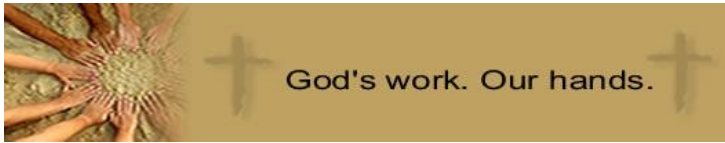


# Assembly Notes (not official minutes)

## 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Assembly of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Redwood Area Community Center, Redwood Falls, MN

Sunday, April 18, 2010



**Assembly Theme:** God's work. Our hands.

**Theme Text:** John 21:1-19

**Theme Hymn:** ELW 708 – Jesu, Jesu,  
Fill Us with Your Love

### PLENARY SESSION 3 – SUNDAY MORNING

Gwen Arneson called the assembly to order. Rev. Becca Krogstad, chair of the assembly planning committee, led the opening prayer. She then reported that service projects and workshops on Saturday afternoon went very well. Praise God for the hard work of the assembly.

#### SYNOD VOICE #3

Rev. Janine Olson introduced the next Synod Voice, Joyce Morris-Lloyd of Bethlehem in St. Cloud, who shared her story by video. Joyce spoke of being a Liberian refugee in the Ivory Coast, of receiving a quilt through Lutheran World Relief (LWR), and of eventually coming to the United States. Receiving a quilt to lie down on was a source of great comfort. Her quilt also enabled her to share with other refugees, which resulted in a bond of everlasting friendship. On behalf of refugees of the world, Joyce offered thanks to God for LWR and expressed gratitude to all who made it possible for her and others to have a quilt.

#### BIBLE STUDY #2

Rev. Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl led the assembly in a study of Romans 10:14-17, picking up the theme of God's work. Our hands (and feet). Rev. Andrea shared stories and pictures from her travel to Zimbabwe for the Lutheran Malaria Initiative, emphasizing the beautiful—and sometimes dirty—feet of Christians around the world who share the Good News in various ways. The Bible study ended with discussion around tables about the sharing of the Good News.

#### RESULTS OF BALLOT #2

Jerry Dragseth presented the ballot results regarding the election of voting delegates and alternates to the 2011 Churchwide Assembly. Results are as follows:

- Lay Female: Marlys Pearson, voting member; Anita Holmes, first alternate

- Lay Male: Jared Mitchell, voting member; Linden Olson, first alternate
- Lay Male, Youth: Quinn Anderson, voting member; David Evjen, first alternate
- Lay Male or Female, person of color: Marie Nelson, voting member; James Filiyaro, first alternate
- Clergy Female, young adult: Rev. Mary Suomala Folkerds, voting member; Rev. Karen Cherwien, first alternate
- Clergy Male, young adult: Rev. Aaron Suomala Folkerds, first alternate; Rev. Bryant Kaden, second alternate
- Clergy Male or Female: Rev. Linda Pedersen, voting member; Rev. Daniel Belgum-Blad, first alternate
- Clergy Male or Female: Rev. Margaret Yackel-Juleen, voting member; Rev. Steve Rheingans, first alternate
- Lay Female, Youth: Jessica Epple, voting member; Kirsten Brock, first alternate

Jerry concluded his presentation by thanking the assembly for their work.

At this time Gwen offered thanks to those synod council members whose terms are ending: Rev. James Tetlie, Dale Ericson, Cathy Blair, Rev. Katherine Rood, Paul Shumaker, Jordan Clarksean, and Craig Hebrink.

#### BISHOP'S REPORT #2

Bishop Jon picked up where his report ended on Saturday. In contrast to lament on Saturday, he began by speaking of hope, specifically in the Psalms. Leaders were invited to join the synod staff in their practice of pausing every 20 minutes in meetings to pray and perhaps read a Psalm. Everyone was invited to read Psalms 144-150 at home and to reflect upon the things in our congregations in the past year for which we give thanks to God. Sometimes we have a hard time celebrating during difficult times, but the bishop assured us there are many things to celebrate.

“What's up in the ELCA and the synod?” is a topic Bishop Jon has been presenting on lately. He summarized the state of the synod by pointing out that many Lutherans are now reading Scripture, both daily on their own and in congregational study. Additionally, we are talking much more about biblical interpretation. People have also expressed

great interest in how we do church, how the body works together for mission. Moreover, people are discussing their beliefs and wrestling with ideas, which causes us to grow stronger in faith. The bishop encouraged the assembly to seize the opportunities these realities present.

“What’s a synod and church body good for?” has been a common question of late. The synod is a resource for members and congregations, a resource of which we are called to be stewards. The benefits of this resource include local, regional and national connections, educated clergy, support of all kinds, reconciliation ministry, misconduct ministry, ministry partners, etc. The mission of the synod includes three areas: engaging leaders, equipping congregations, and serving in God’s world. During discussion of these areas, the bishop challenged everyone to sit down and read the book of Acts this Easter season. He urged the busiest among us to keep in mind that this will only take the time of two “American Idol” episodes! He also recommended a book called *From the Great Omission to Vibrant Faith*.

Much of the bishop’s report centered around the question, “What is God’s preferred future: for your life, your congregation, and our synod?” Key questions that might guide thinking in this area include: Whose are we? Who are our neighbors? What is God up to on our mission field? What are your personal and your congregation’s unique and important callings? (Notice your assets—they’re a great hint!) In times of complexity, focus on less and do it better.

The assembly was challenged to consider hopes for what this synod will look like by 2017, which is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. A task force called Living Into our Future Together (LIFT) has been created to consider what God is calling this church to be and do in the future.

The future is characterized for us by two types of change: technical change, such as web-based communication, right-sizing and decentralizing staff, and increasing synodical partnerships; and adaptive change, which is the type of change which requires experimentation. As we manage change, it may be helpful to wonder: How will we call our people deeper into Scripture and engage them in our Lutheran Confessions? How might we engage ancient faith practices to shape and form us? Bishop Jon passed out adhesive “prayer dots” to stick to watches and cell phones, encouraging people to say a simple prayer every time they see the dot.

Bishop Jon stirred the imaginations of the assembly with the following scenarios:

What if...

--we doubled the percentage of adults involved in Bible Study?

--we built teams of people who helped congregations do planning?

--we became a synod of tithers?

--we loved all the church’s parents and children even if as individuals we don’t have many ourselves?

The next step is to decide what changes are in order to accomplish these tasks more faithfully.

In conclusion, the bishop exhorted his listeners to “let God walk with you. Let God work on you. Let God use your hands!”

The bishop’s presentation slideshow is now accessible at the synod’s website: [www.swmnelca.org](http://www.swmnelca.org) on the Synod Assembly page.

### **CREDENTIALS REPORT #3**

David Leitzman reported who was present at the assembly as of 9:00 a.m. on Sunday.

Of the possible 256 rostered voting members, 205 were registered and 188 were present, representing 73% of possible voting members. Of 676 lay voting members possible, 457 were registered and 442 were present, representing 65% of all possible lay voting members. Thus, of the 932 possible total voting members, 662 were registered and 630 were present, representing 68% of all possible voting members. Also present at the assembly on Sunday were 63 of 71 registered advisors and visitors.

### **RESOLUTIONS**

Jerry Dragseth, chair of the Election Committee, presented the results from Saturday evening’s vote on Resolution 10.01. The bishop took a moment of privilege to point out that, no matter the outcome of the vote, there would be no winners in this issue. He requested no clapping for the results and encouraged the assembly to seek out those who differ from us on this issue for conversation. Jerry reported that 278 people voted in support of the resolution and 295 voted in opposition. Two people abstained. The motion to memorialize the Churchwide Assembly to rescind its 2009 changes to ministry policies failed.

Dale Ericson offered a prayer, and business proceeded with consideration of further assembly resolutions.

Resolution 10.02 and the proposed substitute resolution presented on Saturday were brought to the floor. With unanimous consent, Rev. Pablo Obregon withdrew his motion for the substitute, which allowed for an amendment to the original. The proposed amendment would combine the “resolved” portions of both documents while keeping the “whereas” portion of the original. The amendment was voted upon and accepted. After further discussion, including another proposed amendment that failed, the initially amended resolution was voted upon and adopted.

Rev. Janet Colby led us in prayer.

Rev. Jayne Thompson gave notice of an additional resolution, 10.05 regarding ongoing support for Haitian disaster response.

Consideration moved to Resolution 10.03 regarding the Augsburg Fortress Pension Plan Termination. An amendment was adopted to replace the original “resolved” section with a substitute “resolved” section. Additionally, Beth Lewis, CEO of Augsburg Fortress, was called upon to speak to the complex financial situation and decisions made within Augsburg Fortress.

Bishop Jon Anderson called for the orders of the day. The assembly entered into recess for worship.

Rev. Larry Strenge shared announcements.

#### WORSHIP

Rev. Charles Stewart presided at worship with Rev. Joyce Graue preaching. In her sermon Rev. Joyce shared stories of her time as a missionary, while proclaiming the gospel based on John 21. She concluded with the conviction that, “We are the luckiest people in the world because Christ is risen!” The assembly responded, “He is risen indeed—alleluia!” Worship included the installation of synod leaders: synod council, conference deans, board members and voting members to the 2011 Churchwide Assembly. Holy Communion was celebrated.

#### PLENARY SESSION 4

After lunch, Dakota Road led upbeat and moving gathering music. To open the session Carolyn Olson led a sung prayer, “We Are One in the Spirit.”

Representatives of the LYO Board presented their report. Kody Kantor and Sam Weston described the work of the LYO and their goal of involving 10% of

synod youth at LYO events. Their presentation ended with their “God’s work. Our hands.” video.

#### ELCA CHURCHWIDE REPORT

Rev. Andrea brought greetings from Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson and directed our attention to his printed letter. By video, the Bishop thanked everyone for their prayers and support. Asking, “How do you tell the story of who we are?” the Bishop encouraged the assembly to look at the ELCA emblem with the cross at the center. He pointed out that we are all evangelists. The video proceeded to introduce a series of *Everyday Evangelists*: quilters in rural Illinois, workers at a meal kitchen in Boston, and door-knockers in Minneapolis. These stories are specific examples of the types of ministry going on throughout the ELCA. Set free to do God’s work with our hands, we are all evangelists!

Rev. Andrea again thanked the synod and congregations for their partnership in the gospel. Mission support from Southwestern Minnesota is 52.5% of the budget, or \$1.18 million. Every gift matters!

Rev. Pablo Obregon reported on his experience of ELCA Church Council meetings. Council members come from many different places and backgrounds, representing different communities and ways of interpreting Scripture. Lately Rev. Pablo has felt a sense that the windows have been opened and there is a fresh wind in the room. He identifies this wind as the Holy Spirit, blowing among them as they are challenged by God’s Word and by how to move forward together. He concluded by saying that it is a privilege to participate in the Church Council.

Rev. Larry Strenge shared his story of becoming a mission director in this synod. Rev. Larry declared that the heart of evangelism is in prayer, and his work is centered in that prayer work. He looks forward to working with us to make Jesus known!

Rev. Dee Pederson, chair of the LIFT task force, introduced a discussion around what the future of the church might look like. Rev. Dee outlined seven areas for consideration: identity, opportunities for the future, changing context of our church, partnerships, interdependence, financial resources, structure and governments. Additionally, she referred to Timothy Wengert and the three areas he says must shape our future: commitment to the Bible, the centrality of worship, and a witness to the gospel as shaped by our Lutheran Confessions.

The assembly was invited into deep thinking and conversation around tables; conversations were to be recorded on the one-page report distributed to each table. Questions to be considered included: What is it about being Lutheran that is important to us? What are your hopes for the future of your congregation? What most needs to happen for those to be realized? What “beyond your congregation” relationships are most important to your congregation? What would you like to change about these relationships? What does the ELCA do well? What is God calling the ELCA to do and be over the next years?

LIFT takes seriously the work of connecting and conversing with members about the future. Members of the assembly were invited to be a part of this churchwide conversation. Learn more and contact LIFT via Facebook, Twitter, the ELCA homepage or the LIFT website: [www.LIFTELCA.org](http://www.LIFTELCA.org).

#### **WORLD HUNGER OFFERING**

An offering was collected for World Hunger. During this time Connie Schwartau, ELCA Hunger Coordinator, recognized congregations that had been exceptionally generous this year. She presented the traveling Bread Basket Award to Sundown Lutheran in Springfield, who had given \$15.79/baptized member to this fund. Later it was announced that the assembly offering for World Hunger totaled \$6,366.37.

#### **COMPANION SYNOD REPORT**

The assembly chuckled as Rev. Jean Smith quoted Mr. Ncogobo, Chair of Partnership in South Africa, with an imitated accent: “We are the champions of partnership. Partnership is here. If you want some, come get some!” A synod companion DVD was played. The video featured great pictures and African music as it depicted the vibrant life of the church in South Africa and the blossoming partnership between our synod and theirs. For those who are interested in learning more about South Africa in general, Bishop Jon recommended the book *No Hope Without Forgiveness* by Desmond Tutu.

#### **CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION OF 2011 BUDGET AND COMPENSATION GUIDELINES**

David Anfinson moved that the budget be accepted as presented. There was no discussion, and the vote was unanimous in favor of accepting the proposed budget.

Rev. Evelyn Weston presented the 2011 Compensation Guidelines with a minor correction of year on page 62, and then moved to accept them.

Again, there was no discussion, and the assembly voted to accept them.

#### **RESOLUTIONS**

Consideration moved to the resolutions, and discussion surrounding Resolution 10.03 as amended continued. Beth Lewis was called on once again to speak on a point of information regarding what kind of benefits had already been paid out by Augsburg. When the resolution came to a vote, opposition prevailed. Resolution 10.03 as amended was defeated.

Resolution 10.04 came to the floor and Rev. Bill Nelsen spoke articulately on behalf of the resolution regarding Conference South Africa Partnership Committees. The resolution was quickly adopted.

It was moved that the proposed Resolution 10.05 regarding ongoing support for Haitian disaster response be brought to the floor for consideration. Copies were handed out to the assembly and discussion ensued. Though nobody spoke against supporting these victims, some felt this resolution was not necessary for our continued work in Haiti. The resolution was voted upon and failed.

#### **SYNOD VOICE #4**

LaVern Christianson of American Lutheran in Windom shared how he has practiced his Christian vocation through his work as a teacher. He began by reading Luke 8:41-42, pointing out that Jairus’ daughter was the same age as kids he has worked with, and reminding the assembly that there is more than one way for a child to die. For victims of bullying, taunting, gossiping, etc., LaVern strove to create a space where kids felt safe, accepted, loved and capable.

#### **CLOSING OF THE ASSEMBLY**

Dates for the next years’ synod assemblies were announced (June 10-12, 2011, and June 8-10, 2012 – both at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter), and everyone was invited to help take down tables and chairs in the assembly space at the end. Bishop Jon concluded that it had been a rich gathering where memories of good singing, respectful speaking, and serving together were created. Bishop Jon then formally closed the assembly.