

# 2003 Synod Assembly Recap

Highlights from the 2003 Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly – May 2-3, 2002  
*“Making Christ Known: For the Healing of the World”*

## Voting Members Meet

Over 600 voting members and visitors gathered at the Mayo Civic Center in Rochester for the 2003 Synod Assembly May 2-3, 2003. Bishop Harold Usgaard led the gathering as it approached the work of the church in Southeastern Minnesota. Those gathered worked and worshiped, prayed and praised, studied and celebrated together as the body of Christ.

## Opening Worship

“Christ and healing go together.”

With those words Bishop Harold Usgaard proclaimed the theme of both the opening worship service and of the 2003 Synod Assembly: “Making Christ Known: For the Healing of the World.” The service offered something both familiar and unique. The worship setting was mostly traditional liturgy from the “Lutheran Book of Worship.”

Bishop Usgaard told the worshipping community that healing comes from Christ through us. “Christ is the source of life,” said Usgaard. The bishop added that this life is not possible for those who are cut off from the source of life, Jesus Christ. “God’s will is that we live in relationship with God and with one another,” he said. Therefore “ours is a ministry of reconciliation; a cutting off from God cuts us off from others.”

## First Plenary – Rochester Mayor Speaks, Hunger Update, Update from Sister Synod

A group of religious and city leaders welcomed attendants of the 16th annual Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly.

Rochester Mayor Ardell Brede, a member of Bethel Lutheran Church, said the assembly theme is especially appropriate for this region. He said the theme, “Making Christ Known: For the Healing of the World,” emulates Rochester traditions.

“In my campaign, I talked about Rochester being a city of healing,” he said at the assembly’s first plenary. “We have healing to do and it’s great to see that theme for your assembly.”

Clergy, laypeople and others received updates on several topics. Clark Cary, chair of the synod’s hunger task force, said local donations to the cause increased \$23,000 last year. That means the synod gave \$250,000 last year to a program he said is essential.

The New England Synod bishop, scheduled to speak at the 16th annual Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly, cancelled her trip after poisoned coffee at killed one synod member there and injured 15 others at Gustaf Adolph Lutheran Church in Maine.

The Rev. Dr. Ted Asta, an assistant to the bishop of New England Synod, spoke in her place at the first plenary.

Asta said Bishop Payne has stayed with the families of those who remain hospitalized. Payne plans to celebrate the Eucharist with the small community on Sunday.

The church’s mailing address is:

Gustaf Adolph Lutheran Church  
48 Capitol Hill Road  
New Sweden, ME 04762

## Keynote Speaker – Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb

The Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, pastor of Evangelical Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, told those gathered at the assembly that Christ's ministry has a new meaning in a changed world.

Raheb said clergy and laypeople must work together to bring Christ's message of peace and acceptance into regions dominated by war and intolerance.

Raheb said at the assembly's second plenary that relations between Christians and Muslims have become strained through international conflict.

He said world healing must begin with “the powerful message of Christ.” That healing must then be maintained, he said, by clear communication and understanding.

## A Conversation Among Sisters and Brothers in Christ on Homosexuality and the Church

The voting members gathered in small groups for conversations about what many perceive as a potentially church-dividing issue: homosexuality. The ELCA Churchwide office has recommended that members of all synod assemblies talk about homosexuality this year using a process designed by the Moravian Church. These conversations are part of a Churchwide study on the issue of whether to bless same-gender unions and the ordination of homosexuals in committed relationships.

The discussions are intended to help people with various viewpoints come together and share their beliefs, experiences and struggles in a positive and mutually helpful way. Voting members can use this process as a model for talking about difficult issues in their congregations.

The voting members of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly were divided into 75 groups of approximately 7-8 people led by a facilitator.

Facilitators filled out response forms about their conversations, and those forms will be submitted to the ELCA Task Force on Sexuality. The ELCA Churchwide Assembly will receive a report from the Task Force this year and has requested a recommendation based on their work at the assembly in 2005.

## Congregational Fair

Dozens of local churches displayed ideas, traditions, and “best practices” Friday evening at the Congregational Fair. Assembly attendants filled the Mayo Civic Center auditorium to view and discuss the displays during a festive buffet dinner of a wide variety of finger foods.

Several displays talked about church community structure, congregational traditions and popular programming. Many featured special church dinners and outreach ideas.

## Community-wide Worship Service: Service of Health and Wholeness

Participants in the Saturday morning worship service were invited to come forward, if they wished, and have the hands of pastors and chaplains placed on their heads as they were prayed for individually. The service was intended to symbolize more than just prayer for physical healing; spiritual healing was also a component.

In the homily, the Rev. Dr. Ted Asta considered the many ways healing is needed in people's lives: divorce, illness, and abuse for example. Using the tree of life image from the Book of Revelation, Pastor Asta voiced the prayer of many people, “O Lord, bring healing.”

Soothing and meditative music was provided by harpists, led by Eleanor Niemisto, and guitarist Rev. Victor Jortack.

Not only was the healing service a novelty for the assembly, but it was also open to the Rochester community. Though it's difficult to tell how many of the over 400 worshipers were not voting members, the assembly message was conveyed strongly: Christ is made known for the healing of the world.

## Bible Study – Dr. Frederick Gaiser

“Healing is an important biblical theme in both the Old and New Testaments,” began Dr. Gaiser. As one who has long had an interest in healing, Gaiser was an obvious choice to lead the Bible Study. Along with an academic background, his prior work as a pharmaceutical chemist and his experiences in Africa have broadened his understanding regarding the place of healing today.

Dr. Gaiser led the voting members through the healing story of the man lame from birth found in Acts 3. After a careful reading of the text with commentary, Dr. Gaiser reflected on some of the dimensions of healing. One of those dimensions is the relation between faith and healing. “There’s always a relation between faith and healing in the Bible,” he said. “But it’s not always the same way twice.”

Dr. Gaiser is professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary and is also a member of the ELCA’s Task Force on Health, Healing, and Health Care.

## Report of the Bishop, ELCA

A representative of the national office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shared updates of national programs at the 16th annual Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly.

The Rev. Dr. James Childs, director of the ELCA Studies on Sexuality, brought a report from Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson. Childs said the ELCA made great progress last year in combating hunger, furthering evangelism, and being a public voice.

Childs also presented an award to The Rev. Harold L. Usgaard, Bishop of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod, expressing Hanson’s “profound gratitude” for the synod’s “partnership and mission support” in 2002.

Following Childs’ fourth plenary presentation, attendants discussed among themselves the future of ELCA.

## Report of the Bishop, Southeastern Minnesota Synod

The Rev. Harold L. Usgaard said at the conclusion of the 16th annual Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly that much mission work has been accomplished, but much work must still be done.

Usgaard, Bishop of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, said clergy and laypeople must pay special attention to how they continue to spread the word and teachings of Christ.

“I’ve learned in ministry that while goals are important,” he said, “the process by which we reach those goals is important as well.” He listed seven ministry goals the synod aspires to. For a list of the goals, see [www.semnsynod.org](http://www.semnsynod.org).

## Anti-Gambling Resolution Passes

The assembly voted to oppose the pending “Racino” state legislation during the fifth plenary Saturday.

Members voted to oppose the pending legislation because: gambling is demonstrably destructive of families, persons and society; and the institution of the state is charged with the welfare of its citizens.

If the pending “Racino” legislation is approved, thousands of slot machines could be operated by the Minnesota State Lottery at Canterbury Park in Shakopee.

## Resolution Concerning Freedom to Accept or Reject the Historic Episcopate Passes

The assembly voted to pass a “Resolution Concerning the Freedom to Receive or Reject the Historic Episcopate.” Those who spoke in favor of this resolution said it would clarify the options to those seeking ordination or installation as pastors or bishops. The text of the resolution is available at [www.semnsynod.org](http://www.semnsynod.org).

## Synod Vice-President Re-Elected

The Assembly voted Shirley Gangstad to serve a second term as the Synod Vice President.

## \$19,500 Raised for Iambi Hospital, Tanzania

The offering designation for the assembly was Iambi Hospital in Tanzania, one of our companion synods. The fundraising goal was \$20,000, to send two large containers with building materials for the under-funded hospital. It was announced during the plenary that so far \$19,500 has been raised, with donations still coming in.

## Actions on Resolutions

- 2003-01: Resolution Concerning the Freedom to Receive or Reject the Historic Episcopate **Passed**
- 2003-02: A Renewed Vision for Mission Outreach in the ELCA **Failed**
- 2003-03: A Renewed Vision for Mission Outreach in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod **Referred**
- 2003-04: 2004 Minimum Compensation and Benefits Guidelines **Passed**
- 2003-05: Colombia: Give Peace a Place **Passed**
- 2003-06: Pass the Buck to Lutheran Campus Ministry of Minnesota Appeal **Passed**
- 2003-07: Pending Legislation: "RACINO" **Passed**

*For the full text of all the resolutions, visit [www.semnsynod.org](http://www.semnsynod.org).*

*Special thanks to the Rev. Scott E. Olson and Joshua Lynch for contributing to this report.*

More information about the 2003 Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly is available at [www.semnsynod.org](http://www.semnsynod.org).