Sunday Synod Assembly Summary

The assembly gathered for a morning devotion led by Pr. Jayson Nicholson. Pr. Kathie Aasheim was installed at this time as campus pastor at MSU Bozeman.

Next, Pr. Mark Gravrock led a Bible study on Ephesians 3:14-21. Pr. Gravrock said he has been returning to scripture for comfort and peace during this time of some anxiety in our lives and our world and this passage is especially comforting.

The Bible Study was followed by a pop-up led by Pr. Katie Emery. She spoke about the gathering this year in Lewistown titled “We Do Not Use Heart.” The conference focused on small churches in challenge. The participants talked about what they are going through in the church, the anxiety, the grief and the transitions. How are we experiencing God in our contexts? It is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in these contexts and this is how we do not lose heart. Through this conference, a group was formed to continue the discussion and to encourage and support each other. They have put together some resources for congregations and leaders who are losing heart. This includes a devotional booklet. The other resource is a 6 week study. Both resources will be available on the synod website or by contacting Pr. Emery.

At this point, Bishop Crist announced the results of Friday’s vote for elections for synod council, church-wide voting members and other committees.

Pres. Bill Craft came forward with a greeting from Concordia College and a thank you for the support provided to the college from congregations and the synod. He recommended Tod Bolsinger’s book, “Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territories.”

The proposed 2019 budget was put up for vote. This budget was presented on Friday. There was time for open discussion. A motion was put forth that Bishop Crist be given a 3% raise. Bishop Crist respectfully declined this motion. She did not take a raise this year.

Another suggestion was made that the budget’s allocation for 2019 be made toward individual seminarians rather than toward the seminaries. Bishop Crist said that both numbers of seminarians and debt incrued is a crisis that seminaries are dealing with and working to find creative ways to address. She recommended that we not transfer giving so that we can support the seminaries in their attempts to deal with both issues.

The budget was voted upon and passed.

Pr. Scott Thompson came up to talk about his own response to the mass shootings occurring in our country. Pr. Thompson and his colleagues in the Flathead Valley gathered to talk and decided they wanted to offer an opportunity for the people in their churches to gather and lament, prayer and spend time promoting piece. Over a hundred people came and gathered for a service of prayer, singing and contemplation. They lit candles and shared peace with one another. He said as we, perhaps, can all use these times of gathering for peace.

Pr. Seth Nelson brought up a resolution relating to the lack of candidates for seminary and the increased debt that saddles new pastors.

“Be it resolved that the ELCA commit to paying all seminary tuition costs for all entranced candidates for rostered ministry by 2023.”

Pr. Nelson said it is a tall order for anyone to go to seminary and then, on the other end, face financial uncertainty. It is a deterrent to face the debt load and then to consider going to serve a congregation that may not have many financial resources.

Pr. Schmidt from Big Sky was concerned with how the resolution was worded that perhaps the only way for us to help seminarians was to take away funding from seminaries. Pr. Rydbom asked if there was a way to amend the proposal so that we are not decreasing what we give to seminaries but instead, find other ways to support seminarians.

The changed would read: “Be it resolved that the MT Synod memorialize the churchwide assembly to instruct TEAC to support individual seminarians.”

Pr. Hay suggested added another “Be it resolved” that includes all graduates of seminary with debt. This would not be part of the existing “Be it resolved” about entranced candidates.

There continued to be discussion on the topic. This amendment is to assist with pastoral seminary debt, not to eliminate that debt. A vote on adding the second amendment was defeated.

The group then discussed the initial resolution presented by Pr. Nelson.

“Be it resolved that the Montana Synod memorialize the church wide assembly that the ELCA commit to paying all seminary tuition costs for all entranced candidates for rostered ministry by 2023.”

The assembly voted and the memorial was passed.

At this time the new elected officers to the synod council were installed.

We received a greeting from PLU and a thank you for congregational and synod support.

At this time, Bishop Crist declared the assembly closed and the group was given a break before closing worship.