

SUMMARY OF “FREED & RENEWED IN CHRIST” – 2016 CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY, NEW ORLEANS

More than 950 voting members, lay and clergy, participated in the triennial churchwide assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) which took place in New Orleans in August. Worship and plenary sessions between August 8-13 were broadcast online, allowing members in congregations across the ELCA to witness the work of the assembly. The full program, supporting documents and archived videos of the plenaries and worship are online at <https://guidebook.com/guide/38501/>

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, who was elected at the last churchwide assembly in 2013, gave her report, celebrating the many ministries and achievements of our whole church and encouraging thoughtful and prayerful responses to emerging social issues including gender violence, same gender relationships, racial tension and migrant and refugee resettlement. Expanding on her four emphases for our church – We are Church, We are Lutheran, We are Church Together and We are Church for the Sake of the World –she introduced resources for reading and studying Luther’s Small Catechism during our year-long celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. She encouraged education efforts to broaden our understanding that the churchwide staff, synod staff and congregations are *together* one expression of God’s people, in full communion partnerships with six other church bodies (The Episcopal Church, The Moravian Church, The United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church of the USA, the Reformed Church in America) and as part of the Lutheran World Federation. She spoke about the centrality of our call to love our neighbors, and how it informs our service to the world, including on our upcoming “God’s Work, Our Hands” Sunday which coincides with the fifteenth anniversary of 9/11/2001.

Assembly participants approved the annual budgets for 2017-2019(895-23), and received greetings, reports and reviews from ministries, including **1517 Media** (which includes Augsburg Fortress, Fortress Press and Sparkhouse), **ELCA World Hunger, Women of the ELCA, Lutheran Disaster Response, Lutheran Men in Mission** and **Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA**. Updates on “**Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA**”, **ELCA Malaria Campaign** and an introduction to the new **ELCA Federal Credit Union** were also received.

One of the greetings was from a chaplain currently serving in the U.S. Navy. The ELCA’s **Federal Ministries** include ELCA chaplains who serve in all branches of the military, Veterans Affairs hospitals and federal corrections. In addition to rostered leaders serving as chaplains, congregations can support active, retired or reserve military personnel and veterans through synodical efforts like Centurion Connection, and local efforts such as Stand Down to address homelessness and mental illness among the veterans in our communities, and RISK to provide a confession and forgiveness practice tailored specifically for veterans who wrestle with post-trauma and moral injury. Learn more at www.elcachaps.com

They also received greetings from ecumenical, inter-religious and international partners in ministry including **Lutheran World Federation, The Episcopal Church, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the Anti-Defamation League** and **the Islamic Society of North America**.

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Now in its 70th year of working globally for the poor and the displaced, Church World Service (CWS) recognized the ELCA with its Founder’s Award for the church’s vision of a more just and peaceful world, its commitment to practice radical hospitality, and its witness to Christ during the ELCA’s seven decades of partnership to provide help and hope.

Additional highlights of the actions taken include:

Election of a Vice President

The office of Vice President of the ELCA is the highest elected office held by a layperson in the ELCA. The volunteer elected to this position serves as the president of the churchwide organization’s Church Council which provides guidance and leadership for the churchwide organization and the congregations, and more than 4 million members, of the ELCA. After thirteen years in this volunteer position, Carlos Peña will leave this office on October 31, 2106. Mr. William B. Horne II of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Clearwater, Fla., was elected to a six-year term, commencing November 1, 2016.

Memorials

This triennium, 111 memorials were created by congregations in synods, and approved at synod assemblies to receive further consideration the churchwide assembly. Memorials urge the Church to take action on specific issues related to the world around, as well as ecumenical and inter-religious relations. The following memorials were approved by the assembly:

Repudiation of Doctrine of Discovery (912-28)

Offer a statement of repentance and reconciliation to native peoples in this country from damage done in the name of Christianity; prepare resources to educate members and the wider communities about the doctrine of discovery and its consequences for native peoples; and develop a strategy to increase the Native American Ministry Fund and practice accompaniment and partnership with native peoples and indigenous communities.

Declaration on the Way (931-9)

Adopt an ecumenical text on church, ministry and Eucharist, the “Declaration on the Way” draws together a litany of 32 consensus statements, where Catholics and Lutherans already have said there are not church-dividing differences between them. Authors worked collaboratively to elaborate on these agreements and also included a more tentative section that identifies some “remaining differences.”

Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO) (921-11)

Commit to a whole church response to the migration of children and their families fleeing the humanitarian crisis in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, upholding and guaranteeing the basic human rights and safety of migrating children and their families, addressing the root causes of migration in these countries and the treatment of the migrants in transit, working toward just and humane policies affecting migrants and working together as a church body with strategic partners here and abroad to advocate for these children and their families. Ask congregations to discern whether to become part of

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the “Welcoming Congregations” network, and determine appropriate levels of participation and support in the network.

Deepening Relationships with Historic Black Churches (846-73)

Offer a statement of confession and repentance for the Lutheran church’s complicity in 400 years of enslavement, oppression and marginalization of African descent people and other marginalized populations, as well as our continued contributions to racial harassment and discrimination against people of African descent through corporate action, policy and practice. Recommit the church to increase the number of ethnically and racially diverse leaders and worshiping communities, through mission investment in African descent communities, congregations and ministries; to develop a strategy to increase the number of leaders of African descent, and to encourage the seminaries, colleges, universities and other academic institutions of this church to develop anti-racism resources and to incorporate academic exploration of Black Liberation Theology and Womanist Theologians.

Word and Service (864-32)

Unify the three existing Official Rosters of Laypersons (Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Diaconal Ministers) into a roster of Ministry of Word and Service, effective January 1, 2017.

Peace with Justice in the Holy Land (751-162)

Continue awareness-building, accompaniment and advocacy on behalf of a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine; take steps to assist the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and other Christians in sustaining their endangered presence in the Holy Land; promote the economic empowerment of Palestinians; promote the protection of the human rights of Palestinians and Israelis; embrace the principles of restorative justice as part of the ELCA’s advocacy and engagement for the just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and continue to pray for the ELCJHL and the work of the Lutheran World Federation’s Jerusalem program. Encourage elected officials, the U.S. government and the United Nations Security Council to offer a new, comprehensive and time-bound agreement to the governments of Israel and Palestine, with the desired outcome of two viable and secure states within a shared Jerusalem.

Welcoming Refugees (842-48)

Reaffirm the work of ELCA leaders and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service in working to welcome refugees from across the globe; call on elected officials to support legislative actions to welcome these newcomers to new communities and encourage and support all Lutherans in welcoming refugees by building awareness, volunteering, hosting refugees, speaking out against hate, advocating for a more generous U.S. response and observing Refugee Sunday, and to open up Lutheran congregations and institutions to help house refugees.; provide resources for congregations to learn about and take part in ministries with refugees.

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Additional memorials were approved *en bloc*:

Life of Faith Initiative	Supporting Mission Phebe Hospital through Photovoltaics
Worship Resources to Bless Same Gender Couples	Examining the Implications of Becoming a Sanctuary Denomination
Ministries Among People Experiencing Economic Poverty	Time of Prayer and Worship Resources on Human Trafficking
Examining the Opportunities and Implications of Campaign Zero, a policy platform in affirmation of Black Lives Matter	Gun Violence Prevention
Observation of National Donor Sabbath in Support of Organ and Tissue Donation	ELCA World Hunger and Child Nutrition
Investing in and Encouraging Use of Clean, Renewable Energy	Affirming Global Human Rights and Non-discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation
Eco-Reformation and Renewing Creation Care Efforts	My Muslim Neighbor
Increase Funding for Suicide Prevention Research	Gender Identity
	Voting Ratio
	Cultivating and Sustaining Accompaniment in Global Mission
	Youth Mission Trips

Details of the memorials approved above can be found in the Churchwide Assembly Guidebook online at in the section titled “Legislative Updates” at <https://guidebook.com/guide/38501/>

Several more memorials were voted by card:

Toward a Responsible Energy Future

Inform and educate members and the wider community about the effects of climate change through the lens of the “Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice” social statement, and advocate for policies that reduce energy use and our dependence on fossil fuels and encourage development of renewable energy sources as an expression of our commitment to address climate change and caring for God’s creation.

Call to Discernment on U.S. Foreign and Military Policy

Study, reflect, search and act in light of ongoing and widening war efforts; issue a call for congregations to engage in prayer, Scripture-study and communal reading of the teaching resources of this church, particularly “Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective,” “For Peace in God’s World” and “Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues”; invite this church to a particular time of prayer and communal discernment over the next three years to promote robust examination of expanded U.S. war efforts since 1990 and their consequences, including the impact on well-being of all military personnel and veterans, active, reserve and retired, contractors, affiliates, and their families; the broader societal impacts; and social needs met and unmet due to prioritizing public spending on expanding war efforts.

Justice for the Holy Land through Responsible Investment

Reaffirm the actions of the 2005, 2007, 2011 and 2013 Churchwide Assemblies regarding responsible investment in Israel-Palestine; direct the ELCA’s Corporate Social Responsibility review team to develop

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a human rights social criteria investment screen based on the social teachings of this church and, in the case of Israel and Palestine, specifically based on the concerns raised in the ELCA Middle East Strategy; encourage ELCA members, congregations, synods, agencies and institutions to increase positive investment in Palestine and other under-resourced areas where human rights abuses materially impact the well-being of all people; and encourage ELCA members, congregations, synods, agencies and institutions to engage in shareholder advocacy in support of human rights, exercising the right of a shareholder to submit resolutions at a corporation’s annual meeting.

Supporting Military Personnel, Veterans and their Families

Affirm those called to military service, veterans, their families and this church’s support for chaplaincy ministries; encourage congregations, agencies, families and individuals to assist those considering military service and those continuing in service through moral discernment and vocational guidance concerning the life-changing decisions they must make involving justice, service and the ethical application of force; direct the Office of the Presiding Bishop to establish a Sunday of prayer and action near Veterans Day each year to unite this church in prayer and encourage assistance for military members, veterans, ELCA chaplains and families; encourage ELCA members, congregations and synods to offer care and support for returning veterans encourage congregations to seek out incarcerated veterans to thank them for their service and to help them access veterans’ benefits so that they might have a more successful transition upon release; affirm the publication of the Prayer Book for the Armed Services and to encourage congregations to present gift copies to veterans, military personnel and chaplains; make known the need for ordained pastors to serve as chaplains in the military, Veterans Affairs hospitals, federal corrections and other chaplaincies; urge ELCA members and congregations to contribute to the ELCA Federal Chaplaincy Ministries Fund for Leaders Scholarship to attract the next generation of chaplains; and encourage ELCA seminaries, colleges and universities to integrate practicing chaplains to teach about specialized ministries, preach in chapel, and foster awareness and consideration of a call to chaplaincy ministry.

For more details, go to the online guidebook at
<https://guidebook.com/guide/38501/>