

Minutes of the 2016 Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly June 2-4, 2016

Friday, June 3, 2016

The 2016 Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly took place from Thursday, June 2, 2016 through Saturday, June 4, 2016 at Carthage College at 2001 Alford Park Drive, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Plenary IV

Bishop Barrow called the Assembly to order at 6:32 pm, following music by Rev. Tom Pietz and friends.

Announcements

Announcements by Bishop Barrow

Address by Craig Nesson

Rev. Dr. Craig L. Nesson, Academic Dean and Professor of Contextual Theology at Wartburg Theological Seminary, began with the words of St. Paul from Romans 12.1 (“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”) and greetings from the seminary and from its president, Rev. Louise Johnson.

He spoke of leadership in the life of our church, saying that with all that needs to be prioritized; there is a need for leadership development. “Without good, wise educated leaders, nothing works. The church breaks down without this.”

In our church, he said, leadership is from the ground up. This is built on leaders in congregations, serving and leading in God’s mission. He called the universal priesthood of all believers perhaps the least implemented aspect of the Reformation over the last 500 years, despite being a key tenet.

He spoke of the Life of Faith initiative, which he called parallel to the Book of Faith initiative. This new initiative, he said, is based on the concepts of baptism as the primary ordination and of serving as the Body of Christ in all arenas of daily life. He expressed a need for urgency to be intentional about raising up from our congregations these leaders in daily life.

The Churchwide Assembly will be asked to put into place changes to the rosters of non-ordained leaders, including Associates in Ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers. These Word and Service ministers, Rev. Nesson said, are a great hope, since they show the way for the church, and can be leaders in equipping the baptized.

He went on to speak to an urgent need for Word and Sacrament ministers: for pastors. The ELCA is looking at a serious shortage in the coming years, because of the “age pyramid,” among rostered leaders, with a large number of retirements over the next decade. To fill that need, there must develop an ethos of that service.

Pastors proclaim the Word and administer the Sacraments, setting people free to be what they can be, and to do for others. Rev. Nesson called for voicing this invitation on a regular basis.

“There are people in this room who are being called by the Spirit to become pastors.” We must encourage the development of a culture of invitation, in congregations, and

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through congregations to the church. This must be a diverse invitation: “consider a call to become a pastor of the church.”

Report of the Credentials Committee

Mr. David Groenewold returned to give the report of the Credentials Committee. At the beginning of the second plenary session there were 166 clergy and 253 lay people, for a total voting membership of 419. Also present were 61 visitors for a total attendance of 480. A quorum was present, with in excess of 60% of registered voting members being lay.

Review Voting Process

Rev. Wyvetta Bullock took the podium for the next phase of the bishop election process, briefly reviewing the process, and calling for applause for the nominees.

Address by Candidates for Bishop

Rev. Wyvetta Bullock introduced the three remaining candidates for bishop.

Three questions were posed to the candidates, with each candidate asked to frame and present their answers in whatever way they wished during a nine-minute presentation. These questions were developed by the Elections Committee, with the same questions to each candidate. The questions were:

- Coming up on 500th anniversary, what reforms would you nail on the church door to take the church into the next 500 years?
- What is your favorite hymn, and why?
- What will you do to strengthen participation in God’s mission in all parts of this synod?

Rev. Harvard Stephens (Dean of the Chapel and Pastor to the Community, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago)

As bishop, Rev. Stephens said, he would use this powerful position to encourage the life of the church and to encourage all of us to live with an attitude of gratitude that will strengthen God’s mission. Receiving grace, being thankful, and informing our thanksgiving with a greater appreciation of what God is doing.

Our lives together are important, and we must enter into each other’s prayers. We must be creative. We must know more about what God is doing among us. During this process, it is important to know that people are praying, that sinners are called to proclaim the Gospel, and that prayers have been flowing.

All nominees, he said, have been sharing in this gift. He is moved to be more grateful, to lead worship with hope, and to believe what we proclaim. “The sending part is really important – where we are going is where God is sending us.”

He wants to make diversity more normal, more the standard expectation. To make it more normative in every respect, and to have people value the diversity. “We have to believe in what we can learn.”

Regarding the 500th anniversary, he would give some attention to the documents having to do with our leaders, with an eye toward the church that God is forming now. Leaders

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who identify with the variety of people who they are called to lead. Speaking the truth, the vision, with people to share in ownership.

Rev. Stephens' favorite hymn is "Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song" (*ELW 808*), which he said has become so close to him, considering that we are on a journey which this hymn celebrates, especially the final verse ("I fear in the dark and the doubt of my journey; but courage will come with the sound of your steps by my side.")

Rev. Dr. Paul Erickson (*Director, Agora, St. Paul, Minnesota*)

In response to the question of strengthening God's mission, Rev. Erickson said he would model his work on what he has done in the St. Paul Area Synod, which is a mission renewal process. Over several years, he said, his ministry has worked with 21 congregations in a process that typically takes 15 to 18 months. At its core, he described this process as listening "to God, to our community of faith, to our neighbors." He would love, he said, to see this process engaged in all parts of our church.

In this process, he added, is learning that takes place across geographical lines, with questions of what the spirit calls forth from us. "It's not about doing what we have been doing, it's about developing relationships. The task of a missional synod is to release the creative imagination of the people of God."

On the 500th anniversary question, he called for the "spirit of the reformation, how not to lose sight of what is central to our lives. Lighten our footprint – it's about the waters of grace flowing freely through us." We need, Rev. Erickson said, to live out the old aspects of the Reformation, not go about creating new ones. "Transform our gatherings, not as a performance, but going out into the world." The church needs new leaders, and new pathways into leadership. The church is growing in places like Central America and Tanzania.

He touched on the Two Kingdoms Theory – that God has two ways of working in the world, the church on the one hand, and the state or business worlds.

"We have a deprivation of curiosity – we need not to be afraid of the answers. Each of us are the mysteries of God. Celebrate!"

Rev. Erickson's favorite hymn is "Thine the Amen" (*ELW 826*), with its lines "thine the river thine the tree . . . thine the splendor . . . only thee, only thee."

Rev. Lisa Bates-Froiland (*Pastor, Redeemer Lutheran Church, Milwaukee*)

Ninety-seven complaints about the church. "What motivated Luther to come to the church on that morning? Too many ways Jesus being kept from the people." It had become, Rev. Bates-Froiland said, "pay to play." It is "still . . . about the same thing – how is the church operating in ways that keep some people from participation; the young, people of color, those in poverty?"

The problem is barriers to participation. That is what to nail on the church door.

Participation in God's mission? Life has been blessed, moving from a rural setting to St. Olaf and a student congregation, then to Bloomington, Indiana, and now at Redeemer. Redeemer had only 35 worshipping when she began, and now has 74. The process to

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grow Redeemer, she said was a process to discover what was right around the neighborhood. The congregation “studied our context really well. What is wrong, what would Jesus really want. Read scripture, and really nothing else, during process.”

“What is the magic formula? People inviting their friends; sharing Jesus.”

She cannot settle on a favorite, but “Built on a Rock (*ELW 652*) is “my message, and God’s message. Built on a rock the church shall stand, even when steeples are falling; crumbled have spires in ev’ry land, bells still are chiming and calling.”

Applause for all candidates.

Report of the Credentials Committee

Mr. David Groenewold reported that there was no change in registration from his first report to this plenary session.

Devotions

Ms. Christine Roe called upon the Assembly to be inspired to the gift of God, boldly and faithfully, citing 2 Timothy 1:6-7, which reminds us “to rekindle the gift of God that is within” us. “Stir up the spirit, oh Lord. Stir us up. Stirring things up. Trouble already there – just stirring it up. It takes action, it takes time, it takes God’s spirit of power.” The Assembly joined by stirring, seated or standing, to call upon the Lord to “stir us up.”

Fourth Ballot for Bishop

Rev. Wyvetta Bullock led the fourth ballot for bishop, which was conducted electronically at 7:22 pm.

Video – *God’s Work, Our Hands*

Outreach for Hope Report

Rev. Jim Bickel made an appeal to members of the Assembly for support for Outreach for Hope.

Anniversary Recognitions

Bishop Jeff Barrow recognized those clergy celebrating their 25th, 40th and 50th anniversaries of ordination, as reported in the Supplement.

Report of Fourth Ballot for Bishop

Rev. Wyvetta Bullock reported the results of the fourth ballot for bishop. A total of 374 valid votes were cast, meaning that 224 votes were needed for election on this ballot. There was no election.

The vote totals for the fourth ballot for bishop were as follows:

Paul Erickson	141
Lisa Bates-Froiland	136
Harvard Stephens	97

The top two candidates, Rev. Paul Erickson and Rev. Lisa Bates-Froiland, will face a final vote on Saturday morning.

Consideration of Resolutions

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Discussion resumed on Resolution 3 - Memorial to the Churchwide Assembly on Black Lives Matter. At the resumption of debate, an amendment was pending to strike items two and three from the Resolved statement.

Point of order – A member rose to make a point of order regarding the appropriateness of the previous action to withdraw an amendment to the amendment at the request of the makers of that amendment. The chair ruled that a vote to withdraw the amendment was in order.

Move the Previous Question

Assembly Action

SA16.06.14. Withdrawal of Motion to Amend the Pending Amendment

The Assembly voted to allow withdrawal of the motion to amend the pending amendment.

This motion was supported by 295 voting members, with 35 in opposition.

Assembly Action

SA16.06.15. Move the Previous Question

The Assembly voted to end debate on the motion to amend the resolution.

This motion was supported by 315 voting members, with 25 in opposition.

Assembly Action

SA16.06.16. Defeat of Amendment

The Assembly voted against the pending amendment to Resolution 3.

This motion was supported by 104 voting members, with 233 in opposition.

Discussion returned to the motion to amend the resolution by removing two points from the Resolved statement. Rev. Jay McDivitt, Pastor of Christ the Servant Lutheran Church, Waukesha, spoke in support of the resolution. He said the “resolution makes me uncomfortable.” He can “picture the faces of people in our congregation” when they learn of his vote for the resolution, and went on to say “that is why it is so crucial; [it] unveils the lie that all lives matter. Statistically and historically, it is undeniable, he said, that “Black Lives Matter less.” “Say it out loud – it means something – the Gospel is not generic – it does not whitewash our differences.” The Gospel, he stated, “has always been particular – Jesus comes to us, where each person is – confronts the sin and death that confronts us – that keeps many in chains.” Rev. McDivitt ended by saying “only one person has been told to shut up [in this debate], and that was a person of color.”

Mr. Jeff Witt of Grace Lutheran Church in Grafton moved to refer the resolution to an ad hoc committee, with one delegate from each congregation, to consider the motion. Seconded.

Following questions regarding the legitimacy of this motion were followed by points of order calling for debate and action. The chair ruled the motion to be in order.

Mr. Matthew Brockmeier, Secretary, noted that a referral would mean as a practical matter an end to the resolution, since there is a short-term deadline for submission to the national church that could not be met.

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Mr. Jerry Key of Faith/Santa Fe Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, spoke against the motion to refer, saying that “this is another step in the systematic way of marginalizing people who don’t meet your criteria.”

Another speaker said that the Assembly, made up mostly of white Midwestern Lutherans, needs to stand up and speak, and that stating that Black Lives Matter does not mean that others don’t matter.

Assembly Action

SA16.06.17. Move the Previous Question

The Assembly voted to end debate on the motion to refer the resolution to an ad hoc committee.

This motion was supported by 311 voting members, with 17 in opposition.

Assembly Action

SA16.06.18. Defeat of Motion to Refer

The Assembly voted against the motion to refer Resolution 3 to an ad hoc committee for further consideration.

This motion was supported by 42 voting members, with 297 in opposition.

Xavier Thomas of All People’s Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, said that “a lengthy debate on black lives matter means black lives don’t matter.” Black lives matter, not that all lives don’t matter. “It is heartbreaking to see us torn like this.” He told the Assembly that he plans to go to seminary, that this is “my church, my place of freedom and safety.” He continued that it is painful to see, questioning whether it is worth all the pain. What is it doing to your life that you can’t help your brother in Christ?”

Bill Schalk of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Racine spoke a second time in opposition to the resolution, saying that he is a big fan of language, and that with the use of the word “support” in the second point of the Resolved statement, along with other flaws in the ten-point plan, mean that he “cannot support anything that is wrong, legally and ethically.”

Assembly Action

SA16.06.19. Move the Previous Question

The Assembly voted to end debate on Resolution 3.

This motion was supported by 324 voting members, with 16 in opposition.

Assembly Action

SA16.06.20. Approval of Resolution 3

The Assembly voted to approve Resolution 3 – Memorial to the Churchwide Assembly on Black Lives Matter, as presented.

This resolution was supported by 296 voting members, with 43 in opposition.

Announcements

Bishop Barrow reminded the Assembly of the Prayer around the Cross to follow this plenary session “in the narthex.”

Rev. Tom Pietz returned to the front with music and prayer to close the fourth plenary session. He was accompanied by Ms. Susan Daniels, Mr. Matthew Stein and Ms. Alanna Szczech.

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The bishop announced, without objection, that the Assembly was in recess at 8:35 pm, to resume Saturday morning at 8:45 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew Brockmeier
Secretary
Greater Milwaukee Synod, ELCA