



La Crosse Area Synod, ELCA

Coulee Courier

Assembly edition

Generous Love, Generous Lives

June 8-10, 2012

REMEMBERING MACEDONIA

In writing to the church of Corinth, Paul says, "I rejoice because I have complete confidence in you... We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints. (1 Cor. 7:16, 8:1-7)

BISHOP'S REPORT

Bishop Arends reflected on ways he sees the congregations of our synod active in ministry. Under the theme of Seeing Jesus, Alive and Loving, he countered assertions that the church is dying by pointing to the many ways the churches are living bearers of the cross. He said, "Cross bearers want to get into service." Then he lifted up examples among us of Christian communities serving the community around them.



Bishop also said, "Many congregations are working on mission planning questions. This is the year to take a look at what we're doing." He encouraged all congregations to write down their hopes and dreams so that others in the congregation can see them.

There are questions that should be considered, He said. "In the congregation [written things] help us focus." Then he called our congregations to articulate written answers to simple questions:

- 1) What are our congregation's history and heritage?
- 2) Who are we today?
- 3) Where is Jesus leading us?
- 4) How are we going to get there?

Then Bishop encouraged leaders to consider crafting a statement of twenty words or fewer that tells what their congregations are about.

RESOLUTIONS

Full resolutions are available at www.lacrosseareasyndod.org

R1: (Passed) That congregations challenge members to increase generosity to their congregations by at least 1%, that congregations be challenged to increase their investments in local community ministries by at least 1%, that congregations be challenged to increase synodical mission support by at least 1%, that congregations be encouraged to use the Generous Love/Generous Lives toolkit toward these ends throughout the next two years and beyond.

R2: (Passed) That congregations of the synod commit themselves to the ELCA Malaria Campaign and that our synod's goal for this campaign be \$150,000 by Synod Assembly 2015.

R3: (Passed) That the synod support the 11x15 Campaign for Safer and Healthier Communities, that congregations be encouraged to show the 11x15 PowerPoint and participate in the 11x15 campaign to reduce the prison population by 11,000 by 2015, through the use of evidence-based initiatives.

R4: (Passed) That we encourage congregations to study how Lutheran biblical theology can guide advocacy for a just peace in the Middle East and to examine how Christian Zionism shapes the political debate surrounding the Israel/Palestine conflict.

R5: (Passed) To amend the synod bylaws so that the section about Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO) be replaced with a section about Lutheran Youth Leading Evangelism (LYLE).

R6: (Passed) That the 2013 Synod Assembly change its date and location for one year only. The new dates will be April 26, 27, and 28 at a location within the Synod.

R7: (Passed) That the synod receive Journey Lutheran Church, Onalaska, WI, as an officially organized congregation of the ELCA.

ELCA REPORT

Dr. Stephen Bouman, Director of ELCA Congregational and Synodical Mission encouraged the assembly to consider itself through the story of Elisha and the widow of 2 Kings 4. He said, “We have a lot in the house.” Then, he spoke of the resources we have “in the house” of the ELCA to do work in the world.

First among these resources is Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR). He spoke of LDR’s continuing work in Japan following the 2011 tsunami. He commended LDR’s work for continuing its work in New York City. It has been more than ten years since 9/11. LDR is the only faith-based group still present and working. As such, it serves an important pastoral role in the city.

Another resource the ELCA has “in its house” is Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS). LIRS continues to walk with people of Mexico, immigrants who enter the country with hopes and dreams of supporting their family, who are encountering hostility bred by political debate.

Dr. Bouman also spoke of the altar as a gathering of all the tables of the families of our parish. Tables are places where faith is formed and nourished—in the home and in the parish. They are places of hospitality, where the stranger is welcomed. Bouman went on to say that when Jesus sends disciples into the world without bread for the journey, he sends them on “mission trips” into the world to rely on the hospitality of others. The mission of the church is to go to other places, to enter into spaces of hospitality where the poor and the privileged share table fellowship together.

The ELCA is now starting an average of sixty congregations each year. This is an increase in church starts. Just four years ago, we averaged thirty church starts. In 2012, we intend to start seventy mission congregations.

Bouman’s report closed by reminding that the church’s mission flows out of first love. Quoting John 3:16, Bouman said, “The first love is God’s love. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son... Our first love is given back to us by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.” He concluded by saying, “It is God who is the greatest lover and the most generous.”

Louise Hempstead sits on the church council of the ELCA. She is a member of Bethany Lutheran in La Farge. She reported that disaffiliation from the ELCA, as a result of decisions made at Churchwide Assembly in 2009, has dropped to the point where we now have more mission starts than those leaving the ELCA. In total, 7% of congregations and people have left the ELCA, resulting in an 8% drop of worship attendance and a 5% drop

FINANCIAL MATTERS

Treasurer Derek Jackson presented the treasurer’s report. He began with a review of 2011 expenses. Next, Treasurer Jackson read through a proposed revised 2012 mission budget, reflecting a decrease in anticipated income. Treasurer Jackson then reviewed the proposed 2013 budget. Questions and comments were solicited from the floor.

Treasurer Jackson also reported on fiscal year 2011. This report provided a balance sheet, a restricted fund balances report, an operating fund income and expense report, and a statement of revenue and expense for held (pass through) funds. Our synod continues to make headway on repaying obligations to seminaries not met in previous years. We continue to provide 55% of synodical income to fund Churchwide ministries. Our mission support is ahead of last year because congregations are contributing more than the previous year. The proposed budget was adopted. Also adopted were guidelines for minimum compensation for clergy in our synod.

DAVE SKOGEN, FESTIVAL FOODS

Dave Skogen addressed the assembly about living generously. He shared his experience of building a business on the model of servant leadership and challenged people to give generously. “Those who do not give to their capacity will never know joy.” He also reminded that, “Intentions without actions equals squat.”

ELCA MALARIA CAMPAIGN

Joanne Salava shared a video about the ELCA Malaria Campaign and invited our synod to participate in this campaign. She reminded the assembly that malaria has been present since Jesus’ time and asserted that now is the time to bring it to an end.

A voting member commented that if every member of our congregations gave four dollars, this money could be raised immediately. Pastor Karyn Bodenschatz exclaimed that during the first plenary session of the assembly, “more than 500 children have died from malaria.”

The assembly voted to commit the synod to the ELCA Malaria Campaign and set a goal of raising \$150,000 by the 2015 Synod Assembly.

An offering gathered at Saturday’s worship service was designated for the ELCA Malaria Campaign. The assembly gathered \$3,900. When that total was announced a woman in the assembly made an additional gift in order that the offering would be an even \$4,000. That’s Generous Love-Generous Living!