

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 II

Bishop Barrow called the Assembly to order at 8:50 am.

Address – Rev. Bill Beyer

Rev. Bill Beyer, carrying forward the theme of Claimed to be Authentic, began by quoting from 2 Timothy 1:6, with a reminder that we are called to fan into flame the gift of God that makes us who we are. He told the story of coming to terms with the fact that he is gay, realizing, after decades of working against who he was, that only in authenticity could he find the gift of Grace as being a baptized child of God.

His struggle, he said, had become an all-encompassing struggle, including a struggle with his faith. Now he calls for “all to meet at the foot of the cross and share at the table of the Lord. Is there a place for me in the ELCA – the answer has to be yes.” He said that he found himself while struggling with his sexuality; in the grace of God.

Report of the Credentials Committee

Mr. David Groenewold gave the report of the Credentials Committee, reporting that at the beginning of the second plenary session there were 155 clergy and 247 lay people, for a total voting membership of 402. Also present were 57 visitors for a total attendance of 459. Lay representation remained above 60% of total voting members present.

Budget Presentation

Treasurer Mr. Lee Johnston began by thanking congregations for reversing the trend of declining giving during the just-concluded fiscal year. He presented the proposed budget for the fiscal year beginning on February 1, 2017 and concluding on January 31, 2018.

In his remarks he discussed the amended formula for giving to the ELCA, which was capped last year at 55% of the first \$2 million received by the synod in mission support. This formula continues for the proposed budget.

He also noted that expenses presented in the budget are designed to give the new bishop latitude in structuring staff and activities, and that amendments to details might be made by the Synod Council once the new bishop is in place. He reported that the only substantive increase in budgeted expenses were for legal fees, which have been rising, not just for the synod, but elsewhere in recent years.

Report of ELCA Representative

Rev. Wyvetta Bullock thanked the Assembly again, for hospitality and for allowing her to share. “I give thanks to my God” asking that God strengthen us, for God is faithful. Thanks to Bishop Barrow for his work on ELCA, and for his new work as a hunger ambassador. Thanks also for giving; for the offerings that support for the whole ELCA. Congregational offerings, she said, mostly remain for the work of the congregations, but

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with small percentages also going to synods and the Churchwide organization. She expressed gratitude for this great generosity, which sent \$1.1 million to the national church from Greater Milwaukee Synod congregations in 2015.

To encourage understanding of the work of the ELCA, she encouraged congregations to share “Stories of Faith in Action,” an ELCA publication.

She presented a video from ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, who said that we are church, we have been seen and known by Jesus. Because Jesus cared, we should as well, and used the example of the water project funded through the 2015 Youth Gathering. She also proclaimed that Jesus was a refugee, whose family fled from violence into Egypt.

In all of this, Bishop Eaton urged that members understand that the ELCA has been good about what it does, but has not always been good about talking about why. And the why is that we have been set free by the Good News of the Gospel. God has already saved the world; the work of reconciliation has been done. But the world needs to hear this message. She said that we are church first, not a social service organization with sacraments, because we abide in God’s love.

Returning to her remarks, Rev. Bullock cited statistics on new congregations, other new ministries, and the reach of global missions and missionaries.

She spoke about success in supporting the World Hunger program, Lutheran Disaster Response, the Malaria Campaign, and students receiving help to attend seminaries.

Looking forward, she urged participation in this year’s God’s Work, Our Hands Sunday, which is September 11th. She also spoke of the coming Churchwide Assembly, and the concurrent Grace Gathering, taking place in New Orleans in August. A key proposed change will be consolidation of the various lay rosters, to lay the groundwork for a response to the needs of the world in the 21st century.

Finally, she urged participation in the “Called Forward Together in Christ initiative.

Review Voting Process

Rev. Wyvetta Bullock reviewed the process for the second ballot. All names from last night’s ballot will appear, except those withdrawn. This will again be a vote for one person, on a paper ballot. Seventy-five percent of legal votes cast are required to elect on the second ballot. If no election, the Assembly will move to a third ballot, with seven names plus ties. There were no questions.

Report of the Credentials Committee

Mr. David Groenewold confirmed no change in voting statistics from his first report in this plenary session.

Devotions

Mr. Brian Hornbecker reflected on food and hunger as spoken of in Ezekiel. God feeds us, with Words as sweet as honey. The Word becomes part of him.

Food is used to teach us about the blessings that God sends. Many don’t have food that they need. A call for prayer by faithful stewards, and to share will all God’s children.

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Second Ballot for Bishop

Rev. Wyvetta Bullock conducted the second ballot for bishop, with voting closed at 9:40 am. Bishop Barrow returned as chair following the vote.

Bishop Barrow

Recognition of visitors, including Rev. Larry Westfield and Tim Knutson of the Greater Milwaukee Synod Endowment Fund; and Rev. Dr. Craig L. Nesson, Academic Dean and Professor of Contextual Theology at Wartburg Theological Seminary.

The bishop presented a brief video featuring synod staff and their work with congregations, followed by remarks from the bishop praising his hard-working staff. He noted especially the contributions of Rev. Sandy Chrostowski, who is leaving to take a position with the ELCA.

He ended his remarks with drawing giveaways to Redemption Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wauwatosa and Cross Lutheran Church in Milwaukee.

Break

The bishop announced, without objection, that the Assembly was in recess at 9:46 am, to resume in ten minutes.

Announcements

Bishop Barrow called the Assembly to order again at 9:58 am, following music by Rev. Tom Pietz and colleagues. He announced Rev. Raime Bakken, Region 5 Coordinator, who works with candidacy process and other aspects of ministry. He then introduced Jessica Fairfax. The bishop spoke of World Hunger as being his “heart and soul ministry, the lifeblood and pulse of the church today. He said they have a great mission, and informed the Assembly that this is the year to raise up World Hunger in the ELCA Campaign.

World Hunger Address

Ms. Fairfax thanked the bishop, offering greetings from World Hunger. Her unit has twelve on staff, and she said she wears a number of hats in her work, including events, fundraising and storytelling. She in turn thanked the synod for its support, including more than \$280,000 in contributions in 2015.

Her address continued with her own story, a journey away from and back to the ELCA, ultimately informed by wrestling with the Holy Spirit. This journey brought her to the World Hunger staff.

She spoke of the work to end hunger in the United States and worldwide, with a presence in nearly 60 countries. This has included the Walk for Water initiative, which was funded in large part through last year’s Youth Gathering, with generous matching support from an anonymous donor. A video about the water project was shown.

Bishop Barrow, she said, participated in the water project by carrying a full jug of water for three miles at the Gathering.

In speaking of World Hunger, she added that its work is comprehensive, addressing the root causes of hunger and poverty. She asked attendees to take a moment and talk to a neighbor at the Assembly about what they’ve done for World Hunger. She said that she

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has resources to promote this work, attempting to move toward a world in which all are fed.

The bishop, in thanking her, noted that he'd made an online contribution while she talked in her honor, and added that this work "feeds not just stomachs, but souls."

Report of Second Ballot for Bishop

Rev. Wyvetta Bullock reported results of second ballot, which did not result in election. There were 375 votes cast, with 2 illegal votes, yielding 373 legal votes. Needed for election on this ballot, which requires 75% to win, were 280 votes.

Vote totals for the second ballot were as follows:

Paul Erickson	87
Lisa Bates-Froiland	75
Harvard Stephens	56
David Dragseth	51
Joy Mortensen-Wiebe	31
Lindsay Paul Jordan	25
Jennifer Thomas	19
Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld	11
Amy Reumann	5
Matt Short	5
Greg van Dunk	4
Robert Suhr	2
Jennifer Arnold	1
Patrick Keen	1
Kacey Hahn	0
Elizabeth Rawlings	0

First Ballot for Discipline Committee and Synod Council

Bishop Barrow called for the first ballot for those nominated for positions in the synod or the Churchwide organization.

Vote by electronic voting machine:

Assembly Action

SA16.06.04. Selection of Nominees

Recommendation to the 2016 Churchwide Assembly of a Lay Female for a full term on the ELCA Church Council from the end of the 2016 Churchwide Assembly through the 2022 Churchwide Assembly:

Ms. Carolyn Jewett

Vote was 340 yes and 6 nos on this nomination.

Assembly Action

SA16.06.05. Election of Nominees

Election to full terms (September 2016 through August 2022) on the Greater Milwaukee Synod Discipline Committee, Clergy

Rev. Nancy J. Eggert

Rev. Tim Tahtinen

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Vote was 354 yes and 7 nos on these nominations.

SA16.06.06. Election of Nominees

Election to a full term (September 2016 through August 2022) on the Greater Milwaukee Synod Discipline Committee, Lay Female

Ms. Laura B. Dessereau

Vote was 349 yes and 6 nos on this nomination

SA16.06.07. Election of Nominees

Election to a full term (September 2016 through August 2022) on the Greater Milwaukee Synod Discipline Committee, Lay Male

Mr. Jerry Key

Vote was 331 yes and 18 nos on this nomination, with 6 errant votes

Election for Synod Council – First Ballot Results

At Large – Lay Female – Partial Term: Election through August 2019

Ms. Betty Warber **89 – will continue for second vote**

Ms. Amber Davis **75 – will continue for second vote**

Ms. Erica Jones 72

Ms. Alaine Schwartz 56

Ms. Cari Matter 48

Action on the Budget

The budget was moved and seconded as presented, with an amendment moved and seconded to reduce line 45 (Leadership Support Events) by \$10,000.00, with increases of \$5,000.00 each to lines 33 (Lutheran Campus Ministry) and 21 (Lutheran Outdoor Ministry), for the purpose of moving leadership funding to the young to develop long-term leadership in the church.

Discussion in opposition to the amendment included the ideas that the budget as presented is made by people working through Christ and that the proposed budget for the categories targeted for an increase is sufficient. There was also concern that this proposal was divisive rather than inclusive.

Additional information was requested on the use of funds in line 45, with synod Director of Finance Mr. Dave Groenewold citing Lead and Learn and the Fall Theological Conference, among other activities.

Support for the amendment included a call not to eat seed corn needed for the longer term, for the development of the young, noting that the journey into churches can be difficult. Support was also framed as conditional, with a call to engage in the budget process early on, but not in opposition to this change.

Both Lutheran Campus Ministry pastors spoke in favor of the proposal, in order to foster service to young adults, who in some cases may consider ministry, fostered in part by the work of LCM.

A youth voting member spoke in favor, after having seen a decline in youth in leadership positions, something that he called standoffish to young people.

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Another question regarded the rationale for increasing the budget for an underspent line item, with Bishop Barrow speaking to the need to show a synodical contribution to a category receiving a grant, while Mr. Groenewold noted that last year's number was driven down by planned activities not taking place due to staff illness.

Final comments included the idea in favor that this change would amount to a big difference for a small amount of money, and in opposition that there was already an opportunity to have input into the budget.

Pastor Andrew Feters moved to end debate, a motion seconded.

Assembly Action

SA16.06.08. Move the Previous Question

The Assembly voted to end debate on the proposed amendment to the FY2018 budget.

This was approved by a voice vote.

Assembly Action

SA16.06.09. Approval of Amendment

The Assembly voted to amend the proposed budget to reduce line 45 (Leadership Support Events) by \$10,000.00, with increases of \$5,000.00 each to lines 33 (Lutheran Campus Ministry) and 21 (Lutheran Outdoor Ministry).

The vote on the amendment was 325 in favor and 49 opposed.

Concern was expressed about the need to support ELCA priorities at a higher level, with special note of the needs of seminarians. Included in this concern was additional concern that decisions were already made by synod leadership prior to the Assembly. Bishop Barrow said that nothing was decided until the Assembly.

Assembly Action

SA16.06.10. Approval of Budget

The Assembly voted to approve synodical budget for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2018 as amended, with total contributions and support of \$2,102,780 and total ministries (expenses) of \$2,160,095.

The vote on the budget was 345 in favor and 15 opposed.

Consideration of Resolutions

Bishop Barrow invited Rev. Tim Tahtinen, chair of the Reference and Counsel Committee, to return to the podium to present the first pending resolution.

Resolution 1 – Access to The Emergency Food Assistance Program, which was submitted by St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Random Lake, was presented to the Assembly for its consideration:

Whereas, Jesus asks, in the Sermon on the Mount, "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone?" and

Whereas, Congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are called to "serve in response to God's love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and powerless, and committing itself to their needs" (ELCA Model Constitution *C4.02.d.); and

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Whereas, The State of Wisconsin has instituted requirements for identification for all persons served by The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP, also known as federal commodities) that increase the burden on the poor who seek help from the powerful (Department of Human Services Memo dated June 17, 2015); and

Whereas the TEFAP program has successfully served the hungry in this state without this burdensome requirement, for which no federal requirement exists; therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Greater Milwaukee Synod stands opposed to the requirement to provide “identification or documentation for each household member in order to participate in the [TEFAP] program”; and

Resolved, That the Greater Milwaukee Synod stands opposed to the requirement that “the person taking possession of the food at the pantry is required to provide identification at each visit”; and

Resolved, That the Greater Milwaukee Synod calls upon congregations and members to urge their elected representatives to repeal these identification requirements for The Emergency Food Assistance Program.

Mr. Matthew Brockmeier presented the first resolution, citing the increased burden of new identification requirements on both food recipients and dispensing pantries, and the possible change of relationship when a policing function is added to the pantries’ relationships to those served.

Assembly Action

SA16.06.11. Approval of Resolution 1

The Assembly voted to approve Resolution 1 – Access to The Emergency Food Assistance Program, as presented.

This resolution was approved by a voice vote.

Resolution 2 – Resolution to Establish an Annual Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan Sunday, which was submitted by the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council, was presented to the Assembly for its consideration:

Resolution Summary: *This resolution encourages each congregation of the synod to hold an annual LSS Sunday in order to highlight this ministry and better serve and love our neighbor.*

Whereas, the constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Chapter Four, STATEMENT OF PURPOSE, states that: “to participate in God’s mission, this church shall...Establish, support, and recognize institutions and agencies that minister to people in spiritual and temporal needs” (C4.03.m) and

Whereas, Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan (LSS) traces its origin to 1882, when Pastor E. J. Homme opened a home for orphaned children in Wittenberg, Wisconsin; and

Whereas, LSS currently operates over 260 programs in 115 communities throughout Wisconsin and Upper Michigan; and

Whereas, in the Greater Milwaukee Synod, LSS offers many programs, including refugee resettlement, counseling, adoption and pregnancy services, birth to three program, housing services, residential treatment for addictions, day time drop-in

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shelters for individuals with mental illness, clothing distribution for children who are homeless, Connections (IRIS consulting services), mental health crisis residential stabilization, half-way house (Department of Corrections); and **Whereas**, the partnership between congregations of this synod and LSS, as exhibited through prayer, volunteers, in-kind donations of space and resources, and financial support, is invaluable in meeting the needs of the over 100,000 people impacted by LSS each year; therefore, be it **Resolved**, That congregations of this synod are encouraged to observe an annual Lutheran Social Services Sunday where this ministry of the church is remembered in prayer, information on the breadth and scope of services shared, and an opportunity for financial support made available.

Rev. Jim Holmberg, Director of the LSS Foundation, encourages an annual LSS Sunday at the discretion of congregations. He said that LSS touches the lives of over 100K people a year, and changes lives of countless people in our area and synod. This includes serving more than 400 refugees this year, people like Pastor Logan Vang, along with helping people with disabilities and encouraging congregations to lift up partnerships.

Assembly Action

SA16.06.12. Approval of Resolution 2

The Assembly voted to approve Resolution 2 – Resolution to Establish an Annual Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan Sunday, as presented.

This resolution was approved by a voice vote.

Resolution 3 – Memorial to the Churchwide Assembly on Black Lives Matter, which was submitted by Milwaukee Clusters 1 & 2 and co-sponsored by All Peoples Lutheran Church, Milwaukee; Hephatha Lutheran Church, Milwaukee; Village Church, Milwaukee; and the GMS Anti-Racism Team, was presented to the Assembly for its consideration:

Whereas, Scripture teaches us to "mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15). And that, "If one part [of the body of Christ] suffers, every part suffers with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26); and

Whereas, the 1993 CWA adopted *FREED IN CHRIST: RACE, ETHNICITY, AND CULTURE* which includes a time of confession and a time of commitment; and

Whereas, the 2013 CWA adopted *THE CHURCH AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE: HEARING THE CRIES* which names the sin of mass incarceration and racial disparities in the criminal justice system; and

Whereas, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and many other leaders have encouraged the church to have "difficult conversations" around race; therefore, be it

Resolved, that the Greater Milwaukee Synod memorialize the 2016 Churchwide Assembly:

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1. To request that the ELCA affirm unequivocally that BLACK LIVES MATTER;
2. To request that the ELCA support the 10-point policy solutions of Campaign Zero (an advocacy effort of activists, protesters and researchers focused on police violence) as a faithful expression of public church and advocacy;
3. To request that the ELCA encourage all congregations to engage the 10-point policy solutions in education, lobbying, and direct action.

The 10-points are: 1) End Broken-Windows Policing; 2) Community Oversight; 3) Limit Use of Force; 4) Independently Investigate & Prosecute; 5) Community Representation; 6) Body Cameras/Film the Police; 7) Training; 8) End For-Profit Policing; 9) Demilitarization; 10) Fair Police Union Contracts.

Discussion on this resolution began with opposition based on the ideas that it would violate the separation of church and state, and that every life matters, and support based on the Lutheran history of complicity in maintaining slave status through coercion in baptism, dating back as far as 1708, and the fact that the stakes in this question are life and death.

Additional discussion looked at the range of items on the ten-point list, the history of black lives not mattering in America, and concerns about an anti-police approach. There was a desire expressed to work only with non-violent groups like the NAACP, rather than with groups that were seen as having violent programs. On the other side was reiteration that black lives have not mattered as much as others.

There was a motion to postpone indefinitely.

Assembly Action

SA16.06.13. Rejection of Motion to Postpone Indefinitely

The Assembly voted to reject a motion to postpone indefinitely consideration of Resolution 3 – Memorial to the Churchwide Assembly on Black Lives Matter.

The vote on the motion was 149 in favor and 216 opposed.

The bishop announced, without objection, that the Assembly was in recess at 11:30 am, to resume at 3:00 pm this afternoon.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew Brockmeier
Secretary
Greater Milwaukee Synod, ELCA