

2021 SYNOD ASSEMBLY “Strength for the Journey”

The 2021 North Carolina Lutheran Synod Assembly took place last week, June 3-5, virtually. This was the first-ever virtual assembly and it went very well. Each day there were over 400 people attending through Zoom.

Advent had 5 voting members: Pastor Ward, Gary Martin (Council President), Arlene Cash, Anne Brown, and Pam Rhynes. This was a big year as it was time for election of a Bishop for a 6-year term. Additionally, there were other elections for Synod Council and representatives to the 2022 Churchwide Assembly as well as a few other important committee representatives. There was a lot of very informative information shared with the Assembly regarding the significant contributions made by the ELCA and the Synod over this past year in addition to the elections and if you click on the link below, you will be able to read more highlights from the gathering.

There are two very important pieces of information we want each Advent family to know. The first is that Tim Smith was re-elected to serve another 6-year term as Bishop. Election of a Bishop can take up to 5 ballots but Bishop Tim was re-elected on the first ballot on Thursday afternoon. This was a great testament to the excellent leadership he has provided during his first term which has been full of challenges. The second piece of very important information is that our very own Brooke Summerour was elected to 2 positions. She will serve on the Synod Council until 2025 and she will be a representative from North Carolina Synod for the Churchwide Assembly in 2022. Please join in congratulating Brooke when you have an opportunity.

The ELCA representative to the Assembly was ELCA Vice President Bill Horne. Not only did he preside over the election of the Bishop but he also brought us many highlights of what the churchwide organization has done over this past year and they are outstanding! In this past year the NC Synod sent to the ELCA \$1,035,034 for mission support and overall a total of \$40.7M was received from all ELCA congregations. This total was almost the pre-pandemic giving! During the year the ELCA paid out \$1.8M through their Covid response fund and served over 400,000 people! The ELCA also funded 232 world hunger grants internationally for over \$13M with another \$1M in matching grants to churches (of which Advent was a recipient)! There was \$4.9M used for Lutheran Disaster Relief funds around the world and another \$3M in additional disaster support. During the 2020-21 academic year, the ELCA supported 297 candidates in ELCA seminaries for \$2M.

Bill shared that the future church initiatives are: shared leadership, one church culture, and a push to be more dynamic, flexible, and collaborative. To quote Bill, “the ELCA is willing to take risks to invest in relationships to see where God is leading us”.

Bishop Tim had an opportunity to share his reflections of this past year. He began with reiterating the 4 core values established by the Synod council and affirmed by all congregations at the 2019 Synod Assembly. They are: 1) Be Christ centered; 2) Be generous; 3) Value reconciliation; and 4) Value relationship. Some key accomplishments of this past year that fall within these values include setting aside \$800K for covid relief to rostered ministers and congregations; establishment of the Racial Justice Network that has hundred of Lutheran members from throughout the state; and establishment of a new initiative called “All Races One Church”. This initiative was funded with \$100K and another \$100K

funded each year for the next 2 years. AROC, as it is known, is to support our congregations made up primarily of people of color throughout the state and will be used to strengthen those congregations. Bishop Tim spent time discussing the polarization within our society and the importance of staying Christ-centered in the midst of all the division. There were some key points emphasized by him regarding the polarization.

- 1) In our ministries and in life in general it's not always that we have a lot of problems but that we have a lot of polarities. He quoted Roy Oswald to say "Manage your polarities or they will manage you".
- 2) This world today almost demands that people decide if someone is "one of them" or "one of us". We as humans are "both" and "and" at the same time. We don't have to be all one way or the other and that most of us indeed behave in different ways in different situations.
- 3) We must remain "Christ centered" in the midst of our divisions. Rick Warren said "A lie doesn't become truth – wrong doesn't become right and evil doesn't become good just because it is accepted by the majority".

Lot of thoughts to ponder about as we move forward in the future. He ended his reflections by saying that we move forward if not always with optimism then with hope and trust in Christ that all will be well in the end. If all isn't well, it isn't the end. We will do our best to be the Church together.

The keynote speaker of our last day of Assembly was Bishop Michael Curry, a very dynamic speaker. Key points from Bishop Curry were:

- 1) "We all came here on different ships but we are all in the same boat now" – Be community, seek the best in people. When one is weak and fails, everyone pitches in.
- 2) "Imagine the kind of world we would have if every government looked at their job as being to care for each person"
- 3) "Go forth into the world and help us heal"

Some of the other highlights of the Assembly were:

- 1) Approval of the Synod budget for 2021 and 2022 -- \$3,518,096 each year
- 2) Request that each congregation increase by 1% their giving over the previous year in working towards a total of 10% of their regular offerings (note that Advent's preliminary budget for 2021-22 includes an increase of \$1200 for the year which is a 5.5% increase over 2020-21 (total of \$27,600 which includes the support for Campus Ministry) but it is still far away from 10% of our regular giving which would come to \$47,000 annually).
- 3) We heard presentations and saw videos of the Lutheran camps in NC, Lutheran Services Carolina, Lenoir Rhyne and Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Mission Investment Fund, the ELCA Credit Union, Lutheran Men in Mission, Women of the ELCA, Lutheran Campus Ministry, Portico.
- 4) Some new offerings for education coming up: "Voices in the Wilderness", "Tell the Story", "Dialogs in Race", "3 Preachy Prophets".
- 5) A wonderful uplifting online worship on Thursday evening with a sermon delivered by Tammy Jones West.
- 6) A virtual Moravian Love Feast on Friday evening.

Finally, there was recognition of anniversaries for congregations and for rostered ministers and deaconesses in the state. The oldest congregations in NC are Friedens in Gibsonville and St. John's in Concord, each with 275 years. Wow!!! Believe it or not, we actually have some rostered ministers on the roles who have served over 70 years! Pastor Dick Little was recognized as reaching his 50th year anniversary and Gloria Strickert (who will join Advent on Sunday, June 13) was recognized as being a deacon for 25 years!

Hopefully this article has given you a sampling of the Assembly. If you wish, you can go to the NC Lutheran Synod facebook page and view the entire assembly from there. Questions may be directed to any of the 5 people who attended the Assembly.