



## **SYNOD ASSEMBLY - 'A SYNOD AT TABLE WITH THE HUNGRY'**

*Highlights from the 2008 Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly: April 18-19*

The Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly gathered April 18-19 under the theme "A Synod at the Table with the Hungry." This theme flowed throughout every aspect of the assembly. In Opening Worship Bishop Usgaard connected the story of the feeding of the five thousand in John 6 with the theme saying, "They dared to share because they knew some is there to provide."

The Bible study, done in two parts, was led by Bishop Peter Rogness, St. Paul Area Synod, who has been very active in advocating for hunger issues. Regarding the task set before us he said, "The call of God to us is not simply to feed the hungry but to 'repair the breaches,' to be a part of God's holy work in the world." This call, coming from Isaiah 58:12, was the focus of his study.

Participants were also able to delve deeper into the issues at the forefront of this assembly through hearings and workshops.

The five hearings focused on issues related to the synod's work including the synod budget; synod Minimum Compensation and Benefits Guidelines; the ELCA Bible Book of faith initiative; the work of the synod's Children, Youth and Family Ministry Task Force, which was created as a result of a 2007 Synod Assembly resolution; the work of the ELCA at the churchwide level; and the resolutions presented for consideration for the 2008 Synod Assembly.

Assembly participants also participated in nine workshops to learn more about hunger and justice issues. These workshops, led by people who work to eradicate hunger at the local, state, national, and global levels, included sessions on Channel One Food

Bank in Rochester, Minn.; preparing for international mission trips; the Minnesota Hunger 101 simulation exercise; the work of Lutheran World Relief; a discussion on sustainability; the advocacy work of Bread for the World; national advocacy work of all kinds through the ELCA Washington Office; ELCA World Hunger programs; and the variety of work, most notably the CROP walks, by Church World Service.

Those gathered also were treated to an insightful look at different ways to advocate for the hungry, and the importance of that work, through a discussion panel featuring Bishop Peter Rogness, St. Paul Area Synod; Mark Peters, Lutheran Social Service in Minnesota; and Rev. Mark Peterson, Lutheran Coalition for Public Policy in Minnesota.

A major highlight for 2008 was the keynote address delivered by Rev. David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World. He shared joy for the progress that is being made globally against hunger, disease, and injustice and the part Bread for the World has played and will continue to play in that work. He also expressed concern for the amount of work left to be done, especially here in the United States.

Beckmann's keynote followed a *cena*, a Colombian evening meal. One of the lunches also featured Tanzanian food, connecting participants with brothers and sisters in the synod's companion synods and what food is like in their lives.

Of course the assembly also had much business to address. Early in event, Bishop Harold Usgaard, Southeastern Minnesota Synod, reported on the work that has been done over the last year. He also announced plans for developing a new strategic plan, the last one having been completed in 2007, and for a three-month sabbatical beginning July 2008.

There were three resolutions brought before the assembly. The first, which passed unanimously, asked that the synod become Bible Book of Faith synod and for the congregations to carry out the mission of the initiative, which seeks to make Lutherans more fluent in scripture.

The other two resolutions were both submitted late and therefore needed to be voted on to be addressed by the assembly. The first was addressed and passed. The resolution calls for the synod, its congregations, and its members to work to advocate for peace. The second late resolution regarding health benefits was discussed but was not brought to vote by the assembly. It will be referred back to the author and the synod council for clarification and discussion as suggested by the synod's Committee on Reference and Counsel.

Elections were also held for a new synod council, 2009 Churchwide Assembly voting members, the Augsburg College Corporation board, and the synod's Committee on Consultation. As there were no contested elections, the assembly voted to approve the ballot unanimously.

Another act of the assembly was to approve the proposed 2009 synod budget with one change. After some discussion, the vote was taken and passed to increase gifts to Lutheran Campus Ministry. To do this, the budget was decreased for Luther Seminary and the church colleges.

One person speaking to the change argued that the seminaries and colleges have more resources available to them than Lutheran Campus Ministry, so the little money taken away from the others does not compare in impact to that money in the hands of Lutheran Campus Ministry.

Another individual argued against the change, reminding participants of the debt incurred by attending seminary and questioning the impact the reduction may have on those students.

Each year the assembly is also addressed by the presiding bishop. This year Bishop Mark Hanson's greeting was brought via DVD and the words of Andrew Genszler, director of the ELCA Washington Office. Both spoke to the activity of God through the people, which is being highlighted through the current ELCA theme: "God's Work. Our Hands." They also reminded people of the Bible Book of Faith initiative and other work occurring in the ELCA.

Cindy Johnson, working in Minnesota for Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR), also talked about the work being done by Lutherans. Her updated specifically spoke to the work being done in southeastern Minnesota in response to the floods of August 2007. LDR is still present and has been doing very important work for people whose lives were changed forever by the excessive rains.

The assembly also recognized many individuals and congregations. The work of many pastors was recognized including four who retired in the last year and those celebrating 25th, 40th, 50th, and 55th anniversaries of their ordinations. Several students and first call pastors were also recognized for receiving scholarships and first call debt retirement awards for assisting with the increasing costs of seminary education.

Several congregations were also recognized for their exemplary work. Christ the King, Mankato, was

recognized by Lutheran Social Service in Minnesota as a leader in social ministries. Eleven other congregations were recognized for their outstanding giving to ELCA World Hunger.

## **MORE INFORMATION**

For more information about what happened at the 2008 Synod Assembly, visit [www.semnsynod.org/assembly.html](http://www.semnsynod.org/assembly.html) for all the news. Information includes:

- Longer stories from throughout the assembly
- Full text of Bishop Usgaard's report
- Full text of the resolutions
- Complete election results
- Links to websites of many organizations and projects referenced throughout the assembly
- And more!

## **MARK YOUR CALENDARS**

The 2009 Synod Assembly will be held May 1-2 at the Mayo Civic Center, Rochester, Minn.

## **ABOUT OUR SYNOD**

The Southeastern Minnesota Synod is a faith community of 132,000 baptized people in 184 congregations as well as related institutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Its geographic area includes 15 counties in the southeastern corner of Minnesota.

*The Bridge* is a monthly publication of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA. For more information, contact the synod office:

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