



## **Metropolitan Washington D.C. Synod Assembly Report**

The Metropolitan Washington D. C. Synod Assembly was held on June 21 and 22 at the National Conference Center in Leesburg, Virginia. The theme for the assembly was Praying, Discerning, and Renewing. The Assembly offered an opportunity to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ELCA, acknowledging that we are stronger together, and with God, we always are being made new.

The primary item on the Assembly agenda was election of a Bishop to serve the synod during the next six years. The Rev. Mark Hanson, Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, presided over the election procedures. Two days had been set aside for the election, thus providing enough time for five ballots if needed. However, the process was completed on the afternoon of the first day. Bishop Richard Graham was reelected on the second ballot. Bishop Hanson expressed gratitude to Bishop Graham, citing his grace, hospitality, attentiveness to detail, and his commitment to remaining faith-centered in his actions and decisions.

The assembly agenda included an inspiring presentation by Bishop Hanson, and informative reports from Bishop Graham, the Rev. Amy Thompson Sevimli, Assistant to the Bishop, and the Rev. Philip Hirsch, D.E.M., Assistant to the Bishop. The proposed Synod Spending Plan for 2014 was approved. Eleven resolutions were passed. A full text of each of the resolutions can be found on the Internet at <http://metrodcelca.org/events/synod-assembly/#sthash.hUUKV2D9.dpuf>. Action on the proposal to make changes in the Synod Constitution and Bylaws related to the organizational structure of the synod was delayed until further details and discussion are provided in the coming months.

Reports were offered related to the work of the Shape of the Synod Task Force, Young Adult Ministries, the Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Federal Chaplaincy Ministries, Stewardship and Mission Support, New and Renewing Churches, Global Mission Initiatives, and Environmental Stewardship. Additionally, elections were held for Synod Council and the Committee on Discipline.

Friday evening featured a service of Holy Eucharist. Bishop Graham presided at worship and Bishop Hanson offered the sermon. The sermon focused on how we can strengthen our relationship with God through prayer. Bishop Hanson emphasized that God is with us at all times. God knows our needs even before we ask. In the darkest moments and places of our lives, God brings comfort and love.

Following closing comments from Presiding Bishop Hanson and Bishop Graham, the Assembly concluded with worship and the installation of the Bishop and Synod Council.

## Highlights from Presentation by Rev. Mark Hanson, Presiding Bishop, ELCA

Bishop Hanson introduced his remarks by offering these **questions to think about.**

- The state of the church reflects the state of our souls. How is it with your soul?
- What is the Holy Spirit up to in your congregation?
- What did you expect when you entered your congregational church last Sunday?
- Has the ELCA become a church with low expectations? Do we allow anxiety about our future to lower our expectations? Has the ELCA come to mean “Expectations Low; Climbing Anxiety”?

The Bishop reminded the Assembly that there is **so much good news.**

- It is a blessing to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ELCA.
- The Holy Spirit is among us and is beginning to do new things. A new chapter in our history is being written. It is messy, but so were things in the early church. Every year, we should read Acts to remind ourselves of the challenges faced by the early church.
- Our church is deeply rooted in the living word of God, and so *always* is being made new.
- What better news could there be than each time we worship we are granted the ENTIRE forgiveness of ALL of our sins.
- Our church is deeply rooted in the Lutheran confessions. Grace is at the heart of our faith.
- In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul writes, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away. See, everything has become new!"

Bishop Hanson presented these **concerns to pray about.**

- The need for unity: There appears to be a growing separateness with the Missouri Synod church. Yet, we must be striving for relatedness with others, not separation. Differences enrich us: they should not divide us. We must be tenacious about unity. We are blessed to have six full communion partners. How shall we be “the church” together”? ***We must pray for and with one another, and continue our conversations.***
- Concerns about viability: Many of our congregations are turning inward with concern for their own viability and sustainability rather than outreach to churches and services. Fear binds our imaginations. But with God’s grace, we always are being made new.

The Bishop described **our two major priorities:**

- Our two major priorities are ***service to others and sharing our faith with others (making disciples)***. We are better at service than at sharing our faith.
- We are good at serving: offering food, shelter, and advocating for justice. Remember, however, that other non-church groups offer these services. Our service is in response to the Gospel and we share the good news of the Gospel with those we serve.
- We are all ***ambassadors for God***. Do you agree? Then get out your cell phones *right now* and call or text someone with the good news of God’s love.
- We gather on Sunday to rehearse how to “play it out” during the week. That includes telling our faith story to others and sharing God’s love with them.

Bishop Hanson reflected on **where we will be in 100 years.**

In 100 years, it does not matter so much if we still are “Lutheran” as long as the church focuses on prayer and commitment to faithful evangelical witness to Jesus, and is centered in the cross and the promise. There will be no places or people forgotten by God. There will be reconciliation, not separation. And all will be welcome to share in God’s love and grace.

## **Selecting the Bishop**

### **The Selection Process**

- Voting members were given the following instructions prior to the opening of the Assembly. Individuals selecting the Bishop and voting on resolutions are “voting members” who have been selected by their congregations. They vote in the manner they think best based on reflection and prayer. Although they represent their congregations, they are not “delegates” whose votes are based on instructions from their congregations.
- Generally when a bishop is selected, the process takes four to five ballots. The first ballot is totally open in that every voting member is asked to nominate the individual of their choice for the position. The person must be a rostered minister, but can be from any synod within the ELCA. Individuals who are nominated but do not wish to have their name on the ballot must put this intention in writing.
- Bishop Hanson presided over the election process. He referenced II Timothy, Chapter 1 and Ephesians, Chapter 2, with regard to the duties of the Bishop.
- Two days had been set aside for the election of the Bishop, but it was completed on the afternoon of the first day. At the time the first ballot was taken at the Assembly, 75% of the number of voting members present, or 180 votes, were needed to be selected Bishop. Bishop Graham received 176 votes. The Rev. Phil Hirsch received the second highest number of votes on the first ballot (12). Bishop Graham was selected on the second ballot, which indicates great support from the Assembly. He received 211 votes from 238 total votes cast. 178 votes, or 75% of the total voting members present, were needed.

### **Bishop Hanson’s Reflections to the Assembly after the Bishop’s Installation**

- Bishop Hanson expressed gratitude to Bishop Graham, citing his grace, hospitality, attentiveness to detail, and his commitment to remaining faith-centered in his actions and decisions. He remarked that the Conference of Bishops in the ELCA admired Bishop Graham for his theological wisdom, his passion for the Gospel, his focus on outreach and service, and his commitment to diversity.

### **Bishop Graham’s Reflections to the Assembly after His Installation**

- In his remarks to the Assembly after his installation, Bishop Graham said he was grateful to continue to serve in this role, and that he learned much from his first six years as Bishop. He said that by working together, we have “amazing opportunities” for service and sharing the good news with others. Our mission begins within the synod and spreads nationwide and worldwide. He expressed warm appreciation to all who participated in the Assembly, thanking them for the depth and breadth of their reports.
- Bishop Graham concluded his remarks by saying that we have all that we need to make a difference as we serve others and share the good news of the Gospel. We have great resources and partners. We can afford to be generous. We welcome and need new ideas and “experiments” to learn what it takes to share the news of grace and salvation with others. We need to live our church life for those who do not yet know the good news.

## Shape of the Synod Initiative

### Background

In their remarks and reports throughout the Assembly, Bishop Richard Graham, Rev. Dr. Phil Hirsch, Director of the Metro DC Synod Evangelical Mission, and Mr. John S. White, Synod Vice President, shared information about the purpose and progress made by the Shape of the Synod Task Force.

The context for the effort is based on the synod's priorities as clearly stated in the New Testament: *caring for those in need and making disciples*. The speakers emphasized how well we respond to the first priority, caring for those who are in need locally, nationally, and internationally. However, we often struggle with the second priority, making disciples. The Shape of the Synod Task Force was created to help congregations with this second priority, *making disciples*.

### Actions Taken and Proposed

As a first step, task force members visited congregation councils to discuss their concerns and plans. They found remarkable consistency among the churches – *concerns about property, membership, and money*. Often the congregational response was to create additional programs. It became clear that if we focus inward, our energy is taken up with these matters rather than serving others and making disciples.

The Task Force plans to support the actions described below.

- *Continue visits to congregations to facilitate communication, provide support, and identify ways congregations within the synod can work together to support one another.* Some things can be done most effectively on a synod level, while other things are best done on a congregational level. For example, preparing leaders for all aspects of ministry can be done most effectively if we work collaboratively.
- Help congregations find ways to be *more successful with stewardship efforts*, learning new ways to ask for money and becoming more transparent and clear about how funds are spent. For example, the *Synod's Spending Plan* has been modified in format and fund allocation to support the synod's priorities and add clarity. Hopefully this will be a helpful model for congregations. Additionally, a *synod-wide stewardship campaign, Embrace Generosity*, will be introduced in the fall. Congregations will receive a variety of related resources and can customize the initiative to their own needs.
- *Inviting others to discipleship* is a major priority. A disciple is one who sits at the feet of the master and learns to be like him/her. A disciple is one who follows. Congregations can focus on this priority in many ways, including
  - Offering lively, stimulating worship and grounding ministry in the Gospel
  - Providing meaningful small group experiences
  - Sharing specific examples of how our faith shapes our everyday lives, and ways to talk about our faith with others
  - Learning new ways to invite others to discipleship
  - Freeing pastors to be "missionaries" in their communities rather than having to spend their time tending to "turning off the lights" and fixing broken plumbing.
- Propose *changes in the synod constitution and by-laws* to align them more closely with the synod's priorities. For example, create teams and reduce the number of standing committees. (Note: These changes were introduced to the assembly participants but were tabled until the 2014 assembly, as additional information and details were needed.)

## Highlights from Reports Presented by Synod Leaders and Speakers

### Young Adult Ministries

Rev. Amy Thompson Sevimli, Assistant to the Bishop, reported on Young Adult Ministries. She began her report by quoting John 20:26 -- “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” She said that we have not seen and yet have come to believe. However, there are many who have not seen and do not believe. Among those are young atheists whose experiences she recounted based on an article from *The Atlantic*, “Listening to Young Atheists: Lessons for a Stronger Christianity.” The article says *that many young adults do not find mainline congregations meaningful because of the lack of focus on the way Jesus really matters in our daily lives*. They are looking for something stronger and more specific than they have found in mainline churches. Rev. Sevimli told of the experience of those who have left mainline churches for more fundamentalist churches because it was not clear to them that in those churches, Jesus really mattered. Rev. Sevimli reflected that we do an effective job serving others but have trouble articulating our faith and telling others about how God has made a difference in our lives. We need to learn more about how to bring others to the faith in a new and different way.

Rev. Sevimli explained that in past years she had offered congregations suggestions about how to work with young adults in congregations, but now she would discuss how the synod approach to young adult ministry has changed. It now is focusing on *what the synod can offer to and for young adults* that a congregation young adult group cannot. Among these priorities are *trips for young adults*. She gave examples of young adult ministries and invited young people who had been on mission trips to the Holy Land and the Mexican Border to share their experiences. In Mexico, the families had very limited resources, yet willingly shared everything they had with their young guests, extending kindness and faith. In the Holy Land they visited a Christian Village on the West Bank where the residents were restricted in their movements and struggled to get basic needs of life such as water. These young Christians told of the welcome they had received and how their experiences had changed their attitudes from “do for” to “learn from.”

Rev. Sevimli described a new focus for *Project Connect*. The project formerly focused on calling young adults to leadership in rostered ministry. The new focus will include a broader conversation about where and how God is calling young adults to live out their baptismal callings, whether in ministry or other vocations.

A *Child Protection Policy* has been created in response to a synod resolution passed in 2011. Resources for congregations are available from the synod.

### Creating Leaders for Ministry

The Rev. Dr. Michael Cooper-White, President, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, PA, offered these reflections about preparing future leaders for the ELCA.

- The ELCA needs pastors, diaconal leaders, and lay leaders.
- ELCA seminaries have declining enrollments
- “Who Shall I Send?” God’s great commission is our mission.
- God’s call may come through our voice; God’s work will be done through our hands.
- Gettysburg Seminary now offers full tuition scholarships for the final year of study.

### **Together in Mission**

The Rev. Kate Davidson described the “re-launch” of the synod’s Together in Mission (TIM) initiative. She explained that on Saturday, January 25, 2014, 20-30 speakers will gather with a crowd of people interested in hearing what the best ideas for the ministry of the church are. They will speak for up to 18 minutes, talking about their best idea as to how to better follow Jesus in the 21st century. The talks will be recorded and placed on the Together in Mission website.

### **The Journey**

*The Journey* is a synod initiative involving 28 ELCA congregations (including All Saints) and three Episcopal congregations. The effort is to help congregations learn how to adapt their ministry to a changing society. There will be six sessions offered for participants over three years. Topics for discussion as participants gather are Purpose and Focus, Communicating for a Change, Leading your Congregation through Change, Small Groups, Setting Lay People Loose for Ministry, and Mission in the Community. Rev. Chris Nelson, pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minn., leads the sessions.

### **Global Mission**

The Global Mission report included a summary of our partnership activities with synods in *Namibia, El Salvador, and Slovakia*. A detailed written report was offered by the *Middle East Working Group* chaired by All Saints’ Nathan Rich. With our partner churches, the synod is making a difference in the *Malaria Campaign*. The focus has been on intervention, education, and treatment. Included within the *Missionary Support and Sponsorship* summaries was All Saints support and sponsorship of Missionary Stephen Deal (\$2500 in 2012.)

### **New and Renewing Congregations**

The synod’s *focus on diversity* is reflected in new and renewing congregations within the synod. New congregations under development are La Sagrada Familia (Langley Park, MD) and River of Grace (Dumfries, VA). Two congregations planning to become full ELCA congregations are the In Christ Fellowship (a Tamili Indian Congregation in Washington, DC) and The Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Church (an Ethiopian Oromo Congregation in Washington, DC). Two Latino communities developing as a part of existing congregations are San Marcos (St. Mark’s Springfield, VA) and Santa Maria (Augustana, Washington DC). Additionally, the Amharic Community of Peace in Alexandria, a growing Ethiopian Community, recently called **All Saints’ Rev. Alebachew Engedayehu**. At the *University of Maryland*, the Synod is providing a grant for a three year initiative to reach young adults on and off campus. All Saints’ Pastor Gary Rhinesmith is a member of the New and Renewing Congregations Table.

### **Environmental Stewardship**

30 congregations have responded to the Synod’s *Creation Care* initiative. Congregations are encouraged to visit the *Lutherans Restoring Creation* website.

### **Federal Chaplaincy Ministries**

The Synod report on Federal Chaplaincy Ministries described the work of the chaplains. The report included a picture of All Saints’ Jeff Jacobson.



## **Resolutions Adopted**

The following resolutions were adopted during the Metropolitan Washington D.D. Synod Assembly held on June 21 and 22, 2013. A full text of each of the resolutions can be found on the Internet at <http://metrodcelca.org/events/synod-assembly/#sthash.hUUKV2D9.dpuf>.

- Accompaniment, Awareness-raising and Advocacy for the People of the Holy Land
- The Community of St. Dymas
- Expression of Thanks and Gratitude
- Expression of Thanks and Gratitude for Service of Harold Sargeant, Associate in Ministry (AIM)
- Giving Thanks and Praise to God for Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) 75th Anniversary
- Greetings
- A Memorial Calling for Conversations about Ministering to Same-Gender Couples and Families
- Memorial in Support of Legislation Prohibiting Employment Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity
- Memorial in Support of the Uniting American Families Act (UAFA)
- Resolution on Criminal Justice
- Safe and Responsible Use of Firearms

## **Sharing Information about the Assembly**

This report of the Assembly will be placed on the All Saints website.

An article providing an overview of the Assembly proceedings will be published in the August *Grapevine*. The September's *Grapevine* will feature an article on the State of the Synod Initiative. A description of the Synod's initiatives and activities will be offered in the October *Grapevine*, and a summary of the resolutions passed by the Assembly will be included in the November *Grapevine*.

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Bates and Louise Waynant

Voting Members to the Synod Assembly from All Saints Lutheran Church