

2004 Synod Assembly Recap

Highlights from the 2004 Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly – April 23-24, 2004
“Called into God’s Marvelous Light”

Voting Members Meet

About 765 voting members and visitors gathered at the Mayo Civic Center in Rochester for the 2004 Synod Assembly April 23-24, 2004. 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

"It all starts with God, and we live our lives in response. That could take us just about anywhere." With those words, Bishop Harold Usgaard proclaimed the theme of both the opening worship service and of the 2004 Synod Assembly: "Called into God's Marvelous Light."

The bishop repeatedly stressed how God's call extends to all God's people. Noting the examples of the prophet Jeremiah, the Apostle Paul, and the disciple Matthew, Bishop Usgaard affirmed, "There is no one who cannot be used by God."

Drawing on Weber's "Salty Christians," Usgaard asserted that ours is not a church that competes with the world, or one that gets a piece of the worldly pie. Rather, ours is a church in the world, moving in and out. "It's not where we are, but who we are," he said. Then he added, "It's not about a job or making a living; it's about making a difference."

"God's calling. That's where it begins," said Usgaard. Quoting I Peter 2:9, he set the tone for the work of the assembly that will be lived out in the synod: "But you are a chosen race, a holy priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." As an assembly of God's people in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA, "that could take us just about anywhere."

Synod Strategic Plan Presented by Bishop Usgaard, Unanimously Accepted by Assembly

The Rev. Harold L. Usgaard, Bishop of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod, outlined the vision and goals of the new strategic plan.

The plan, titled "Called Into God's Marvelous Light," was unanimously supported by attendants of the 17th annual Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly. Usgaard said the plan will guide synod activities in the years ahead.

Containing three visions, the strategic plan calls synod members "to be joyful witnesses," "to be Christ-centered disciples," and "to be strong leaders." Usgaard said those visions translate into several goals, which are available on the synod web site.

Usgaard said the plan's visions and goals were derived from the suggestions of synod members. He thanked members for the input and said requests for monetary support would be forthcoming.

"Allow me to be frank," he said. "We are talking about new initiatives. New initiatives take extra support. We will not be able to accomplish what we are envisioning without financial support."

Usgaard said requests for financial support would be accompanied by reasons explaining why the new funding is needed.

Bible Studies Led by Kathryn Bradley-Love

In her first Bible study, the Rev. Dr. Kathryn Bradley-Love took the assembly on a journey with Saul on the road to Damascus, in his encounter with the "marvelous light" of Jesus Christ.

Reflecting on Acts 9, the Rev. Dr. Bradley-Love asked the voting members, "Can we locate ourselves in Saul's experience?" She proceeded to not only answer the question, but provided the atmosphere to do so. In the

first part of the study, which focused on verses 1-9, Dr. Bradley-Love made several connections between Saul's conversion story and the lives of Christians.

In her second Bible study, Bradley-Love focused on Ananias, who God called to heal Saul's blindness, again making numerous connections between the text and the lives of the assembly-goers. "We are in the same boat as Ananias," being called by God, she said.

The Rev. Dr. Kathryn Bradley-Love serves in the Division for Congregational Ministries as Associate Director of Evangelism.

Keynote Carmala Aderman Speaks on Evangelism

The Rev. Carmala Aderman told those gathered at the 17th annual Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly that churches are being challenged to grow in the new century.

Aderman, the assembly's keynote speaker, said churches in the 21st century will more closely resemble their 1st century predecessors than their 20th century counterparts. The reason for this, she said, is because churches must embrace diversity.

"We get to find new means to open up ways for people to be grasped by this amazing faith that the Holy Spirit has blessed us with," she said. "If you like adventures, this is a fascinating time to be a part of the church of Jesus Christ."

Aderman is a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and currently is called to serve as an assistant to the bishop in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin. In that role, she focuses primarily on evangelistic work.

Evangelism Workshops Teach About Evangelism in Many Contexts

Several speakers talked about various aspects of evangelism during a series of workshops.

The workshops, held Friday afternoon, covered eight aspects of evangelic work. Speakers talked about ministry in urban and rural environments, having the courage to lead and thinking positively about evangelism. Speakers also discussed how to involve new congregations in evangelism, reaching youth, the importance of clear communication, and using "Renewing Worship," a new hymnal.

Nine out of Ten Resolutions Passed; One Referred to Synod Council

There were several global-mission related resolutions this year. The assembly voted to raise synod-wide contributions to the Missionary Fund of the ELCA to \$200,000 for the year 2005; to encourage congregations to include financial support for the Morogoro District Support Fund in their mission planning efforts; and to invite Bishop Sijifredo Buitrago, IELCO to next year's synod assembly.

The assembly also voted to make recommended amendments to the synod constitution that included renaming the Leadership Development Committee back to "Nominating Committee," and to make changes recommended by the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA for synod constitutions.

The recommended "2005 Minimum Compensation and Benefits Guidelines" were accepted passed by the Assembly, after some minor, last-minute changes to the document made by the Lay and Clergy Leadership Development Team of the Synod Council, which develops and revises the document each year.

The assembly voted to refer to the synod council a resolution recommending each of the synod's five conferences start a new mission congregation within their conferences by 2007. They assembly also voted for the synod council to consider establishing a fund which would assist pastors in paying the cost for moving to a new location immediately following their retirement.

Finally, the assembly voted for each congregation to consider bringing at least one person, age 30 or less, to the synod assembly as a voting member in future years.

Full text of all resolutions is on the synod web site, www.semnsynod.org.

The Rev. Eric Shafer Serves as Churchwide ELCA Representative

The Rev. Eric Shafer, Director of Communications, ELCA, represented the churchwide ELCA at the assembly, bringing video greetings from Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson and fielding questions from attendees in two separate sessions.

In his video greeting, Hanson told attendants of the assembly that the church has nothing to fear.

Hanson said the ELCA is doing great work across the globe. He said even as this work continues, though, "we have somehow managed to come to a time when the questions that divide us now define us."

But the bishop noted the ELCA's 11,000 congregations have far more similarities than differences. Hanson said the ELCA is a church with 5 million evangelists, each centered in Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit.

"We in the ELCA are not a church searching for an identity," he said. "We know who we are because we have been marked with the cross of Christ forever."

During the question and answer session, Shafer gave an update on a controversial lawsuit.

The civil case stems from an ELCA pastor arrested in 2001 and later convicted of pedophilia charges. More recently, 14 alleged victims filed a civil case against the ELCA and other Lutheran-based institutions.

Shafer told attendants of the 17th annual Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly that the civil case ended this week and, before it went to trial, the ELCA settled its part of the suit. He said as part of the settlement, the ELCA has agreed to help finance counseling for people victimized by the former pastor. The ELCA's settlement will be paid by insurance, not benevolence, funds.

Shafer and the Rev. Joseph Crippen, of the Church Council of the ELCA, also clarified points about the ELCA Studies on Sexuality, and spoke about the timeline that was passed out to the Assembly. Shafer invited any questions about the Texas suit, the sexuality study, or any news involving the ELCA to be addressed to his e-mail: eshafer@elca.org.

Habitat for Humanity Project

From Tuesday, April 20-Saturday, April 24, volunteers from across the synod worked on renovating a house for a family in need. Called "Building in God's Marvelous Light," the project was a means of taking the assembly theme, "Called into God's Marvelous Light," outside the assembly hall. The family that will live in the house, once it is completed in June, is originally from Bosnia. Both parents work in the hospitality industry in Rochester. The walls for the new garage that is being built next to the house were assembled by people from the Red Wing Correctional Center and shipped to the site; and the cabinets were built by people from the Faribault Correctional Center.

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

More detailed information about the 2004 Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly is available at www.semnsynod.org.