

The Bishop's Road Show

The Season of Pentecost

June 8, 2010

Synod Assembly Edition – written by Helen Harms, Assistant to the Bishop

ASSEMBLY GATHERS AROUND THEME OF ECUMENISM

The Twenty-Third assembly of the West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod-ELCA met in Assembly June 4-5, 2010 at the McLure City Center Hotel in Wheeling, WV. The theme of the assembly was **“Ecumenism in Appalachia”**. First English Lutheran Church was the host congregation for the assembly. Forty-two clergy and lay leaders on the roster, 103 lay voting members and 34 visitors attended.

The keynote address was delivered by The Rev. Donald McCoid, Executive for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations-Office of the Bishop-ELCA. The Rev. McCoid spoke of the importance of unity as reflected in the high priestly prayer of Jesus in the Book of John. He also reflected on the unique role of the ELCA in fostering and promoting dialogue among our many ecumenical partners. The keynote address was followed by an **ecumenical panel**. Panel members were Bishop Michael Bransfield and Monsignor Annee, Wheeling-Charleston Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church; Bishop Michie Klusmeyer, West Virginia Diocese of the Episcopal Church; Bishop Ralph Dunkin, West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod of the ELCA. The panel expressed appreciation for the support and encouragement given by ecumenical partners as the church bodies deal with the issues of contemporary culture. As they reflected on the scripture passages that guide them in their ecumenical ministry, they echoed the themes from the keynote on the unity of the body of Christ. The panel responded to questions from the assembly about how ecumenical relationships are carried out in congregations and communities across the synod.

The assembly heard reports from various partners in ministry. A highlight of the assembly was the report of the ELCA representative, The Rev. Donald McCoid, Executive for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations-Office of the Bishop-ELCA. Pastor McCoid is a son of the synod having attended Trinity Lutheran Church in South Wheeling. Pastor McCoid led the assembly to reflect on what it means to be church in a time of conflict and disagreement. He spoke of the unity we share in Jesus Christ which transcends differences of opinion and positions. He reminded the assembly that “We are the ELCA.” He highlighted the importance of the ministries which are supported by mission support-ministries that would not exist without that support.

A festival Eucharist was held at **First English Lutheran Church**. First English is celebrating 150 years of ministry in downtown Wheeling, WV. The Rev. William Ridenhour, pastor, presided at the Eucharist and Bishop Ralph Dunkin delivered the sermon. Pastor Ridenhour served as chaplain to the assembly and members of First English provided staff for registration. The offering amounted to \$1,592 and will be shared equally between Community Lutheran Partners and the Fund for Leaders Scholarship Fund. A reception hosted by Thrivent for Lutherans, Community Lutheran Partners, Evangelical Lutheran Coalition for Mission in Appalachia (ELCMA), and the Lutheran Theology Seminary at Gettysburg was held at the McClure following worship.

In actions, the assembly adopted the budget for 2011. During fiscal year 2010, the Synod Council found it necessary to reduce the approved budget by \$107,780. The new budget figure for 2010 is \$579,185. Included in the reductions were staff raises and mission support to the ELCA. The assembly passed a 2011 budget for the same amount. The mission support percentage for income going to the ELCA has been reduced from 51% to 45%.

Other actions of the assembly included the consideration of resolutions. The first was a **change of the By-Laws** of the Synod to reflect the name changes in parish alignments. The Franklin Parish will now be called the Mountain Lutheran Parish. The Shepherdstown Parish is now the Shepherdstown Lutheran Parish.

Four additional resolutions passed dealt with the 2009 Churchwide Assembly decisions on the inclusion of individuals in same gender life-long, committed relationships to the roster of the church. The first resolution called for a recommitment to the ministries of the ELCA and asked for a re-evaluation of the percentage for mission support. This resolution passed with some amendments. A resolution calling for full transparency on the part of bishops and candidacy committees with regard to the inclusion of gay and lesbian persons in partnered relationships on the roster was ruled out of order since that provision already exists. A third resolution questioning the legitimacy of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly actions in light of the Confessions of the Lutheran Church passed with amendments. In a related manner, a resolution calling for the Bishop of the Synod to send two observers to the Lutheran Core convocations, August 26-27, 2010 in Columbus, Ohio was approved. Although the resolutions continued to express disagreement with the assembly actions, they also expressed a sense of unity with the ELCA.

A resolution from the Tour de Revs calling for a focus on increasing World Hunger actions and contributions in our synod in the coming year passed with much acclaim. Also passed was a resolution calling for ELCA teaching statements on sanctification, the authority of scripture, and ecclesiology. The assembly approved a resolution calling for the establishment of a task force regarding "Living into the Future Together". The task force will study and evaluate social and economic changes in our region since the church was formed and their impact on the synod. The task force will report to the 2011 synod assembly. Two resolutions also passed related to the proposed ELCA Social Statement on Genetics. One called for the postponement of action on the social statement until the ELCA Churchwide Assembly of 2013. The other resolution called for the development of a process in the WV-WM Synod to study the statement. A resolution from the floor was passed calling for the synod to encourage congregations to remember the Lutheran Theological School at Gettysburg financially and for the synod to consider passing along a portion of undesignated gifts to the seminary. Finally a resolution of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the assembly was passed.

The assembly also elected the following to serve on Synod Council: Rostered-Brian Bennett, Mary Prather, Wanda Childs; Lay-Leroy Humbertson, Patricia Keller, Carolee Lee, Paul Wangerin, and Kyle Lee (Youth). Voting members to the 2011 Churchwide Assembly will be Pastor Matt Riegel, Sherri Schafer, and Chap Holbert.

Paul Wangerin was elected to served on the board of the Lutheran Theological School at Gettysburg. Pastor Ron Schlak was elected to the Consultation Committee.

New pastors to the synod were introduced. They are Pastor Sean Smith, Messiah Moundsville/Good Shepherd, New Martinsville; Pastor Jaq Campbell, Church of the Covenant, Grafton; Pastor Matt Holbert, Grace, Fairmont; and Pastor Kyle Hayes, St. Johannes, New Milton (Dodderidge County). Pastor Paul Schafer was recognized for 20 years of ordained ministry; Pastor David Westphal and Eric Nielsen for 25,

Pastors Roger Harms and Fred Soltow for 35 years of ordained ministry, and Bishop Emeritus Alex Black for 55 years of ordination.

During the assembly, \$857 was raised for “A Seed Planted”, a fund that provides small grants to congregations for evangelism.

On Saturday, voting members and guests attended a variety of workshops. Dennis Sparks from the West Virginia Council of Churches led “take a Bite: Identifying your Piece of the Layers of Christian Unity in Appalachia. Community Lutheran Partners Director Sherri Schafer led “Who, What, Why and How” for participants to learn more about CLP. Barb Debski of the Board of Pensions led a workshop “That You May be Well” focused on wellness. The Tour de Revs unveiled their plan for “Homecoming” at their workshop. Evangelism: Unpacking the E Word was led by Helen Harms and Laughing Lutherans was lead by Pastor Christine Olson.

The assembly concluded an hour early.

You are invited to re-print the above information in congregation newsletters and bulletins.

From Sunday through Monday I, your bishop, received some 50 E-mails. I took Monday as a day off after attending St. Mark’s, Wheeling’s celebration of Pastor Paul Schafer’s 20 Anniversary of Ordination. I will be on the road today and tomorrow.

On Thursday and Friday I will be working at home attempting to write lots of letters of recommendation as we have at least three congregations attempting to secure World Hunger Funds. Should you need to reach me Thursday or Friday will be the days as I will go on vacation starting on Saturday and then when I return I will spend most of the week at Camp Luther. My next day, after today that I will be in the Synod Office for a “normal” day will be Tuesday, June 29.

Yours in our Lord’s service,

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