

NORTHERN GREAT LAKES SYNOD

NOTES & QUOTES

Volume 20, Issue 9

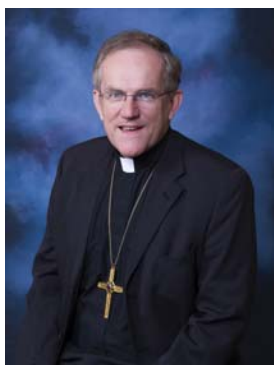
SEPTEMBER 2007

On Navy Pier in Chicago

THE CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY 2007

Bishop Thomas A. Skrenes

tskrenes@nglsynod.org



Over 1,000 Voting Members, and more than 500 visitors, attended the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Chicago. Voting members come from our Church's 65 Synods and gather every other year to reflect on our life together as a Church. This year we met on the shores of Lake Michigan in our nation's second largest city. We worship, we listen, we discuss and we vote. And always there is conversation wrapped around God's Word about the future of this Church.

Our Synod was well represented by the voting members that were elected at our 2006 Synod Assembly. Thanks be to God for **Jack Armstrong (Faith, Sault Ste. Marie); Pastor Virginia Eggert (Faith, Ishpeming); Wendy Ehle (St. James, Rudyard); Pastor Nancy Kauppi (Grace, Gwinn); Tim Mulvaney (Bethany, Escanaba); Virginia Paulson, (Immanuel, Negaunee); Connie Schmidt (Christ the King, Escanaba); and Kirt Stage-Harvey (Zion, St. Ignace)** who, along with me, represented you and our whole Church in the business and life of the Assembly.

So what happened at Churchwide?

The day after the Chicago Assembly concluded, I received a [summary by Bishop Peter Rogness of the St. Paul Area Synod](#). His words accurately describe the actions of the 2007 Assembly. A portion of his report is copied below for you:

"First, contrary to some news postings, sexuality and ministry wasn't the only thing we talked about by any means. Former bishop of the Saint Paul Area Synod, Mark Hanson, was re-elected on the second ballot to a second term, with a resounding 86 percent vote! And in the far more dramatic election, attorney David Swartling of Seattle was elected to succeed the only secretary the ELCA has had in its 20 years, the Rev. Lowell Almen. David Swartling is a delightful, warm, intelligent, deeply spiritual, and deeply involved person of faith. In addition, voting members worshipped; we committed ourselves to a far-reaching



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THOMAS A. SKRENES, BISHOP (CONTINUED)

emphasis on deepening our church's immersion in Scripture; we deliberated Iraq and the Middle East; we adopted a social statement on education; and we took on new resolve in fighting the HIV-AIDS pandemic. We celebrated rapid growth in responding to world hunger and disasters and pledged to do even more. In short, we celebrated the vast array of ministries we do together as a church, and it's a wonderful sight! It was a fine assembly.



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Sexuality Issues at the Assembly - Background

In 2001 the Churchwide Assembly (CWA) set in place a task force to bring back recommendations to the 2005 CWA regarding blessing same-gender relationships and ordaining faithfully partnered gay clergy and to bring a social statement on human sexuality to the 2009 CWA. The 2005 CWA received three recommendations on these issues, and in response (1) voted to “continue to find ways to live together faithfully in the face of our differences,” (might be a paraphrase, but close); (2) let the matter of blessings be a matter of local pastoral care and did not establish such a rite for the whole church; and (3) decided against allowing partnered gay and lesbian clergy to be ordained and serve in the church.

The general expectation was that these matters would again be discussed in 2009 in connection with the social statement. However, last winter a discipline committee in Atlanta, in acting to remove a partnered gay pastor, recommended that synods memorialize this assembly to change policy. So it was before us again. Twenty-one synods (including both the Saint Paul Area and Minneapolis Area Synods) took actions asking that the process for such change be set in motion.

So What Happened?

The memorials committee bundled these resolutions together and recommended that they simply be referred as information to the task force in their deliberations leading up to 2009. Not surprisingly, a substitute motion was made on the floor reflecting the 21-synod request to set in motion a change in policy. (Now here’s where you should pay attention if you’re trying to sort out what news sound bytes are saying in different directions!)

*After lengthy debate, both in a non-legislative “committee of the whole” and formal parliamentary proceedings, the assembly **defeated** the motion to change policy, and instead supported the recommendation to simply refer all this to the task force working on the social statement. The motion to change the policy failed 450-581.*

Then a motion was made to allow a process of exceptions to the policy for the sake of mission in local situations, patterned after the exception process to the requirement of ordination by a bishop. This exception proposal was also rejected, 472-520.

So it was clear the assembly was staying with the process to come forward with a social statement in 2009, and not to consider any change in policy until such a statement is adopted and policy is made consistent with that statement. So the study process continues. (An amending action was taken to specifically ask the social statement to address these matters.)

Then, on a later set of memorials, the assembly passed a motion which is the basis for the news reports suggesting ELCA policy has changed. An action was taken in which the assembly “prays, urges, and encourages synods, synodical bishops, and the presiding bishop to refrain from or dem-

THOMAS A. SKRENES, BISHOP (CONTINUED)

onstrate restraint in disciplining “those” congregations and pastors that are out of compliance with the existing policy. Bishop Hanson was asked if this was in conflict with existing governing documents, and Secretary Almen explained that it was not.

This is, frankly, where reporters not familiar with the nuances of ELCA governing documents got it all wrong. Our documents regarding discipline have within them a number of possibilities of response to policy non-compliance, including personal consultation, admonition, formal charges, and suspension, with few timelines and no “sentencing guidelines” (to use the secular image). The effect of this action is not to give permission to defy policy, but to ask that as bishops and others ponder responses to these situations, that they lean in the direction of a less harsh rather than a more harsh response.

What Does This Mean? *My sound byte, were someone to ask, would be this: This assembly chose to stay with the process we’ve put in place that will lead us to a far reaching (i.e., much broader than simply homosexuality) discussion of human sexuality in 2009, and in that light we will consider these policy matters. Until that time, the assembly said, let’s stay with current policy, and let’s walk gently with each other.”*

Pastor Lowell Almen, Secretary of the ELCA, reflected on the 2007 Assembly in a memorandum to the Conference of Bishops. He wrote in part the following:

A summary of the assembly’s decisions on issues of sexuality might be that voting members

- *wished to continue the process of deliberation leading to a social statement on issues of sexuality in 2009, and*
- *seemed mindful of the exhortation of the 2005 Orlando assembly “to concentrate on finding ways to live together faithfully in the midst of disagreements, recognizing the God-given mission and communion that we share as members of the body of Christ”*

The individual decisions of the 2007 Chicago assembly reflect these two broad themes and have raised questions seeking clarification:

1. *Did the 2007 Churchwide Assembly change or direct that changes be made in the ministry policies of this church (e.g., “Vision and Expectations” and “Definitions and Guidelines)?*

No.

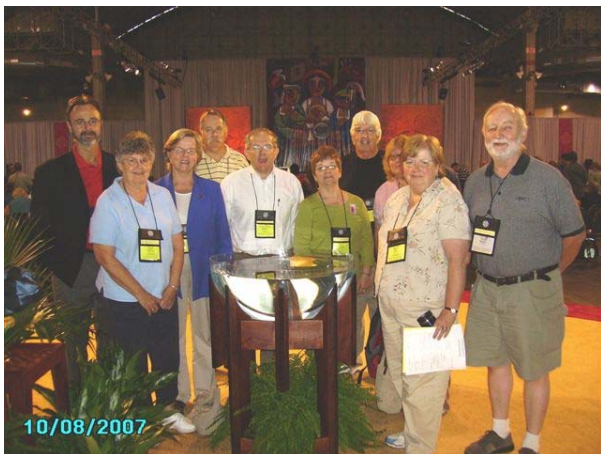
2. *The desire that roster standards be addressed in 2009 was underscored by the amendment that was adopted to the recommendation (E-2) of the Memorials Committee. That amendment—which was approved 692-303 (69.55%)—directed that the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality “specifically address and make recommendations to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly on changes to any policies that preclude practicing homosexual persons from the rosters of this church.”*

3. *What more happened? Voting members adopted, by a 538-431 vote (55.52%), what appears to be a “sense motion”—and not a legislative act to change policy. That motion “prays, urges, and encourages” restraint “in disciplining those congregations and persons who call into the rostered ministry otherwise-qualified candidates who are in a mutual, chaste, and faithful committed same-gender relationship...” The “sense motion” does not change the policies and standards that guide and direct the decisions of Candidacy Committees. In regard to the candidacy process, Candidacy Committees continue to be obligated to abide by the existing policies of this church. That same action “prays, urges, and encourages” restraint “in disciplining those rostered leaders in a mutual, chaste, and faithful committed same-gender relationship who have been called and rostered in this church.” At a news conference following the decisions, Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson said the keywords in the resolution were that the Churchwide Assembly “prays, urges, and encourages” restraint in discipline on such matters. “These are words of counsel,” he said. “They are not words that change the standards of this church. They reflect the mind of this assembly as it seeks to give counsel to the leaders of this church.”*

My further reflections:

As your bishop it is my responsibility to attend Churchwide assemblies. I find these assemblies to be both wonderful and difficult. I have attended at least 7 Churchwide Assemblies of the ELCA and conventions of the former American Lutheran Church. I have noticed over the years the painful divisions that exist in this Church, as well as the blessings of our unity in Christ. I am very concerned about the increasing level of "politics" and dissension which now marks every Churchwide Assembly. The groups advocating change in our current policies on sexuality are well organized and well funded. They are determined to win on their issues. The groups advocating that the homosexuality policy remain the same in the ELCA were present in Chicago, but are not nearly as well funded or organized. Both sides are spinning the results of the Assembly to their advantage, and are setting up the 2009 Assembly in Milwaukee to be very significant for the future of this Church.

Bishop Mark Hanson did a tremendous job as our presiding officer and bishop at the Chicago Assembly. He is a great pastor! He was extremely fair to all sides in all debates and faithful to his responsibilities as the leader of the whole Church. He is a man of God.



At our 2007 Synod Assembly, we in the Northern Great Lakes Synod memorialized the ELCA to amend its Disability Plan for rostered persons to include persons over the age of 65. The Board of Pensions listened to us and will bring to the November ELCA Council meeting a plan of action to give our older pastors the same disability benefits as those under the age of 65. I am proud of our Board of

Pensions for their willingness to respond to this concern in a very positive matter.

The theme of our Churchwide Assembly was "Living in God's Amazing Grace: Thanks be to God!" We in this Evangelical Lutheran Church in America must give thanks for what has been given to us. Thanks be to God indeed!



ATTENTION PASTORS AND CHURCH SECRETARIES

Each year I am in worship at between 30 and 40 of our congregations. I see a lot of church bulletins and read a lot of newsletters. Here are a few thoughts about our church bulletins and newsletters:

+Most of our Sunday bulletins are well prepared and complete. More and more congregations are including much of the liturgy within the bulletin. Some are including the hymns in the weekly worship folder.

+Some of our congregations Sunday bulletins do not even have the name of their congregation on them. Church bulletins need to be "visitor friendly." Every bulletin should have the name of the congregation, its address and its office phone number printed on it every week. There are several of the church bulletins that do not include the name of the pastor(s). Please check your bulletin! Think like a visitor to your church - what do they need to know?

+Some of our congregations make no reference in the Sunday bulletin that they are "A congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America." Please include that sentence. Try not to use "ELCA" since many people will have no idea for what those initials stand.

+Every monthly newsletter could have a mast head page that says that: “_____ Lutheran Church is a member congregation of the Northern Great Lakes Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.”

+Please try to include in every monthly newsletter the Synod website address (nglsynod.org) and the ELCA website address (elca.org). On those websites are an abundance of information about the work we do together as God’s Church. Feature a ministry in every monthly newsletter.

SYNOD OFFICE

REMODELING UPDATE



Your Synod Office Staff is still working out of temporary office space at Messiah Lutheran Church in Marquette. The work on the Synod Office has gone much slower than we had expected. As it looks today, we are about eight weeks from moving back into our newly refurbished space. Our Synod Staff is doing a magnificent job in the midst of considerable space constraints.

+Bishop Thomas A. Skrenes
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Seminarian Support

Calvary, Minocqua

Our Redeemer, Newberry

Lutheran Campus Ministry

Grace, Gwinn

Emanuel, Skandia

Bethany, Amasa

World Missionary Support

Trinity, Stambaugh

Calvary, Rapid River

Bethel, Ishpeming

Endowment Fund

Ralph & Jean Peterson

Judy Mattson

Rev. Mark Schahczenski

Rev. George Kaiser

Rosa Maria Opferkuch

Rev. Warren & Kathryn Geier

Rev. Gerald Anderson

Susan Anderson

Rev. Chad Christensen

David & Patricia Holli

Rev. Barry & Barbara Levine

Lutheran World Relief

Holy Trinity, Chassell

Zion, Marinette

Grace, Gwinn

Lay School for Mission

Trinity, Rapid River

ELCA Disaster Funds

Bethany, Amasa

Grace, South Range

Mission United, Pelkie

+ From the Assistant to the Bishop +
 Pastor Jennifer Johnson Wrege

*“And I will raise you up on eagle’s wings,
 bear you on the breath of dawn,
 make you to shine like the sun,
 and hold you in the palm of my hand.”*

You and I have sung these words at Sunday morning worship. We have heard them offered as a prayer at funerals. Around campfires and in the accompaniment of guitars, hope-filled and confident voices have been raised to claim the promises God bestows as described in this song.

The words of the song *On Eagles’ Wings* are based on Psalm 91. I am working on memorizing both the Psalm and the song. I’m thinking that one benefit of committing scripture, hymns and Christian songs to memory might be that the Holy Spirit will work the promises deep into my bones, penetrating into my DNA so that when there are days with challenges, trials, frustration, suffering, disappointments, loss and confusion, it will be the words of God’s promises that ring out over the words of fear.

And, I believe that the Holy Spirit is nudging me a bit to this discipline of memorizing scripture – not to make my life miserable with yet another demand, particularly with a task that is likely to be difficult for anyone over fifty (my days of memorizing anything quickly and easily are behind me!), but rather to give me a gift. So along with this nudge to memorize, God gifted me with a scene, an image, a picture. It’s helped my memory work.

The scene is real! I saw it with my own eyes! It happened while canoeing one hot and humid day in July along the upper St. Croix River north of Taylor’s Falls, Minnesota. Marv and I were on our annual canoe trip with friends who are much more proficient at the sport than we are, and so are almost always way down around the next bend from us. It was our second day into “it”. We were sore, sunburned, hot and sweaty. There seemed to be precious little current to help pull us downstream and, on top of all that, there was a rather strong, gusty wind that seemed intent on pushing us backwards. At one point when it seemed as though each stroke propelled us mere inches ahead, Marv called out, “Put some muscle into it!” I looked back with a glare that needed no words to interpret.

We paddled on in silence. All around us the blue water of the St. Croix shimmered and sparkled. A patchwork pattern of trees, strung along the banks, reached toward the sky with limbs wide open to receive the summer light and warmth of the sun. It was quiet. Occasionally, we floated past turtles who were sunning themselves on rocks or dead tree branches that stuck up above the water. It was a sight to behold – beautiful.

I heard Marv call out to me in a whisper, “Look up!” There, above us, were eagles – adult eagles and young eagles – circling in flight, the adult eagles teaching their young to fly by swooping underneath them and bearing them up. Lost in the wonder of it, we watched for a long time until they flew off into the trees and disappeared from view. I had visions of the eaglets nestled down in the safety of their nest – fed, protected, and safe.

As we returned to the work of paddling our canoe to the landing, which was still another two hours downstream, I thought about the eagles and their young – how, at one point, the parent eagles coax, prod, and even push their young ones out of the nest so they can grow into fully mature eagles, but when the time is right these same adult eagles provide a safe place, food, and rest.

On that hot and humid July summer day, I concluded that in God’s eyes, I was still an eaglet who needs sometimes to be coaxed, prodded or even pushed out of the safety of my “nest,” my comfort zone, in order that I move toward becoming a fully mature woman of the Christian faith. And, at other times, what I need is the safe haven of the “nest”, where I can be fed and rest, be protected and safe. God provides both, each at the perfect time.

So, I invite you during these early days of autumn to join me in memorizing Psalm 91 in your Bible and *On Eagles’ Wings*, #779 in *With One Voice*. We can sing and pray together as God moves us to maturity in the faith.



Blessings!

Pastoral Vacancies and Interim Pastors

Grace, South Range & First, Dollar Bay - Pastor Jimalee Jones & Pastor Peter Gundersen

Bethel, Ishpeming - Associate Pastor Vacancy

Prince of Peace, Marquette - Pastor Rell Spickerman

Trinity, Stambaugh & Bethany, Amasa - Pastor Doug Johnson

All Saints, Wakefield - Pastor John Kuziej

Central, Menominee - Pastor Ken Michaelis

Pioneer Lake, Conover - Pastor Dorothy Lindstrom

Bethany, Covington & Trinity, Trout Creek - Pastor Marlin Snyder

Holy Cross, Baraga - Pastor Ted Koehl

Bethany, Norway - Pastor Earnest Ness

Bethel, Cedarville & Zion, Allenville - Pastor George Kaiser

Bethany, Mohawk - Pastor Peter Vorhes

Our Redeemer, Newberry - Pastor LaVonne Stephenson

Messiah, Marquette - Senior Pastor Vacancy

We are very grateful to all our congregations whose generous and timely giving in June and July has resulted in a \$16,590 increase in mission support over the same time period in 2006. We continue to remain ahead of last calendar year for mission support giving; however, we are approximately \$4,000 behind in fiscal year receipts. May we continue to trust in our Lord Jesus Christ to provide for all our needs and give God our thanks and praise for the abundance of God's gifts.

As of 7/31	2006	2007	\$ Change	% Change
Pledged Amount	1,033,577	1,045,301	+11,724	+1.1%
Amount Received	495,667	520,462	+24,795	+5%
Designated Gifts	97,737	96,999	-738	-.8%



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ON-LINE DEVOTIONS FOR SEPTEMBER
2007

www.prayfaithfully.org

September 2-8 / Members of Our Saviour's, Paynesville

September 9-15 / Steve Olson, LSS

September 16-22 / Nora Smith, First, Gladstone

September 23-29 / Pauline Kiltinen, St. Mark's, Marquette

September 30-October 6 / JoAnne Barrix, Faith, Rock

Anyone feeling God's call to share devotions would be appreciated. Please contact Jean Schmidt at prayfaithfully.org.