

Saturday, May 31, 2014

Worship before the plenary session was led by Rev. Eric Luedtke, with Rev. Rebecka Feters assisting. Venice Williams preached on seeds and vines, and on the value of being made uncomfortable, as, she said, many were following Barbie Izquierdo's presentation on Friday.

Plenary IV

Bishop Barrow called the Assembly to order at 9:39 am.

Announcements

The bishop's announcements included the New Wind Folk School and a rostered leaders retreat at Lutherdale in late August (using Portico funds that came from high participation levels in their annual survey).

He thanked the people who made the Assembly function well, including the tech crew, the staff at Country Springs, the worship planning team, those who set up displays, the Assembly planning team, and those providing child care at the Assembly.

Report of the Credentials Committee

Mr. David Groenewold reported that in attendance on Saturday, May 31, 2014 were 149 rostered persons and 190 lay people, for a total voting membership of 339. Also present were 63 visitors for a total attendance of 402. A quorum was present.

Electronic Evaluations

An electronic evaluation of the Assembly was conducted. Paper evaluation forms were made available for those without voting machines, and for any who wished to add narrative elements to their evaluations.

Report of the Bishop – Bishop Jeff Barrow

Vice President Scott Manske introduced Bishop Barrow, lauding him for the strength of what he stands for and for how well he represents the synod, saying that he is doing a wonderful job,

The bishop began by saying that his decision not to provide a written report beforehand was intentional, in that many don't read such reports, and that he intended this year's report to be more on the order of a reflection. Once his remarks were concluded, he said, he would conduct an open mic to hear concerns and thoughts about where the synod needs to go, giving those present a chance to respond to his report. He added that a conversation of the faithful is often missing in the church.

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He began by referring to Isaiah 35, with its promise that “the eyes of the blind shall be opened,” and that God “will come and save you.” These words, in the Advent lectionary, represent a time of awakening; a time of reversal of fortunes and of expectations.

This is the new vision we are to have: those of us who have given up, and have been given up on. These words provide the core of what I understand to be the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ, to stop lamenting and stop living in the past. We are the fragile vessels, and this provides an awakening for those who have fallen asleep. It is a matter of discerning what we take and what we leave behind.

The time of assumed Christianity is gone, here in the United States, and perhaps worldwide. This is increasingly a society of the unchurched. The bishops’ academy focused on the “nones,” those who claim no religious affiliation, though the faith questions often remain prominent among those who have abandoned religious institutions. One frustration about the church is that there is so much effort to hang on to what has been, rather than meeting those who want to find God. Is desperation driving us together? We still embrace a rigid congregationalism in this country – rampant congregationalism. So much of our church life revolves around this, and too many people have clung to that, rather than preaching the Gospel to a world that is hungry for that message. “It is imperative for churches to begin to work together before reaching the point of desperation.” Sometimes I think we would be better off with fewer organizations, but more holy places to gather for word and sacrament. At Holy Communion in Racine one year the snow plowing budget was \$20,000, and the total for plowing for the congregations in Racine was probably \$100,000, for churches that may only have been one-third full. The question is how to be the people of God eager to proclaim the Gospel.

In Isaiah, renewal began with employing the gifts of the sacred remnant – the dreams of a great new reality. Churches are struggling to become missional.

I visited one congregation and asked for a tour of the building before worship. I saw every corner, talked about what had gone on there, and heard the dreams that never materialized in that space. Those may embody the seed of new growth. The trick lies in leaving behind the trappings of the institution, the buildings and hierarchy, but then to remember the important witness of those who have gone before. The celebration of anniversaries of ordination opened things for us in that way.

What do we take with us? I am proud to be a Lutheran. This is not about Nordic self-effacing piety, but about a theology of the cross. Grace is revealed in God’s benevolent nature toward all of creation. That allows us to walk in the steps of Jesus. Being Lutheran is care of our neighbor, and seeking out the poor: “to understand the poor and

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disenfranchised as neighbor, rather than simply as the objects or recipients of one's own benevolence."

Water, Agriculture, Dignity

Last year, the Good Shepherd Fund process began to name things we are passionate about in this synod. Five out of 35 grants were funded, but more important; in the conversation generated some things emerged, including that hunger issues matter in this world. But feeding hungry people goes beyond sending food packets or working at a pantry, and I hope it only begins a conversation on what food justice is. It is not justice until it begins to see the faces of those who become empowered to become neighbors.

This can lead to the larger arena of human dignity and justice, to work toward sustainability rather than dependence. In global partnerships the discussion is about sustainability, with a discussion on dependence.

I am proud of the ELCA for addressing and entering arenas, and staying there for the long-haul.

The Good Shepherd money also raised up the importance of being a global church, where we learn from neighbors as we walk together. When you go elsewhere, you see the synod through different eyes

Only one of the five grants only dealt with mission development, which was disappointing. The idea of sharing our faith. We do hospitality badly, because of diminished understanding, but the question based on theology remains: why wouldn't you want to be Lutheran?

One thing to take along is the notion that being part of the Lutheran church can actually bring hope and joy and love to others.

Who do you ask to share this beautiful thing in your life? The theology of the cross offers a path for Christianity in this country. Boldness to the Gospel, and to carry that witness, that spirit of proclamation and witness to justice.

Bishops Open Mic

Rev. Margaret Schoewe, St. Matthews Evangelical Lutheran Church, Wauwatosa, said that we need to keep thinking about how to reach out to young people who are not churched. Wauwatosa, she said, is a growing area. She asked whether there are congregations which have gone out and reached the young who are not churched. She would like to hear, but after the Assembly.

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Ms. Kathy Davis, St. John's Lutheran Church, Brookfield, said that she appreciated why the bishop didn't provide a written copy of his report.

Bishop Barrow said that the text will be available on the synod website.

Rev. Matthew Short, St. Luke Lutheran Church, Slinger, said one thing that is fundamental is cultural translation. We have a treasure chest of theology, but often pre-conceived notions. The question is how to break through, to take the gift and put it out there in a radically different context. This is every generation's task of cultural translation.

A Voting Member from Adoration Evangelical Lutheran Church, Greenfield, said that the church that her family, with two kids, attends has people embracing new ideas, such as a bible study and the use of social media to promote the church. Initiatives included being at a bar, part of an effort to open up to a greater population. "We met our pastor outside of church, and he is good at using the tools that we use." It is a matter of coming to you. Stop putting people in a box, not boxes for youth and young adults – talk to them as a person, get to know them, start the conversation with what is important to them. Then they can feel valued, and will stay. We are now in a church where all of us feel valued.

Mr. Paul Bauman, Trinity Lutheran Church, West Bend, referring to the ELCA representative's remarks the day before, said that with the changing of neighborhoods, is there anything available as best practices to say okay, how do we continue to reach out, not to the same people, but to new people?

Rev. Lisa Bates-Froiland, Redeemer Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, said that a t-shirt she is reluctant to wear says "sin boldly – but trust in God more boldly still." She added that if you are part of a congregation thinking about something, go ahead, and trust that God will send the teachers to you. The only true sin, she stated, would be not to have started at all. Sinning boldly – trusting that god will do what he will.

Mr. Dayvin Hallmon, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Kenosha, said that, as a person approaching 30, he is disappointed in the approach by the synod to the young. Are we serious? Do we have an assertive approach? He is broken-hearted about what he hears.

Mr. Lee Jost, Faith Lutheran Church, Cedarburg, made observations about seeing "a serious, broad reawakened interest in the Christian-Judeo principals on the founding of our nation, a real hunger to grasp the founding father's principals." There seems to be an increase in student enrollments, Belmont, Hillsdale and other Christian academies and higher learning institutions.

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Rev. Andrew Nyren, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, said that he does close work with people from other religious traditions, but no longer with Catholic churches in his area. There is no connection, nothing going on. Are there things that you know of going on?

Bishop Barrow responded that there are good relations, with some things on which we are very close. There is now a kind of revival of the ecumenical spirit.

Rev. Jacob Werkheiser, Vernon Evangelical Lutheran Church, Mukwonago, reflected on highs and lows of this weekend, with one of the lows being, for some, the medium – how we conduct business. It “is kind of boring.” He urged the synod to change the medium to engage more who are not at the table. At their table, each person writes down a word, and then a drawing, that engage them in the conversation. He spoke of the idea of revival, and of learning, at God’s table. Carrying forward the idea of sinning boldly, with intensity, is a challenge. “I would like to hear from you practical methods beyond conversing.” Does the bishop have practical ideas for continuing that or fostering more engagement?

The bishop responded that “I’m still the guy who goes on canoe trips.” The whole thing, he said, of media connecting to people is powerful and dangerous. “Others [in the synod] do that better.” He added that “we live in an age of snarky tweeting,” noting the power of civility in our interactions.

Nanette Smith, Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church, Menomonee Falls, said that people with disabilities have not been mentioned in our conversations. She said that she leads a group for young adults of different ages that meets once a month. “These folks have some incredible insights, such incredible faith, and we do not have this group represented, there are no materials provided, we need to engage with them.”

In closing this session, Bishop Barrow said that “it is a great privilege to be called to do what I do. I am grateful for those on staff.” In noting the good comments, he said that “baptism always trumps ordination. I am grateful for this office, but baptism calls us all together. I am grateful for everybody in the room.”

Vice President Manske turned the chair back to Bishop Barrow, adding that “sometimes we overthink things.” As an example, his daughter’s friends were volunteering for Vacation Bible School at a time when not enough volunteers could be found. These young people came and were engaged. They did the Ten Commandments, teaching them to the kids. “All they want to do is be engaged and invited. If we open up the doors, they will come on in.” He said his daughter is now known as someone who is “kind of religious.” A friend, who sometimes did not find acceptance elsewhere, asked if

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they would be accepted at their church. “The answer was yes, we would accept them. Invite and engage.”

Action on Budget

Mr. David Groenewold, synod Director of Finance, moved approval of the budget for February 1, 2015 through January 31, 2016, as presented in the Supplement. There was no discussion.

Assembly Action

SA14.05.16. Approval of Budget

The Assembly voted to approve the Greater Milwaukee Synod’s budget for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2016 as presented, with total contributions and support (income) of \$2,195,500 and total ministries (expenses) of \$2,224,080.

Good Shepherd Task Force Report

Rev. Andy Fetters, St. Mark’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, Waukesha, presented the report of the Good Shepherd Task Force. He called it a great pleasure to sit on the Task Force, thinking of “the trust that was given to us by all of you and by the bishop. The Task Force celebrates these disbursements – God has blessed us richly. AMEN! We pray for all of these projects to bear fruit.”

Rev. Fetters introduced members of the Task Force, and then introduced a video highlighting the work of the ministries that had received grants. The video presentation included a request that congregations consider the use of their assets, when no longer needed for their ministry, to connect with needs in ministry.

Open Forum

The Open Forum, a success in 2013, was repeated this year.

Ms. Ellie Schmidtke, Associate in Ministry/Director of Family Ministries, Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church, Menomonee Falls, who supports both bible camps, requested a prayer for all who will be programming and working at the camps this summer.

Ms. Loretta Brockmeier, St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, Random Lake, wanted to “speak up for the boring parts of the Assembly, which are extremely vital for adjudication.” She said she grew up Catholic, and the church was not transparent. Being part of an open church is, she said, an exercise in self-discipline.”

Mr. Jerry Schmidt of the Mt. Meru Coffee Project gave thanks for the synod’s support. He said there was one remaining challenge: that they came with coffee, but did not want

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to carry it away. “Please stop and buy on the way out.” He said that the money from the purchase of coffee supports the growers and agriculture in Tanzania.

Rev. Joe Ellwanger, Retired, Hephatha Lutheran Church, Milwaukee; “I am here to report on what I think was a very important emphasis in last year’s assembly, the 11x15 Campaign.” He said that while there was no report on the campaign at this year’s Assembly, he wanted to assure the Assembly that those working on this effort are grateful that some have been engaged in this campaign. He said there is some progress, but that “making a change in this piece of our culture is not easy and is not fast – it is slow, but there is progress.” The big progress of the last year, he said, was increasing funding for Treatment Alternatives and Diversions (TAD), which is designed to keep people out of prison in the first place. Theologically, he said, that is where we are at – funding went from \$1million to \$4million, enough to keep 250 people out of state prisons, and 750 out of county jails. This is saying, he added, “that you are a human being, you’ve got dignity.” He repeated the call for “treatment, not incarceration,” saying “I will not give up on this issue. This is a church engaged in the nitty-gritty of people at the edges.” It is walking with those who are in the criminal justice system. “We recognize the more we are engaged, because of the gospel; I will pause with a semi-colon.”

Ms. Brittany Wilson, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, it was a really nice assembly.

Rev. Matthew Short, St. Luke Lutheran Church, Slinger, presented a challenge for members’ calendars, to see if a date is open, Friday, October 24th. That is the date of the Lutheran Campus Ministry fundraiser, especially important since we are the only mainline protestant denomination still doing this form of ministry.

Rev. Rachel Young-Binter, Lake Park Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, and Lutheran Campus Ministry, UWM, reinforced the message about the fundraiser , adding that “we are a reforming church – resetting the table, wider, bigger, the beauty and diversity of all God’s people.” She described those who sit at the Corner House table, a variety of faith traditions as the core group on Wednesday, and interfaith conversations on Monday nights. She said that the LGBT community, people who have often been injured by their faith communities, are a welcome part of the table. “Let me open the doors – thanks for support for Campus Ministry.”

A voting member from Spirit of Peace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, addressed their new beginning. We are “really excited about the ministry in our neighborhood – creating a retreat center in their building – so much to show and to tell – open invitation, to come, explore and understand.”

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Rev. James Bickel, Galilee Lutheran Church, Pewaukee and Executive Director of Outreach for Hope, touted the synod picnic, in conjunction with the Outreach for Hope Bike Ride on September 6th, announcing that online registration opens tomorrow.

Ms. Monica Miller, Atonement Lutheran Church, Racine, said that hunger is one consequence of poverty, and that this coming Wednesday, June 4th, there is another opportunity to reach out further regarding poverty, to lift up the issues of poverty, when WISDOM organizations and others join in a symposium on poverty at Marquette University Memorial Union. This is being done so as not to lose sight of issues of poverty. She said that registration is available on the Wisconsin Council of Churches website.

Ms. Tracy Apps, Synod Director of Communication, “you guys all have a story to share. I am encouraged by these stories, which are a way to increase communication and awareness of what others are doing.” She urged members to “publish your story on the synod website. We want to open it up to you, so visit the website and submit your stories. Tell about what is working in your congregations.” She said that she wants “to fill the website with your stories, and not have to write it all myself.”

Mr. Sean McGinty, Adoration Evangelical Lutheran Church, Greenfield, said that methods of inviting people at Adoration include rummage and bake sales to pull in people. “To get people in, start a dialogue.” Next Thursday, Friday and Saturday is the spring rummage sale, with a young adult group holding a brat fry with this and the Meru group adding in a book sale.

Mr. Clarence Royston, Hephatha Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, said that “youth need attention, need to feel like they are somebody.” He emphasized the need to “not step on their dreams,” their “need to be loved, nurtured and blessed.” He urged members to “give them something to do, or they will find something to do.” The fundamental thing to remember, he said, is that this is “not about Lutherans, but about Christians,” working in neighborhoods with serious issues, including violence, homelessness, and high prison populations.” The basic need for them is love,” to work with the 06 initiative and 11x15, but to “be the best Christian you can be.”

A voting member from St. Matthew’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, Wauwatosa, urged members to come hear Barbie again tomorrow during the 9:45 am adult education time. Worship is at 8:30 am or 11:00 am. “Please come for everything.”

Rev. Lisa Bates-Froiland, Redeemer Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, spoke of Sierra Guyton, the young girl shot in a playground last week, asking for prayer for her. The week before the shooting, the Zeidler Center, had invited a group of 18 to 24 year-olds from that neighborhood for one day discussion about struggles, another day about

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obstacles, and a third day to have mentors, coaches, to meet with them one on one. She added that Redeemer offered cards for people to contacts or prospective employers when they are looking for a job. This is “the grit of life,” she concluded.

Mr. Al Burgemeister, Galilee Lutheran Church, Pewaukee, spoke about the Lutheran Choir, which rehearses Tuesday evenings at St. Matthew’s in Wauwatosa. He mentioned their Christmas and spring concerts, inviting all to sing or to hear.

All Peoples Cool Congregations Challenge for Sacred Stewardship is an award for urban greenhouse project and year-round space

“We’ve heard about the prison population and the struggle for jobs when they come out.” Milwaukee Working collects books, with some sold online, and others recycled. Members were urged to consider a book collection for Milwaukee Working.

Ms. Emily Vretenar, Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church, Muskego, said that she was “part of the youth table over here. Being involved as a rep was an honor, getting to vote on big-people stuff.” She said that “other churches should invite people to vote,” and that this “should have an impact on how our church goes” in the future.

Rev. Andy Fetters, St. Mark’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, Waukesha, recounted one of the best days he’d had recently, when a member contacted him, had a conversation about some issues at the church, and said six words: “I’m glad you are our pastor.” Directing his words to the chair, Rev. Fetters added, “I’m glad you are our bishop.”

Closing of Assembly

Bishop Barrow concluded with the Order for Closing of a Synod Assembly.

Rev. Tim Tahtinen, Spirit of Peace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, shared devotions. “I love this theme about the table, and a theology of the table, where everyone is welcome.” We talked and shared with people with different traditions. “Some are accustomed to the notion that if you’re not like us you’re not welcome – I challenge you to go home and to invite people in to dinner.”

The Assembly adjourned by unanimous consent at 11:43 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew Brockmeier
Secretary
Greater Milwaukee Synod, ELCA