

Friday, May 30, 2014

Plenary III

Bishop Barrow called the Assembly to order at 3:00 pm with a greeting, thanking those present for staying with us. Rev. David Dragseth of Lake Park Evangelical Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, thanked Barbie Izqueirido, the Assembly's keynote speaker. Bishop Barrow gave her a scarf like that in the picture of Bishop Desmond Tutu and President Obama, followed by devotions led by Rev. Richard Suero, Faith/Santa Fe Lutheran Church, Milwaukee. Pastor Suero led the Assembly through Matthew 6 and the question of fasting. He spoke of his Catholic background, and fasting as a child, asking how we can talk to people about fasting when they are hungry: "how do we sustain the human body – how do we sustain religion – how do we tell people to fast when we are satisfied – how do we teach the teaching of Jesus if we don't live this?" He questioned doing things for others without involving them. "If we are a church, we are a church together – this is the body of Christ, the church of Christ, this is who we are together – when one suffers, everyone suffers."

Following singing, the bishop spoke of Faith/Santa Fe, an old English-speaking congregation that took stock of its neighborhood and reached out.

Announcements included the Mt. Meru benefit golf outing, and honey in the angel jar for sale.

Report of the Credentials Committee

Mr. David Groenewold, chair of the Credentials Committee, reported that in attendance prior to the third plenary, on Friday, May 30, 2014, were 149 rostered persons and 187 lay people, for a total voting membership of 336. Also present were 60 visitors for a total attendance of 396. A quorum was present.

Lutheran Magazine and Telescopes for Tanzania

Rev. Tom Pietz, Our Savior's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Hartland, spoke of the awards made to *The Lutheran* magazine, and highlighted an article in the edition included in members' packets on Revs. Sue and Chuck Ruele, who run the Telescopes for Tanzania program (the Ruelehs were in Tanzania at the time of the Assembly).

Video presentations followed.

The video on *The Lutheran* magazine provided its rationale, to show God's presence in our lives and around the world, sharing stories of God's people living their faith and connecting Lutherans with the global Christian community. *The Lutheran*, it shared, provides an open forum for discussion, challenging us to bring God's grace to all. It went on to say that informed members are active members, who contribute to the vitality of the church.

The Telescopes for Tanzania video featured the Ruelehs, who built an appreciation for science education using simple tools, beginning with three telescopes. Their initial work was a success, and they got requests to go back, where they did workshops, with students enjoying hands-on activities. This has, they said, helped students do better

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with math and science. Their colleagues said that this project creates curiosity about science for young Tanzanians who cannot afford to buy the tools. Sue Ruehle spoke of the need for gifts to reach their current \$14,000 project funding goal.

Second Ballot

With information now available on individuals nominated from the floor, voting proceeded for the two contested positions involving floor nominations.

Nominated for the Consultation Committee

Clergy – Partial Term from September 2014 through August 2015

Rev. Sheila Rawn 97

Rev. Ari Mattson* 130

Nominated for the Discipline Committee

Clergy – Partial Term from Election through August 2016

Rev. Karen Natterstad* 133

Rev. Grant Quever 111

Bishop Barrow announced the results of this ballot (*** declared elected**).

Resolution 4 – Resolution Opposing Discriminatory Legislation

The fourth resolution, which was submitted by Cross of Life Lutheran Church, Brookfield, was presented to the Assembly for its consideration:

Resolution Opposing Discriminatory Legislation

WHEREAS God created all people and sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, for the salvation of all people; and,

WHEREAS Jesus Christ, by word and by example, taught us that we should love, interact with and care for all people; and,

WHEREAS legislators in several states have proposed so-called “religious freedom” legislation which in actuality would legalize discrimination against some people; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the congregations of the Greater Milwaukee Synod oppose any legislation that authorizes acts of discrimination against some people in the name of religion, and be it further

RESOLVED, that the congregations of the Greater Milwaukee Synod continue to invite all people into our congregations and communities.

Rev. Sherrie Lorbeck, Cross of Life, Brookfield, speaking in support of this resolution, said that “you might be aware of legislation that would allow business owners to discriminate in the name of religious freedom.” It is alarming, she said, that so many states are having this conversation. This would open wide the door to so many kinds of discrimination. As Christ’s people, we must speak for justice, for equality, for dignity and for respect.

A voting member said that such legislation actually simply protects business owners from lawsuits, saying that this is about norms, and that the proposed resolution does not seem consistent with the ELCA’s position on tolerance. He cited certain discriminatory

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procedures within the ELCA, including the exclusion of potential pastors if they wish based on sexual orientation.

A voting member spoke in opposition. The intent of this type of legislation, he said, was to protect those Christians with a different view. This resolution would discriminate against those whose views are different. The summary of the resolution includes a statement on love, but it is about an individual decision to act in the way that business owners believe. This is about freedom. There is nothing in the Gospels about compliance with an anti-discrimination law. The synod cannot coerce love.

Rev. John Bischoff moved to amend to change “some” to “all” in first resolve. The motion was seconded.

Assembly Action

SA14.05.09. Adoption of Amendment

The Assembly voted to adopt the motion to amend the text in the first Resolved statement in Resolution 4, by substituting “some” for “all.”

Rev. David Schoob spoke in favor of the resolution, stating his sense of the spirit of the resolution, which is in part to counter the idea that all Christians believe in such laws. He said that people within the church need to define our religion in a situation where people are being denied housing and jobs, which is a matter of justice.

Rev. Arlen Solem, Associate Pastor, Cross Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, said there was a time when non-white people were not considered human, where Christian people did not allow people of color into their businesses. It did not change everyone’s hearts, but that doesn’t change the fact that discrimination is wrong. Such measures, he added, could also discriminate against people of color.

Rev. Sherrie Lorbeck stated that we’re all here because we’re Lutheran, but we have differing beliefs. At some level what does it mean to be human, and what are basic human rights. Arizona law was vetoed, because the governor said it was so far-reaching. Currently, class of race is legally protected. She said she is speaking again in favor of this resolution, so that we can speak out as Christ’s people.

Rev. Jay McDivitt offered a motion to amend the resolution by striking the first resolved statement, replacing it with:

Resolved that members of congregations within the Greater Milwaukee Synod are encouraged not to patronize businesses who refuse to serve customers of all faith traditions or sexual orientations, regardless of any legal protection that might be offered for such practices; and be it further

Resolved that members of congregations within the Greater Milwaukee Synod who are business owners are encouraged to serve all people of all faith traditions or sexual orientations, regardless of any legal protections that might be offered for such practices.

He said that we want to be on record that we do believe in serving all people, regardless of what possible legislation might look like.

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Rev. John Horner-Ibler said that the original resolution was written by an attorney, and that he is alarmed both for legal and for faith reasons by the motion to substitute. The original resolution picked up on the Sermon on the Mount. Creating legal precedent moves us away from our faith, by saying that this is a matter for individual conscience. He said that this should be about legislation, rather than waiting for case-by-case protests or boycotts.

Gary Liedtke, St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Waukesha, said that he wondered whether both the original resolved statement and the two proposed as substitutes could all be incorporated into the resolution. He moved to amend the current motion to amend, to retain the original first resolved statement rather than replacing it. This motion to amend the amendment was seconded.

Mr. Jerry Key, Peace Lutheran Church, Faith/Santa Fe Lutheran Church, asked the Assembly to go back to the resolution as originally presented, removing all amendments. He said that the proposed changes would defeat its purpose.

Rev. Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Kenosha, asked whether it was appropriate at this point offer an amendment to that wording of the first resolved statement, as already amended. Because this is not germane to the question on the floor, she will wait to make her motion.

Jay McDivitt, Christ the Servant Lutheran Church, Waukesha, spoke in opposition to reinstating the first resolved clause. He said it is not everyone has the same view on this resolution, but that as a Reconciling in Christ synod, we are already on record opposing discriminatory practices.

A final comment was that business discrimination puts this issue at a lower, more local level. Uncertain about having a policy on this.

A vote was held on Mr. Gary Liedtke's amendment.

Assembly Action

SA14.05.10. Adoption of Amendment

The Assembly voted to adopt the motion to amend the amendment striking the amended first resolved statement and substituting two new resolved statements by retaining, rather than striking, the amended first resolved statement.

The motion on the floor became, in effect, to simply add the two new resolved statements offered by Rev. Jay McDivitt.

A motion was offered to move the previous question (end debate).

SA14.05.11. Move the Previous Question

The Assembly voted to move the previous question.

SA14.05.12. Rejection of Amendment

The Assembly voted to reject the motion to amend the resolution by adding two new resolved statements as proposed by Rev. Jay McDivitt.

Debate resumed on the original resolution, with a wording change to the first resolved statement.

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Mr. Jerry Key, Peace Lutheran Church, Faith/Santa Fe Lutheran Church, said that such legislation is a first step on a slippery slope allowing people in businesses to discriminate.

Rev. Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Kenosha, moved an amendment to the first resolved statement to replace the words “against all people in the name of religion” to “against any person or groups of people in the name of religion”.

Assembly Action

SA14.05.13. Adoption of Amendment

The Assembly voted to adopt the motion to amend the first resolved statement by replacing the words “against all people in the name of religion” with the words “against any person or groups of people in the name of religion”.

A voting member from Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Kenosha, asked as a point of information what exactly the resolution would do.

Bishop Barrow responded that resolutions are not legally binding, but give a sense of what we are stating as a synod; they become a statement of what we believe.

Rev. Carol Hegland, Village Church, Milwaukee, said that the “last question raises why I am so excited to speak in favor of this resolution,” noting that it gives the bishop the authority to stand up and say that the synod opposes such legislation. “We are doing today a ‘here we stand’.”

Rev. Alexis Twito, Capitol Drive Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, spoke in favor of the resolution, saying that it is “important because it is about sex, it is about gays and women who use birth control. If we allow legislation to give businesses this freedom to discriminate, it poses a problem.”

Pat Campbell, Mt. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Wauwatosa, said that no one here is in favor of discrimination, “but many of us have different ideas of what that looks like.” Since there is not yet a law allowing this, it is premature to take this action. Being against discrimination is self-evident. Opposed to the resolution unless it is about a specific circumstance; “there is nothing substantial in the works right now.”

Rev. Steven Blyth, St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Palmyra, stated that he is against discrimination, but is also against discriminating against people who practice their faith. If a bakery chose not to make a cake for a homosexual couple, can't they choose what to do? What are we trying to do? Are we trying to discriminate against people following their own beliefs?

Rev. Mark Thompson, Memorial Evangelical Lutheran Church, Glendale, said that such arguments remind him of quietism; being in favor of what is happening, the approach which led to Jim Crow laws.

Mr. Jerry Key, Peace Lutheran Church, Faith/Santa Fe Lutheran Church, said that legislation and the personal behavior of business owners are two different things. “We are allowing businesses to decide who not to serve.”

A motion was offered to move the previous question (end debate).

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SA14.05.14. Move the Previous Question

The Assembly voted to move the previous question.

The vote was on the original motion, as amended in Synod Assembly action SA14.05.13.

Assembly Action

SA14.05.15. Adoption of Resolution 4

The Assembly voted to adopt Resolution 4 as amended:

Resolution Opposing Discriminatory Legislation

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WHEREAS Jesus Christ, by word and by example, taught us that we should love, interact with and care for all people; and,

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RESOLVED, that the congregations of the Greater Milwaukee Synod continue to invite all people into our congregations and communities.

Transitions

The bishop read a list of those who’ve come into the synod, asking those present to stand for recognition.

Cluster Task Force Report

Ms. Esther Rusch, Faith Lutheran Church, Cedarburg, acknowledged the work of the Cluster Task Force. 2013 Synod Assembly Resolution 1, which established the Task Force, called for representation that “must fairly represent the lay/clergy balance, male/female balance, people of color/white people balance, urban/suburban balance, and also represent other-abled and the gay, lesbian, bisexual community.” Ms. Rusch said that for the most part that balance was achieved.

She went on to say the purpose of their work had been to understand the purpose of clusters, how they have functioned, and how to structure them for the future. She cited the synod’s constitutional provision +S12.01., which sets as the purpose of clusters “to foster interdependent relationships among congregations, institutions, and synodical and churchwide units for mission purposes.” Rather than functioning as shared mission clusters, she said the reality often was that they had become mutual support arrangements for rostered leaders.

The listening sessions held by the Task Force only drew 20 people (28 including Task Force members), from 17 congregations, and eight clusters. There was, she said, no groundswell of support for changing clusters. To the extent that the desire was to bring

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people together across lines to discuss issues, it was not clear how realigning clusters would make a difference.

Ms. Rusch ended by saying that cluster renewal is not dead in the water; that there is interest in continuing discussions on the possibility of clusters as lay-led ministries. The Task Force recommends continuing the conversation on lay-led ministries, something that the Synod Council addressed when it called for continuing discussion on cross-fertilization across cluster and other boundaries within the synod at its May 2014 meeting.

Questions and Comments for the Bishop

Diane Roznowski, Reformation Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, and GMS diakonia Steering Committee chairperson, thanked the bishop for including diakonia in consideration as part of an approach to revitalizing clusters.

Bishop Barrow reiterated that there is not much passion to redesign clusters. He said that this is an ongoing discussion. He said that over the years, lay people have been set aside as active participants in clusters, and that some larger issues will keep pushing this discussion forward.

Rev. Matthew Short, St. Luke Lutheran Church, Slinger, said that as the dean of a cluster that doesn't meet, he sees a growing congregationalism. To address this trend, he urged all present to go home and tell the stories of the things the synod does. "Talk to your pastor, write a report, give a report – continue to seek partnership outside of our walls."

Announcements from the Bishop

Do not leave items on the table; dinner on your own; there will be a brief meeting for ushers, and rehearsal for choir immediately following this session.

Following announcements, Bishop Barrow declared the Assembly in recess at 4:32 pm.