transportation to the Assembly if he would testify against us. He declined. We had never been told that we were allowed "witnesses" as part of the discussion. The witnesses for the most part talk about the 1998 incident with Pastor Almquist. Very few of the witnesses are people known to current Redeemer members. Note: Only one of our 82 members was an active adult member at the time of Almquist's seizure of our savings. 79 of our members joined since then. Two returned to active membership during this time.
- Synod rewords the prepublished question to be voted on, switching a yes vote to a no vote, and in doing so leaves out all the issues we are appealing except the property issues. Redeemer had asked to have input into the wording of the question but was refused. Synod votes overwhelmingly to allow the bishop to take our property and assets, which is forbidden by the Synod's Articles of Incorporation and is therefore void.
- Synod Assembly NEVER VOTES on issues of Synodical Administration or forced closure or suing Redeemer's lay members.
- Synod passes a 10% deficit budget explaining that shortfall will be taken from mission fund. Mission fund is funded with assets of closed churches.

May 10, 2009, Mothers Day

- Larry House and Tracey Beasley attend worship and try to commandeer the service. They announce that they are now in charge and Davenport will be preaching each Sunday from now on. Showing up at worship and demanding an immediate meeting is a violation of the congregation's constitution which requires written notice to members of meetings. Our worship becomes an ugly scene witnessed by two first time visitors (one amazingly returns!) We try to reach Davenport but she does not return calls or emails. Davenport comes once, preaches a sermon entitled "They'll know we are Christians by our love" and we never see her again.

Summer 2009

- Redeemer signs lease with two members to run day school. (Redeemer had run its own day school prior to Ken Crest.) Lease is for one floor only and for about twice what Ken Crest paid for both floors. They plan to rent both floors within a year for five times what Ken Crest had been paying. This would easily cover the interest payments on the loan and provide for the congregation.

September 2009

- We use congregational members' expertise to create a ministry helping immigrants purchase first homes. We planned to purchase, renovate, and resell one home a quarter which, with the parish building leased, would fund our ministry.
- Redeemer signs agreement to purchase a house and identifies a buyer. Closing is scheduled for the week of September 28. This transaction would have helped pay the loan and provided the seed money for the next home purchase.

September 25, 2009

- Synod tells judge that Redeemer is first of six congregations they wish to close this way. It suggests that Redeemer is in favored position to receive vast special funding.
- Judge tells us that bishop has reported to him in private that Redeemer has very few members, still not recognizing the now 52 members we received in new outreach.
- Court rules against Redeemer without hearing the case. Again "no jurisdiction" in church matters is cited.
- Court ruling makes it impossible for us to close on the house.
- Lawyer instructs us to stay away from the property which we do.

September 27, 2009, Sunday morning

- Locks are changed. Congregation has no access to records so cannot determine what was needed to comply with court order. Limited material in our possession is provided but we thought it all to be duplicates of what was in the church records under synod lock and key.
- Congregation and all tenants are evicted (day school, four AA groups)
- Redeemer files appeal as soon as possible.

November 2009

- Synod files Contempt of Court case for failure to supply things we had every reason to believe were in the locked church and had no ability to prove or disprove as being in the locked church. We know for a fact that some of things they presented to court as missing ARE in the locked church. Several other things they claimed to the court as missing, they know very well never existed at all (for example, tax records for staff. We had no staff!).

2010

- Court orders deed transferred to synod.
- Synod refuses to pay interest on the mortgage and loan goes into default.
- May: Bishop reports at Synod Assembly that Attorney Gordon has made a presentation about our case to all synod counsel in Chicago. Bishop uses term "hijack." Assembly applauds.

En banc hearing held 2/9/11.

- Five judges again rule that courts have no jurisdiction. But two judges issue strong dissenting opinion that followed Redeemer's arguments exactly, proving that our viewpoint has legal merit and deserved more consideration within the church. We will appeal to Pa Supreme Court.