

Minutes of the Montana Synod Assembly



“Strengthen Congregations”
June 1-3, 2018
Best Western Heritage Inn,
Great Falls, Montana

Friday, June 1, 2018

Plenary I: 3-5 PM, Friday, June 1

OPENING OF THE ASSEMBLY

Bishop Jessica Crist opened the 31st Montana Synod Assembly at 3:00 p.m. with an opening litany.

CALL TO ORDER

Bishop Crist called the Assembly to order.

INTRODUCTIONS

The following people were introduced to the assembly:

Synod Council – Alex Tooley, Jonah Kunka, Pastor Linda Webster, Dick Deschamps, Doug Allie, Neal Wedum, Robin Matthews, Pastor Mark Taylor, Mary Hutchinson, and Kristi Lobdell

Staff – Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger – DEM, Susah Hedahl, Colter McCarty, Pastor Jason Asselstine – Associate to the Bishop.

Parliamentarian – Pastor Lowell Anderson

Special Guests – Linda Bobbitt, Leslie Swenson and Pastor Brenda Smith.

Thanks – Bishop Crist offered thanks to Pastor Julie Long for organizing worship during the assembly. She also thanked Kathy Marks and Nancy Marks for their work on the powerpoint, and the Johnson Brothers for sounds and audio visual equipment.

New to MT Synod – Pastor David Rommerein, Pastor Jayson Nicholson, Pastor Scott Thompson, Pastor Doris Tollefson, Pastor Jessica Obrecht, Pastor Marlow Carrels, Pastor Marty Mock, Pastor Elizabeth Liggett, Pastor Todd Wright, Pastor Jake Schumacher, Pastor Paul Balaban, Intern Grant Ragsdale, and Intern Brenda Boogren.

CREDENTIALS REPORT

Neal Wedum presented the Credentials Report:

Clergy: 79

Lay: 123

Total Voting Members: 202

Visitors: 24

Total in Attendance: 226

Motion

Second: Receive the Credentials Report

SA.18.06.01

VOTE: RECEIVE THE CREDENTIALS REPORT

Adoption of the Rules of the Assembly

Motion

Second: Adopt the rules of the Assembly

SA.18.06.02

VOTE: ADOPT THE RULES OF THE ASSEMBLY

Adopt Agenda with Privilege of the Chair to Adjust

Motion

Second: Adopt the agenda with privilege of chair to adjust

SA.18.06.03

VOTE: ADOPT THE AGENDA WITH PRIVILEGE OF CHAIR TO ADJUST

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Pastor Amanda Liggett presented the secretary's report, directing the assembly to her printed report in the reports book. She shared letters of greeting from the Allegheny Synod and the Synod of Alberta and the Territories.

The minutes of the 2017 Montana Synod Assembly were presented. The minutes are available on the assembly website and links have been sent out in the synod weekly newsletter.

Motion

Second: Adopt the minutes of the 2017 Montana Synod Assembly

SA.18.06.04

VOTE: ADOPT THE MINUTES OF THE 2017 MONTANA SYNOD ASSEMBLY

TREASURER'S REPORT AND PRESENTATION OF THE 2019 BUDGET

Treasurer Sue Ost presented the treasurer's Report.

Thank you to all of the congregations in the Montana Synod for your steadfast and generous support of your Synod and the ELCA. I am honored to serve as your Treasurer, and to report to you on the financial condition of the Synod.

In 2017, Mission Support was budgeted at \$1,060,000. This estimate was based on the actual amount received in 2015, and we have learned that a lower estimate would have been more realistic. After a tight summer, and an appeal to congregations, Mission Support received for the year was \$1,033,756 – or about 97.5% of the budgeted amount. We were able to keep expenses within that amount, and the 2018 and 2019 budgets both reflect the projected support from congregations at \$1,030,000.

In addition to Mission Support, Designated Giving from our congregations totaled almost \$270,000 in 2017. This figure includes about \$84,000 for ELCA World Hunger and about \$50,000 toward the Synod House Campaign. The many recipients of these funds are very grateful.

All of the Synods of Region I are audited annually by an independent accounting firm, and I participate in those audits through email and conference calls. The Montana Synod is financially healthy and has again received a clean audit report. We thank Alyce Bakker and Karen Dickon of the Region I Financial Services Office for their work on our behalf, in keeping good records, providing regular reports and any financial information and analysis that we request.

After the first three months of the 2018 year were completed, Mission support is right on track at 25% of the year's budget. Our expenses are within the budget as well, after making a few adjustments to the 2018 budget based on actual expenses for 2017 and some changes to the benefit costs for some employees.

The construction of our new Synod House over the past year has presented me with some additional challenges as Treasurer – creating and following another budget, working with subcontractors and payments to them, lien releases and our construction loan from Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA. The budget for the building was just under \$1,124,000. This figure already includes a savings of at least \$130,000 because we chose to use ELCA Mission Builders and volunteers rather than a general contractor. Although we have a few bills yet to pay, I'm confident that we'll complete the project about \$100,000 under budget. Thanks to the generous donations to the building fund by congregations and individuals over the past ten years, our loan from MIF ended up at \$427,426. We will be counting on continued donations by the building's supporters to make the mortgage payments. I hope you will all be able to make it to the dedication tomorrow, and to have a tour of this functional and energy-efficient work and meeting space.

In 2019, we will elect a new Bishop. Along with that transition may come some expenses, such as moving if the person elected relocates from another community. We have some funds set aside for this now, but the Synod Council agreed that we should add to that in both 2018 and 2019. Funds that are not used for the transition may be returned to the cash reserve, or left in Restricted for future transitions.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to serve as your Treasurer.

Motion

Second: Receive the Treasurer's Report

SA.18.06.05

VOTE: RECEIVE THE TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer Sue Ost presented the 2019 budget to the Assembly in narrative form.

For several years, I have presented the proposed budget to the Assembly in the form of a narrative. The idea is to show specific examples of how the Synod's funds are spent, so that you, as representatives of your congregations, can more clearly see the many and various ministries and activities that are supported by your generous gifts. In the development of the 2019 budget, the Executive Committee and the Synod Council agreed to estimate that the congregations' Mission Support will remain the same as we budgeted for the current year. Our Churchwide Support will be slightly lower, and a static amount, not based on a percentage of Mission Support. As we focus on our Synod Benchmarks, our ministries and the needs of our Synod change and evolve, and we strive to meet those needs within our budget.

Most of our staff will receive a modest increase in their compensation in 2019, except for the Bishop, who declined an increase. We estimated health care and pension benefit costs, including having a newly elected Bishop in 2019. Agency and Ministry Partners, Congregations, Colleges, Seminary Support, and programs remain basically the same. Now let's take a look at the budget as it's used to work toward meeting our Synod Benchmarks. The distribution of the budget to the benchmarks is fairly even, as about 20% of the total supports each of the five benchmarks.

Meet the Future Boldly

Our Montana Synod Staff is a dedicated group, each one using their particular gifts to lead us. Bishop Jessica Crist is a leader, not only in the Montana Synod but across the ELCA. She is a teacher, a diplomat, a traveler, and sets an example of a life of Christian service for all of us. Executive Assistant Susan Hedahl oversees the office operations, the annual Montana Synod Assembly, the roster, Synod Council meetings, and assists with administration and finances. I'll talk about the rest of the staff later.

College campuses are the greatest concentration of young adults in our Synod.

Teenagers who are away from home for the first time, twenty-somethings who are making choices about their lives and priorities, non-traditional students, single parents, and students from diverse ethnic backgrounds —these are the people on our college campuses. Lutheran Campus Ministry ministers with worship, listening posts, counseling, programs, retreats, and service projects. Both U of M and MSU have vibrant programs – check out their newsletters, websites, and display booths to find out more about what they are doing. Campus ministry funnels students into outdoor ministries and post-college service programs like Young Adults in Global Mission, Lutheran Volunteer Corps and other programs. It helps young adults contemplate questions of vocation—whether in rostered ministry or in another field and challenges adults, as well, to share their faith and understanding of vocation with young adults away from home.

Campus ministry meets the future boldly.

Serve the World, Especially the Poor and Those in Need

Ministry with vulnerable children is one of the most important things a church can do. Intermountain Children’s Home was founded in 1909 and today, in addition to its residential program, provides community services that reach more than 800 children and families weekly, combatting emotional trauma, mental health issues, and substance use among children.

In 2015, the Montana Synod of the ELCA joined the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Church of Christ in becoming full mission partners of Intermountain. We will continue to support Intermountain’s programs financially, as well as through our prayers.

Lutheran Social Services walks with vulnerable women who experience unplanned pregnancies. Whether they choose to relinquish a child for adoption or parent the child, or something in-between, Lutheran Social Services is there to support them, as well as supporting adoptive families.

The portion of your Mission Support that is sent on to ELCA Churchwide helps support worldwide programs like ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Response, the ELCA Malaria Campaign, Immigration and Refugee services, and many more.

These are all examples of how we serve some of those in our world who are most in need.

Deepen Faith and Witness

As Lutherans we are all about education and learning at all levels. That’s why we support pre-schools and day-cares, Confirmation classes and Bible camps.

Associate to the Bishop Jason Asselstine will accompany a group of youth to the National Youth Gathering in Houston this summer. The experience has been described by both youth and adults as “life changing”, “amazing”, and “inspiring.”

The Montana Synod and the ELCA support colleges and seminaries. Luther Seminary of St. Paul, Minnesota, and Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary of Berkeley, California

agree that Synod support is integral to the financial health of the seminaries. Our financial commitment to them supports faculty and students – students who become our pastors.

In our Synod we gather pastors in their first 3 years of call to learn more about ministry in the context of First Call Theological Education. They get to know one another and share challenges, frustrations, ideas, and opportunities. They get to meet Synod staff, and they meet with experienced pastors to learn history and context. Associate to the Bishop Jason Asselstine coordinates this program.

Northern Rockies Institute of Theology provides continuing theological education and lifelong learning to pastors and lay people in the Montana Synod. NRIT helps pastors delve more deeply into areas that assist them in their current ministry. Administrator of IT Colter McCarty has been working with NRIT in the development of on-line courses, to better meet the needs of our clergy while keeping costs as low as possible. This is in addition to his administrative and technical support of the Synod and technology assistance to all of its congregations.

One way that lay people can both learn and teach is through the Lay Pastoral Associates Training program. The two year curriculum provides basic classes in both practical and theological disciplines. At the completion of the program, LPAs serve congregations in a variety of ways.

Promote Unity

More than fifty years ago Lutherans and Catholics started formal dialogues with one another. We continue to live with that legacy today. Last fall, many of us gathered at the Cathedral in Helena to jointly commemorate the 500 th anniversary of the Reformation, Lutherans and Catholics side by side, celebrating our similarities rather than our differences.

The Montana Association of Christians and the Wyoming Interfaith Network are constantly working to overcome differences between Christian denominations so that we may work together for the betterment of the world.

Synod Secretary Pastor Amanda Liggett is the ELCA's representative to the United Methodist Council of Bishops Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships. Your Mission Support supports these organizations to promote unity.

Strengthen Congregations

The focus of our Assembly this year is the final benchmark, Strengthen Congregations. Almost everything we do supports our congregations in some way. Associate to the Bishop Jason Asselstine provides leadership in the areas of mobility, First Call Theological Education, the LPA program and youth ministry. Director of Evangelical Mission Peggy Paugh-Leuzinger serves on behalf of the ELCA as a part of the Montana Synod staff in areas of stewardship, mission support, ministry development/ redevelopment, and working with the Montana Synod Mission Table. She also works with the Native American accompaniment team.

Our Candidacy process recruits and supports candidates for ordained ministry and the

lay rosters, encouraging the exploration of vocation, and acquiring the education and tools necessary. Some of our pastoral candidates are right out of college, and some are second or third career. Some have known all their lives that they wanted to be a pastor. Others heard the call more gradually. The Montana Synod Candidacy process supports the congregations of the synod through the candidacy, assignment and mobility processes.

In our Synod, we have three congregations that we specifically support financially: Freedom in Christ Prison Congregation, Spirit of Life at the Fort Peck Adult Correctional Facility, and Our Saviour's Lutheran on the Rocky Boy Reservation.

According to the Freedom in Christ website, when faith communities work with inmates while in prison, and during their transition back into communities, recidivism rates are four to five times lower than state and national rates. That means that the inmates who participate in Freedom in Christ have a much higher chance of staying out of prison in the future. They are better prepared for the transition and have a support network that really does help them succeed.

Pastor Rob Nedbalek and a team of volunteers offer incarcerated individuals access to God's grace, God's love, God's forgiveness through worship, Bible study, baptism, and caring hearts.

Pastor Christine Holler-Dinsmore has worked with the incarcerated on the Fort Peck Reservation for several years. She says, "Our ministry is devoted to forming a healthy community centered on Christ and the Creator, and reaching out from that stance to create healthy members of a community." Spirit of Life serves both men and women, with worship, Bible Study, and social time. They have a garden! Those who enjoy working in it are inspired to continue gardening after their release. Since this ministry began, over 100 brothers and sisters have been baptized.

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church has served the people of the Rocky Boy Reservation since 1920. It's one of 22 Native congregations in the ELCA. In addition to regular worship, this congregation offers many ministries that reach out into the community – a sewing group and classes, layette ministry, children's Christmas gift give-away, a thrift store, and a large facility that can be used for many different needs in the community. Servant groups come from near and far to help maintain and upgrade the structures. Pastor Linda Webster also organizes cross-cultural experiences that help educate seminarians, pastors, and lay people about the Native cultures.

I hope this presentation has shown how the Synod's funds are used to promote and achieve our benchmarks. If you weren't able to attend the Budget session earlier today, I am available to answer your detailed questions throughout the Assembly –just catch up to me during the break times, or leave a message at the Assembly Office. Thank you.

COMPREHENSIVE MINISTRY POP-UP

Pastor Lynne Ogren of Zion Lutheran Church in Lewistown reported on the results of a comprehensive ministry report done with Pastor George Karres, the former DEM of the Montana Synod. They have used Vibrant Faith in the Congregation and are growing in what the faith formation model means for them.

REPORT OF THE CHURCHWIDE REPRESENTATIVE

Pastor Brenda Smith presented the report of the Churchwide Representative. Her presentation was entitled, *Say, Amen!* She shared a video from the Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton about grace.

Pastor Smith highlighted some specific ministries in the Montana Synod and thanked us for our mission support, Lutheran Disaster Response donations, and hunger grant partnership. She explained how our partnership benefits the church both domestically and globally. The ELCA is in the midst of a Capital Campaign, with 81% congregational participation. Churchwide is focusing on the two priorities: lay leadership and congregational vitality. Regarding faith formation, churchwide is working on a bible study based on Bishop Eaton's 5 Emphases. Our church is always seeking ways to enhance our ecumenical and interreligious partners. Pastor Smith closed with amen and thanks.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH POP-UP

Pastor Andrew Wendle, who serves Eidsvold Lutheran Church in Somers, told the story of how their congregation became more involved in the life of the community, especially the school. Through various outreach activities, they built relationships that proved vital when the community faced tragedy and threat. They were already present and able to help, because they were able to say, "We are here with you."

GREETINGS FROM PORTICO

Andrea Arey shared a short video from Portico explaining the mission of the ministry. It's possible to live well, even in challenging times. She highlighted two resources – a bible study that works around the wholeness wheel and a labyrinth. She invited all rostered ministers fifty and older to attend a pre-retirement seminar in October at Our Redeemers in Helena.

CAMPUS MINISTRY POP-UP

The new MSU campus minister, Pastor Kathie Aasheim, brought greetings. Campus ministry helps young people continue their faith formation throughout the college years. She shared ways that congregations can help fund these ministries and asked that congregations share names of students from our congregations who are attending school at UM or MSU.

Bishop Crist pointed out that we still do campus ministry when many of our fellow denominations have ceased their efforts in that ministry.

GREETINGS FROM PACIFIC LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AND CALIFORNIA LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY

Sarah Wilson brought greetings from PLTS and CLU. She thanks the Montana Synod for all the support we give to the school and the students, especially for financially supporting the seminary. She then shared a video about the schools and their partnership.

GREETINGS FORM THE ELCA CHURCH COUNCIL

Leslie Swenson, of Fairbanks, Alaska, brought greetings from the ELCA Church Council. She thanked Bishop Jessica Crist for coming to the Alaska Synod Assembly, where Bishop Shelley Wickstrom was reelected on the first ballot. Ms. Swenson has been on the council since 2013 and will serve until 2019.

The council is working on their own benchmarks, with their major focus at the moment being on a well-governed, connected and sustainable church. They work closely with TEAC – Theological Education Advisory Committee, to find ways to raise up new leaders in the church. Colter McCarty has been especially helpful in explaining how IT is integral to communication today.

The council is also focused on the Declaration on Interreligious Commitment, the draft Social Statement on Women and Justice (almost ten years in the making), and the entrance right discernment group for Ministers of Word and Service. She invited comments and conversation around any of these topics.

GREETINGS FROM THE ELCA FOUNDATION

Beth Adams, charitable gift planner for the synods of Region 1, shared that she has a workshop tomorrow about endowments. She would especially like to talk to congregations she has not visited yet.

THANKS TO THE WOMEN OF THE ELCA

This group is hugely helpful in registration, during the voting process and in many other ways throughout the assembly.

ELCA YOUTH GATHERING POP-UP

Pastor Jason Asselstine spoke about the upcoming youth gathering in Houston. He provided a list of the committed congregations, so that we can pray for them as they travel and go through the experience. There will be two buses traveling to Houston from Montana, in addition to those who are flying.

CLOSING PRAYER

Alex Tooley led the Assembly in prayer.

The Assembly was recessed for dinner.

Plenary II: 7-8 PM, Friday, June 1

Credentials Report

Neal Wedum presented the Credentials Report:

Clergy: 84

Lay: 137

Total Voting Members: 221

Visitors: 33

Total in Attendance: 252

REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE BY CHAIR ROB STUBERG

The Chair of the nominating committee, Rob Stuberg, presented the slate of candidates:

Synod Council

Tom Gossack: Synod Vice President

Rev. Amanda Liggett: Synod Secretary

Kris Gunsten: Five Valleys Cluster

Allen Hansen: Beartooth Cluster

Rev. Gretchen Wagner: Northeast Cluster

Rev. Anna Merritt: Russell Country Cluster

Churchwide Assembly Voting Members:

Position 1: Clergy - Bishop Jessica Crist

Position 2: Clergy - Rev. Seth Nelson or Rev. Elisabeth Daniels

Position 3: Clergy - Rev. Mark Taylor or Rev. Arne Bergland

Position 4: Lay Male - Synod Vice President Tom Gossack

Position 5: Lay Male - Richard Brown or Paul Armstrong

Position 6: Lay Male - Gordon Oelkers or Peter Metcalf

Position 7: Lay Female - Sue Ost or Jaynee Groseth

Position 8: Lay Female - Laura Lee Ullrich or Autumn Keller

Position 9: Lay Female - Kim Moss or Amanda Nelson

Position 10: Youth/ Young Adult - Cheyenne Damron or Alex Tooley

Position 11: Person of Color - Loni Taylor or Elias Nawawieh

ELCA Church Council (Choose 2)

Lisa Carlson, Jan Martin or Mary Hutchinson

Synod Nominating Committee

1 Clergy: Rev. Mark Taylor

1 Lay Male: John Munding

1 Lay Female: Barb Arensmeyer

Kogodus

Position 1 - Rev. Stacy Siebrasse

Positions 2,3,4,5 – Rev Wade Brinkhopf, Tamara Bushnell, Deb Cathey, Craig Ekegren, Joy McSparron, Arlene Kaurin

Dick Deschamps led the Assembly in prayer.

1ST BALLOT

The first ballot was distributed and collected by WELCA, Neal Wedum, Pastor Jason Asselstine and Dick Deschamps.

BISHOP'S REPORT

Bishop Jessica Crist presented the Bishop's Report.

Report of the Bishop to the 2018 Synod Assembly

Let us pray: Gracious God, we give you thanks for your church, and for the many saints both recent and long-ago who have answered your call to service. Fill us with your spirit so that we, too, may serve. Amen.

Sisters and brothers, it is good to be here. Welcome. Whether it is your first Synod Assembly or your 31st, welcome. Welcome to Voting Members and guests, welcome to featured speakers and workshop leaders, welcome to synod staff and hotel staff, welcome to anybody who wandered in here by mistake. You are welcome.

Our Assembly this year is based on one of our Synod's 5 benchmarks. Those benchmarks are:

Meet the future boldly.

Serve the world, especially the poor and those in need.

Deepen faith and witness.

Promote unity.

Support congregations.

For the last 5 years we have emphasized one of the benchmarks each year in our Assembly theme, and this year we are focusing on Strengthening Congregations. Our keynoters tomorrow and our workshops will help us find ways to strengthen congregations. But even though we orient our Assembly on one of the benchmarks each year, we keep all five in front of us as we plan and evaluate our work as a Synod.

The first benchmark, the one that pushes and pulls us every day and is overarching, is "Meet the future boldly." It is what has inspired us to go forward with our new building, which you will have a chance to see tomorrow. It is what we point to when nay-sayers suggest that we could make do with what worked in 1975. Make do? Yes, we are pretty good at that. We made do in the 1975 building long after it was no longer practical. And we made do in our temporary headquarters on two floors of New Hope here in town for almost 2 years. We know how to make do.

But we also know how to move beyond simply making do, for the sake of the Gospel. Our new building gives us the capacity to have meetings in our conference room, rather than renting or borrowing space. Our new building gives us the ability to conduct far more meetings electronically, saving time and money. My son now works in the Governor's office. They fly places. He called me one day last week after they had had a meeting in

Browning, another in Havre, and a third at Rocky Boy. He said, “Mom, you know you really save a lot of time when you fly. You really should get a plane.” I responded, “We’re not getting a plane. But we’ve got a new building that is equipped to connect us with people all over the synod. And it costs a heck of a lot less than a plane.” Does that mean that we’ll never drive to your congregation again? Does that mean that we won’t drop in on your congregation en route to someplace farther away. No. But what it does mean is that we will be careful in our travel, that we will be mindful of how much we spend driving, and how much time. When needed, we will not hesitate to get there. But we are trying to be good stewards of our resources.

Our new building is designed to steward resources. From the angle of the roof to the materials in the construction to the landscaping, the Synod House is helping us meet the future boldly.

We had help with our building. We had local volunteers, especially from Our Redeemer’s in Helena and Bethel in Great Falls. And we had the Mission Builders. Do you know about the Mission Builders? They come from around the country to help churches, camps, and now Synods build their buildings. They get paid minimum wage, and they gave it all back, to help the building. Check out the Mission Builders display and consider if you would like to join them somewhere. You’ll find that they don’t just build buildings, they build relationships, and they build faith.

Some of our Mission Builders have returned to be here for the dedication tomorrow. Jim and Chris Dyess, Arne and Mim Fichtenberg, Arvin Pletcher, Allan and Sue Ost are here this weekend. Please thank them. And please give special thanks and a standing ovation to Sue and Allan Ost, who made the trip from Havre almost every week all winter and all spring. Thank you.

Also critical to the project were Mission Builders Kathy and Terry Thiel, Steve and Carole Schenck, and Chris Dunker.

We invite you to come and see your building. And we invite you to consider making an ongoing commitment to paying for the project. We have a 25 year mortgage with the Mission Investment Fund, and we are looking for donors to commit to helping pay that down. Talk with any of the officers.

Another way that we meet the future boldly is through our new Director for Evangelical Mission, Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger. A year ago, the position was filled by Pastor George Karres, who announced soon after the Assembly that he was going to retire and move to Tucson. After thanking him and wishing him farewell, we didn’t waste a moment, and issued a call to Pastor Peggy to be the new DEM. You may be used to seeing her sitting up front as Secretary for the previous 11 years. Now she has a new role in the Synod—working with congregations and ministries.

Meeting the future boldly directs just about everything that we do.

Our second benchmark is “Serve the world, especially the poor and those in need.” You do that in your congregations, with soup kitchens, homeless ministries, gas cards, food pantries. Your congregations’ contributions to ELCA World Hunger help people in need both abroad and in the US.

Our Synod is committed to this benchmark. This year our Assembly offering will go to Puerto Rican ELCA congregations who have sustained damage during last year's hurricane season. The devastation was so widespread that many parts of the island are still without power or water. ELCA congregations lost power and windows and had roof damage. This offering is a way our Synod partners with the Caribbean Synod to support their congregations in need.

Last year was a horrendous fire season--forests in the west and prairies in the east, exacerbated by severe drought. Money to help with fire relief came in from around the country, and we were able to help some eastern Montana ranchers get donated hay from the Midwest.

And then there was this winter. Most severe winter in a long, long time. While for many it was an inconvenience, for some it was life threatening. In particular, remote communities on reservations found themselves cut off from food. Along with others, we stepped in. Thanks to Dick Deschamps, Montana Synod Disaster Coordinator, and chair of the Montana VOAD, we were able to identify the areas of most need, which turned out to be on the Northern Cheyenne reservation. So we committed to pay for a truckload of food to be delivered to Lame Deer, enough to feed 400 families for 5 days. And we put out a plea for donations, and the money came in. Thank you.

I mentioned that your World Hunger donations not only go abroad but also come back to the United States. This year 3 projects in the Montana Synod were funded—one at Our Savior's Rocky Boy, for care packages for people without access to groceries; one at Our Savior's Laurel for a community garden, and one to the Montana Association of Christians, for advocacy for the poor. Make sure you visit the world hunger table and sign up to help with education and recruitment in our synod. Pastor Jessie Obrecht of Fairfield is heading up that group currently.

We connect with the world through our Global partnerships. Bradn Buerkle is a missionary in Russia, originally from Plevna, and is supported by congregations in our Synod. Gustavo Driau is a coordinator for the ELCA in Latin America and is supported by some of our congregations. In addition, we have 7 Young Adults in Global Mission from our Synod this year—serving in places as diverse as the United Kingdom to the divided West Bank. The YAGM program gives young adults an opportunity to serve overseas for a year, and sends them home excited about the global reach of the church.

And, of course, we have our two Companion Synods, the Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Cape Orange Diocese of South Africa. Next June, at our Synod Assembly, we are hoping to have a visit by Bishop Motsumai Manong from South Africa. If you are interested in helping out with that visit, we could use you.

And this September, we are arranging for a group to visit Bolivia for their 80th anniversary. They are particularly interested in meeting LPAs, and knowing Spanish is a real plus. If you are interested, please let me know after the Assembly.

Companion Synod relationships are based on accompaniment. That means we aren't the Friendship Force, we are not the USAID, we are not the Peace Corps, and we are not 19th century missionaries, or even 20th century missionaries. We are partners, equals. We learn

from one another and share with one another. Companion Synods are partnerships with Lutheran churches in the global south. They may have been originally set up by missionaries from Europe, (just as our church was originally set up by missionaries and settlers, and just as the European churches were set up by missionaries from the middle east, originally!) But they are independent churches. In September, the Bolivian church celebrates 80 years of being its own church. For South Africa it is in the 40s. For us, 30.

But that is to say, we do not go to Bolivia and South Africa to take the Gospel to them. The Gospel is already there! We go to learn and share, to deepen our faith and witness together.

The third benchmark is “Deepen faith and witness.” That’s what you do in your congregations every Sunday with worship and Bible study. That’s what you do when you reach out to your neighbors, when you live out your faith in a public way. You know the statistic: On average a Lutheran invites someone to church once every 24 years. Our church is over 30 now. It’s time to invite someone else.

But there are other ways that congregations witness, as well. Anybody here do “God’s work. Our hands?” If you are out there in the community with your gold t-shirts on, you are witnessing by your work and presence. If your congregation volunteers at the homeless shelter, picks up trash along the highway, hosts travelling cyclists; makes prayer shawls for the highway patrol; sponsors a girl scout or boy scout troop, makes quilts for Intermountain; visits Freedom in Christ; sends socks to Spirit of Life; does a work weekend at Rocky Boy; hosts a booth at the county fair—you are doing a kind of witness.

One of the ways that our Synod supports deepening faith and witness is through NRIT, the Northern Rockies Institute of Theology. NRIT provides continuing theological education and lifelong learning to rostered leaders (who are required to do 50 contact hours annually), to LPAs (who are expected to do 20 hours), and to interested lay people. NRIT was set up in the 1970’s along with a whole lot of similar agencies across the church, and is the only one still at work. Stop by the table and learn more. And if you would like to host or cosponsor an event in your congregation, talk to Director Jenny Kunka. NRIT is a gem.

Another way that our Synod supports deepening faith and witness is through the LPA program. The LPA program certainly supports congregations by training leaders. But it also strengthens the participants by giving them education and tools that deepen their faith and witness. Talk to anyone who has been through the program and hear their stories. Tomorrow morning, just after the opening devotions, we will recognize 20 new LPA’s who have completed the program. There are others in the pipeline, as well. And we are starting a new class in the fall. Stop by the LPA table and learn more. This is a fabulous program. We’ve even had visitors from other synods coming to see how we do it. The LPA program is very important.

And of course, what is our church without its youth? We are doing youth ministry differently from a generation ago. Gone are the days when every congregation has a Luther League. Instead, we have an annual Synod Youth Leadership event. This year it was in Helena. And we have a big push to go to the ELCA Youth Gathering. Pastor Jason Asselstine has organized 2 buses to go from Montana to Houston at the end of the month, where the riders will join with other Montana Synod youth and adults and about 30,000 others

from around the church. The youth gathering can be a life changing event. Keith Weatherford of Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Billings is assisting Pastor Jason in coordination. Colter McCarty from our office will be there to help with tech matters, and I will be there as well.

The fourth benchmark is “Promote unity.” We live in a fractured time. A recent study suggested that we are getting more polarized rather than less, even though we have many of the same basic values as a society. We are not of one mind on all things as a church, but we do share fundamentals, “One Lord, on faith, one baptism.” As ELCA churches we share our commitments stated in the Confession of Faith in our synod and congregational constitutions. In these fractured times, it is more important than ever for our congregations to be places where people can disagree but still be one in Christ.

2017 saw the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It was the occasion for all sorts of attention from the secular media, and for all kinds of spotlights on Luther and the whole Protestant Reformation. Lutherans tended to note the anniversary of the Reformation by promoting close ties with the Catholic Church. In Lund, Sweden, there was a service attended by Pope Francis. In Helena, Montana, a magnificent Vespers in the Helena Cathedral was presided over by Bishop George Thomas, Bishop Michael Warfel, Former Bishop Mark Ramseth and Bishop Jessica Crist. This was really a big deal. And the previous Friday we held a Convocation jointly with the Diocese of Great Falls/Billings, and focused on the 5 ecumenical imperatives proposed by “From Conflict to Communion.” Those imperatives are:

1. Catholics and Lutherans should always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced.
2. Lutherans and Catholics must let themselves continuously be transformed by the encounter with the other and by the mutual witness of faith.
3. Catholics and Lutherans should again commit themselves to seek visible unity, to elaborate together what this means in concrete steps, and to strive repeatedly toward this goal.
4. Lutherans and Catholics should jointly rediscover the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ for our time.
5. Catholics and Lutherans should witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world.

We take our ecumenical commitments very seriously, both with our full communion partners, and with other Christians. As we look to supporting congregations across our synod, cooperative work with full communion partners is essential. We are working with Presbyterians, Episcopalians, United Methodists and the United Church of Christ. Pastor Amanda Liggett represents us in the national ecumenical dialogues, as well as representing the ELCA on the United Methodists national governing body. Plus she serves the Methodists and Lutherans together in Lavina, Montana. That’s how we do ecumenism, from the local to the global. We are active members of the Montana Association of Christians, with Pastor Kendra Wilde serving as President, Jan Martin as Treasurer, and until May, Pastor Martha McCreight as Secretary.

In today's world we also are aware of sisters and brothers of faiths other than Christian. We have a 20+ year history of relationship with the Montana Association of Jewish Communities. We have a fledgling Montana Interfaith Network, and in Wyoming the Wyoming Association of Churches has officially become the Wyoming Interfaith Network—from WAC to WIN.

Twenty or so years ago the ELCA adopted a statement on ecumenism that has been a marker for how we conduct ourselves ecumenically. Now there is a proposed declaration on interreligious relationships, slated to be voted on at the 2019 Churchwide Assembly. Pastor Miriam Schmidt is leading a workshop on it.

When we talk about promoting unity, it is not just about getting along with folks from other backgrounds. It is also about finding ways for congregations to work together cooperatively to strengthen their ministry. Next week I am meeting with 4 congregations who are facing some financial challenges. They have always been separate congregations, but we are starting the conversation about how they might support one another, how they might work together. It's about promoting unity for the sake of the Gospel.

The fifth benchmark is to “Support congregations.” Much of what we do in the Synod Office is to support congregations. Whether it is working with congregations in transition, engaging in congregational ministry reviews, assisting with conflict resolution, answering questions about pensions, registration, tax status, tech support, constitutions--we are all about supporting congregations.

One of the innovative ways we support congregations is through the LPA program. I mentioned it as a way to deepen faith and witness. But it is also a way to support congregations. LPAs supply preach when pastors are gone. They assist with hospital visitation, teaching, administrative tasks in their home congregation, depending on the need and the skill set. Some LPAs do more than fill in. Some LPAs are long term interims in congregations who would otherwise not have a pastor. As we have fewer pastors available to serve, and fewer interim pastors, we are asking LPAs to step up and serve congregations, with pastoral support from a Vice Pastor, on a long-term or short-term basis. Supporting congregations is our bread and butter.

And do you notice? Each of these benchmarks leads into the others. What we do is interconnected.

This Assembly we focus on congregations. Our Churchwide Representative, the Rev. Brenda Smith, works with faith practices, and will be sharing those with us in her keynote and workshop tomorrow. Our other keynote, Linda Bobbitt, is a former Vice President of the Rocky Mountain Synod, our neighbor to the south. As Vice President, she became interested in congregational vitality, and developed a way to help congregations assess their vitality. Pastor Mark Gravrock will lead us in Bible Study on Sunday morning.

And on Saturday afternoon we will have a whole host of workshops that will help you strengthen your congregation. Whether it is updating your constitution or reengaging with stewardship, starting an endowment, or understanding family systems, we've got a workshop for you.

At this Assembly we will also be electing some leadership. We need to elect both a Secretary and a Vice President, and several members of the Synod Council. We also will be electing Voting Members to the Churchwide Assembly which is next summer. Those people will go to Milwaukee in August of 2019, and, among other things, vote on the Social Statement on Women and Justice, vote on the declaration on interreligious relations, and elect a Presiding Bishop and a Secretary.

Closer to home, a year from now, the Montana Synod Assembly will be electing a new Bishop. My second term will be up, and I will complete my 40th year of ordination. It has been an honor to serve as your bishop for the last 11 years, and I look forward to the next year. But I also look forward to the Synod's developing new leadership for the coming years. This next year will be a time of prayer and discernment for the Synod, and for its leaders. I will be praying and discerning right along with everyone else.

The ELCA Church Council, along with the Conference of Bishops and the Churchwide staff, have identified 2 areas of concentration for the ELCA in the coming years—leadership and congregations. I think we can affirm those. We are doing our Assembly on strengthening congregations. We may also need to encourage congregations to be more flexible in the future. That may mean working with other congregations, sharing a pastor. It may mean sharing a pastor with an ecumenical partner. It may mean working with LPA's and Vice Pastors. And it means inviting congregations to lift up leaders through the TEEM process. This next week I am also meeting with a congregation to talk to them about raising up an LPA for the TEEM program—a route to ordination based in the congregation.

We have talked a lot about leadership—the leadership that we have and the leadership that we need. When I met with the pastors at Chico this year I told them that currently we have the most people enrolled in the LPA program that we have ever had, and the fewest people enrolled in candidacy that we have ever had.

What does this mean? It means that we have been successful in recruiting people into the LPA program, and that is really good. LPA's serve congregations in a variety of ways. It also means that we have been less successful in recruiting people into seminary study, less successful than ever before. And that is not so good. It is not just us. Seminary enrollment is down across the board, across synods, across denominations, across seminaries. We have half the seminary graduates we had a decade ago, and many are unwilling or unable to serve the kinds of places that need pastors. Like rural Montana.

LPA's are part of our solution to the clergy shortage. LPAs are serving a number of congregations, both long-term and short-term. Every LPA has a clergy mentor, and it is a good way to serve congregations. We need LPA's and especially welcome those who can serve remote and rural settings.

But we also need pastors and deacons. So I want to challenge all of you to help with this. I want each of you to look around your congregation, look around your neighborhood and imagine who might be a pastor, who might be a church leader. Look hard. And look again. And then say something. Tell someone that you think they might be a good pastor. Encourage them. Say it again later. Be imaginative. Look at the kid who always wants to help with the offering—encourage her. How about the guy who is retiring from the military—tell him that you'd like to see him consider ministry. If you don't do it, and I don't do it, it is not going to happen. Far more people go into ministry because someone encouraged them than because the sky opened up and a voice boomed down at them. Seriously. This is on us.

And let's not only recruit candidates, let's support them. We have a seminary loan repayment program, in honor of former Bishop Mark Ramseth, that pays one month's loan per student per year. And we have a Fund for Leaders Scholarship that gives seminarians a couple thousand dollars a year. These are greatly appreciated. But they do not cover what it really costs to go to seminary. Seminaries are working hard to lower costs and reduce student debt. Luther has announced that it will offer free tuition next year, following the example of United. But there are other costs. I encourage your congregations to support seminary students financially when they are in seminary. You can provide congregational scholarships. You can contribute to the Fund for Leaders. You can contribute to the Seminary Loan Repayment fund. And you can contribute to the seminary or seminaries of your choice. All is helpful. All is needed. And you can pray. This cannot go on without prayer.

Two years ago our Synod was one of a number of synods who passed a resolution of the Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery, and sent it on to the Churchwide Assembly for consideration. We are a Synod in a territory with 7 reservations, 10 federally recognized tribes and 1 state recognized tribe. Eight years ago we adopted an apology to the tribes, and have presented it to 3 tribal councils. We have 2 very different ministries on reservations—an historic congregation, Our Saviour's, on the Rocky Boys Reservation; and an evolving ministry, currently in the tribal correctional facility on the Fort Peck Reservation.

The Secretary of the national American Indian Alaska Native Lutheran Association, Loni Whitford-Taylor, is a member of our Synod. We have had awareness and education events with Episcopalians, with Canadians. We have congregations who are doing outreach in the reservation and urban communities around them. But still there are barriers to us becoming a fully welcoming, fully multicultural church.

Tonight at worship we will use a liturgy designed in response to the repudiation of the doctrine of discovery. It is one way that we are working to move forward, and working to acknowledge the people who were here before the Lutherans. We are all here now, and there is no going back for anyone. My hope is that we will go forward as sisters and brothers.

Before I close, I want to thank the Synod Staff, Susan Hedahl, Executive Assistant; Colter McCarty, Administrator of Information Technology; Pastor Jason Asselstine, Associate to the Bishop; Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger, Director for Evangelical Mission; Jenny Kunka, Director of the Northern Rockies Institute of Theology.

And I want to thank our Synod Council and particularly our officers, for their hard work as volunteers on behalf of the work of the Synod this past year: Tom Gossack, Vice President; Sue Ost, Treasurer and Mission Builder; Amanda Liggett, Secretary.

And now, let us pray:

Almighty God, your Holy Spirit equips the church with a rich variety of gifts. Grant that we may use them to bear witness to Christ in lives that are built on faith and love. Make us ready to live the gospel and eager to do your will, so that we may share with all your church in the joys of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Our Savior and Lord. Amen.

TEEM POP-UP

Cheryl Muncy spoke about the joys and surprises of working toward ordination through the TEEM Program (Theological Education for Emerging Ministries). Though much of the work is done from a distance, there is an on-campus requirement where you meet people from all over the world. Cheryl is grateful for the opportunity to be part of the program. Encourage those who are thinking of ministry!

The assembly was recessed for the evening.

OPENING EUCHARIST

Bishop Jessica Crist presided over the Opening Eucharist. Rev. Brenda Smith delivered the sermon. Members of congregations participated in the procession of estimates of giving for the coming year. The liturgy was a Native American Liturgical Celebration designed in response to the Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery.

Saturday, June 2, 2018

Voting members were treated to a buffet breakfast sponsored by Mission Investment Fund.

MORNING PRAYER & LPA RECOGNITIONS

Morning prayer was led by Pastor Larry Stappler. New Graduates of the Lay Pastoral Associates program were recognized. Those recognized were: Steve Ward, Judy Manweiler, Jon Dunham, Cristy Meier, Marlene Anderson, Stephen Aadland, Gaynell Tempel, Robin Trudell, Erika Morck, Richard Sine, John Wiegand, Sigurd Rudie, Charles Fligel, Elizabeth Cox, Allen Hansen, Neal Wedum, Judy Bjorkman, Robin Menger, and Don Buerkle.

CAMPUS MINISTRY POP-UP

Pastor John Lund brought greetings from Emmaus Campus Ministry, where the students go on to have continuing involvement in ministry and further education. The “common thread” of their continued faithful service is that they came out of congregations that supported and taught them, guiding them in wonder about the big questions. He asked that congregations send him and Pastor Aasheim the names of young people headed to college.

GREETINGS FROM LUTHER SEMINARY

Blaine Thrasher brought greetings from Luther Seminary. He grew up in Chester, MT, and is happy to be home for this event. He shared a video on student perspectives of the Luther experience. Luther Seminary has been providing leaders for Christian communities for nearly 150 years. They are excited to offer a “Jubilee Scholarship”, providing full tuition scholarships for all students who enter the seminary.

Bishop Crist pointed people to the budget to note that the synod supports both Luther Seminary and PLTS.

KEYNOTE I: LINDA BOBBITT – STRENGTHENING CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY

Linda Bobbitt is an active lay leader who lives in Colorado and is deeply interested in congregational vitality. Her background is in health and human services administration. Her driving question is: How are people different because of what the church does?

Ms. Bobbitt presented information about the Congregational Vitality Survey, shared some of the results from the Montana Synod, and explained where there was room for growth. For congregational vitality, you must begin with the core identity and build on it with Mission and purpose and God's presence. She then explained change cycles and how programs within the church are effected by them.

We have something life-giving our neighbors need. It's not just that we are nice. It's about sharing the gospel.

The best way to accomplish all of this is to ask: Where is God going and how do we join?

LAY PASTORAL ASSOCIATES POP-UP

Don Buerkle reflected on the experience of the United Trinity Parish of Baker, Ekalaka and Plevna, MT, with the LPA program. Participants have been challenged and excited. Thanks to the synod for the program and the churches for supporting them. It seems to be growing and the LPAs are grateful for the help, attention and encouragement.

KEYNOTE II: REV. BRENDA SMITH – STRENGTHEN CONGREGATIONS: FAITH PRACTICES

The Rev. Brenda Smith works in the domestic mission unit of the ELCA as Program Director for Faith Practices and the Book of Faith Initiative.

Pastor Smith opened with a song about a changed life. Faith changed her life and she loved to hear people share stories about how faith has changed them. She asked the assembly to share characteristics of a Christian. They responded with words like compassionate, bringers of peace, people of integrity, non-judgmental, etc . . . If people don't see the difference Christ makes, they won't come back.

She shared a handout explaining the five gifts of discipleship found in the vision statement of the ELCA.

Church is where we learn to practice our faith through love, forgiveness, community and service. She shared some strategies for creating a climate of prayer, discipleship, and hospitality.

People make a decision about the congregation in the first six minutes!

There are Three Great Listenings: Listening to God, to each other, and to the community.

Thank you! Brenda shared her thankfulness with us in the form of a poem (a rap) that she wrote just for us.

THANK YOU TO ALLAN AND SUE OST

Vice President Tom Gossack honored Allan and Sue Ost for their dedication and invaluable work on building the Synod House. They were given a gift certificate to Chico Hot Springs.

SYNOD HOUSE

The assembly was invited to travel to the Synod House for a dedication and tour.

HYMN SING AND RE-GATHER

Pastor Carol Seilhymer led the assembly in singing hymns before the afternoon workshops.

WORKSHOPS

Workshops were held throughout the afternoon. They were:

Endowments in your Congregation with Beth Adams

Where Are the Young People? With the Rev. Seth Nelson

We Do Not Lose Heart with the Rev. Peggy Paugh Leuzinger

How Your Congregation Relates to the Synod and the ELCA: Constitutions, Committees and Administration with the Rev. Tony Rhodes

The ELCA's Proposed Declaration on Interreligious Relations with the Rev. Miriam Schmidt

Engaging the Congregation in Difficult Conversations with the Rev. Dr. Laurie Jungling

Congregational Vitality with Linda Bobbitt

Prayer with the Rev. Brenda Smith

Stewardship Challenges and Resources with the Rev. Peggy Paugh Leuzinger

Family Systems in the Congregation with the Rev. Jason Asselstine

Peace in the Congregation with John Munding

Using Your Worship Space with the Rev. Julie Long

Campus Ministry held a reception in the display area.

BANQUET:

The assembly representatives and their guests gathered for a banquet at 6:30 pm. Pastor Steve Nelson and Lynn Ryan of Bethel in Great Falls provided music.

The following were recognized for milestones in their ministry:

Deacons

Fifth Anniversary

Nancy Wittgren, Chaplain, St. Patrick's Missoula

Tenth Anniversary

Brooke Ells, Kalispell

Fifteenth Anniversary

Sharon Amor, Retired, Bozeman

Twentieth Anniversary

Bonnie Olsgaard, Retired, Missoula

Judi Martin, Retired, Glasgow

Pastors –

Fifth Anniversary

Rev. Scott Kiehn, Baker

Rev. Stacey Siebrasse, Havre

Rev. Tammy Bull, Great Falls

Rev. Valerie Putt, Chinook
Tenth Anniversary
 Rev. Alvina Olstead, Froid
 Rev. Amanda Ligget, Roundup
 Rev. Anna Merritt, Great Falls
 Rev. Benjamin Quanbeck, Billings
 Rev. Jennifer Quanbeck, Billings
 Rev. Charlotte Schmiedeskamp, Billings
 Rev. Kendra Wilde, Helena
 Rev. Linda Webster, Box Elder
 Rev. Miram Schmidt, Big Sky
Fifteenth Anniversary
 Rev. Andrew Wendle, Somers
 Rev. Avis Anderson, Retired, Glendive
 Rev. Kathleen Larson Aasheim, MSU Campus Ministry
Twentieth Anniversary
 Rev. Kristi Bummer, Billings
 Rev. Patricia Harant, Helena
 Rev. Peter Erickson, Columbia Falls
Twenty-Fifth Anniversary
 Rev. Brenda Satrum
 Rev. Doug Peterson
 Rev. Kim Wilker, Red Lodge
 Rev. Robert Nagy, Malta
Thirtieth Anniversary
 Rev. Kay Wittman, Billings
 Rev. Steven Paugh Leuzinger, Livingston
Thirty-Fifth Anniversary
 Rev. Dan Heskett, Kalispell
 Rev. David Curtright, retired
 Rev. James Sheldon, retired, Belgrade
 Rev. Leslie Nelson, retired, Libby
 Rev. Ronald Martin-Dent, retired
Fortieth Anniversary
 Rev. Joel Brosten, retired, Bozeman
Forty-Fifth Anniversary
 Rev. Darius Larsen, retired, Big Sky
 Rev. Richard Omland, retired, St. Paul, MN
 Rev. Wayne Pris, retired, Kalispell
Fiftieth Anniversary
 Rev. Donald Gordineer, retired, Dayton
Fifty-Fifth Anniversary
 Rev. Ernest Larsen, retired, Yuma, AZ and Roundup
 Rev. Robert Nilsen, retired, Kalispell
Sixtieth Anniversary
 Rev. Lowell Anderson, retired, Helena

Congregations

100th Anniversary

Zion Lutheran Church in Fairview, MT

Malta Lutheran Church in Malta, MT

Peace Lutheran Church in Plevna, MT

The following were recognized upon their retirements:

Rev. Gregory Holler-Dinsmore, Wolf Point

Rev. Alvina Olstead, Froid

Rev. James Darchuk, Billings

Rev. Kenneth E. DuVall, Anaconda

The guests of the synod were recognized:

Rev. Brenda Smith, ELCA Representative

Linda Bobbitt, Keynote Speaker

Leslie Swenson, ELCA Church Council

Rev. Mark Gravrock, Bible Study Leader

Sunday, June 3, 2018

Voting members were treated to a buffet breakfast sponsored by Portico, Concordia College, Pacific Lutheran University, Luther Seminary, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary.

MORNING PRAYER

Morning prayer was led by Pastor Jayson Nicholson from Laurel. Pastor Kathie Aasheim was installed as campus pastor for Lutheran Campus Ministry, Montana State University, Bozeman.

BIBLE STUDY

Rev. Dr. Mark Gravrock led the Assembly in a Bible Study entitled *Rooted, Grounded and Freed: Ephesians and Mark*.

Plenary III: 9:45-10:30 AM, Sunday, June 3rd

WE DO NOT LOSE HEART POP-UP

Pastor Katie Emery told about a group of pastors in small congregations facing transition and change. They compiled resources for congregations and leaders who have been losing heart: a devotion book and a six-week sermon study (or bible study) based on the wilderness wanderings in Exodus. Both resources will be made available on the synod website.

CREDENTIALS REPORT

Dr. John Sheppard presented the Credentials Report:

Clergy:87

Lay:143

Total Voting Members: 230

Visitors: 35

Total in Attendance: 265

REPORT OF THE FIRST BALLOT

The results of the first ballot were presented.

Synod Officers:

Vice President – Tom Gossack

Secretary – Amanda Liggett

Churchwide Assembly Voting members:

Bishop Jessica Crist

Rev. Seth Nelson

Rev. Mark Taylor

Synod Vice President Tom Gossack

Richard Brown

Peter Metcalf

Sue Ost

Autumn Keller

Amanda Nelson

Alex Tooley

Loni Taylor

ELCA Church Council (Those elected will be placed on the ballot at the ELCA churchwide assembly. The person elected at that assembly will serve a six-year term on the ELCA church council.)

Lisa Carlson

Mary Hutchinson

Synod Nominating Committee:

Rev. Mark Taylor

John Munding

Barbara Arensmeyer

Kogodus:

Rev. Stacey Siebrasse (position 1)

Rev. Wade Brinkhopf (position 2)

Tamara Bushnell (position 3)

Joy McSparron (position 4)

Arlene Kaurin (position 5)

The bishop declared all these to be elected.

CONCORDIA COLLEGE GREETINGS FROM PRESIDENT BILL CRAFT

Bill Craft, President of Concordia College, brought greetings. The college has been blessed for generations by students and teachers from the Montana Synod. He thanked the delegates who have served on the board. He highlighted some successes and hopes of the college: opening a new science center, to offer grants to low income first time students to study the sciences, began a new graduation requirement called PEAK (every student must take their studies and apply them to the real world on a real problem in real time e.g. nursing students in Haiti), created Community Access Scholarship Program to offer five full ride scholarships to underserved students, and in campus ministry they have called an ELCA Deacon to be their minister of Spirituality and Faith in Action.

BUDGET 2019 VOTE

VP Tom Gossack led the assembly in discussion of the proposed budget.

Adoption of the Budget for the MT Synod for 2019

Motion

Second: adopt the 2019 MT Synod budget

SA.18.06.06 VOTE: ADOPT THE 2019 MT SYNOD BUDGET

SAFETY IN CONGREGATIONS POP-UP

After the Texas church shooting, Pastor Scott Thompson spent time in reflection around the issue of congregational safety. Along with colleagues in the Flathead Valley, he held an Interfaith Service for Peace and was surprised and pleased by the attendance.

OTHER BUSINESS

MEMORIAL REGARDING SEMINARY TUITION FOR ROSTERED MINISTRY CANDIDATES

Pastor Seth Nelson proposed a resolution to memorialize the Churchwide Assembly.

WHEREAS the Conference of Bishops has declared that the ELCA has a critical need for rostered ministers; and

WHEREAS seminary student debt is a major factor in the ability of rostered ministers to serve congregations; and

WHEREAS debt is a deterrent to students entering seminary; and

WHEREAS burdens of seminary costs born by individual candidates for rostered ministry are burdens of the whole church; therefore, be it

RESOLVED that the Montana Synod memorialize the Churchwide Assembly to instruct TEAC to re-orient priorities from support of seminary institutions to support of individual seminarians; and be it further

RESOLVED that the Montana Synod memorialize the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA to commit to paying all seminary tuition costs for all entranced candidates for rostered ministry by 2023.

Discussion ensued, along with several amendments.

Motion:

Second: To approve the memorial regarding seminary tuition for rostered ministry candidates as amended.

WHEREAS, the Conference of Bishops has declared that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has a critical need for rostered ministers; and

WHEREAS, seminary student debt is a major factor in the ability of rostered ministers to serve congregations; and

WHEREAS, debt is a deterrent to students entering seminary; and
WHEREAS, the burdens of seminary costs for the individual candidates for rostered ministry are burdens of the whole church; therefore, be it
RESOLVED, that the Montana Synod Assembly memorialize the 2019 Churchwide Assembly that the ELCA commit to paying all seminary tuition costs for all entranced candidates for rostered ministry by 2023.

SA.18.06.08 TO APPROVE THE MEMORIAL REGARDING SEMINARY TUITION FOR ROSTERED MINISTRY CANDIDATES AS AMENDED.

**WHEREAS, THE CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS HAS DECLARED THAT THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA (ELCA) HAS A CRITICAL NEED FOR ROSTERED MINISTERS; AND
WHEREAS, SEMINARY STUDENT DEBT IS A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE ABILITY OF ROSTERED MINISTERS TO SERVE CONGREGATIONS; AND
WHEREAS, DEBT IS A DETERRENT TO STUDENTS ENTERING SEMINARY; AND
WHEREAS, THE BURDENS OF SEMINARY COSTS FOR THE INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES FOR ROSTERED MINISTRY ARE BURDENS OF THE WHOLE CHURCH; THEREFORE, BE IT
RESOLVED, THAT THE MONTANA SYNOD ASSEMBLY MEMORIALIZE THE 2019 CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY THAT THE ELCA COMMIT TO PAYING ALL SEMINARY TUITION COSTS FOR ALL ENTRANCED CANDIDATES FOR ROSTERED MINISTRY BY 2023.**

INSTALLATION OF VICE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY

Vice President Tom Gossack and Secretary Amanda Liggett were installed in those positions by Bishop Crist.

GREETINGS FROM PACIFIC LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY

Doug Page brought greetings on behalf of PLU. He was pleased to report that PLU is doing very well and pointed the assembly to the report in the book and information on line. They are currently in the process of searching for a new president and nominations are invited. They will continue to have a summer institute of theology. The Director of Congregation Relations is once again a full-time position.

CLOSE OF ASSEMBLY

Bishop Crist declared the Montana Synod Assembly Closed

CLOSING EUCHARIST

Bishop Jessica Crist presided over the closing Eucharist. Pastor Tammy Bull baptized Emmit William LeFever.

Respectfully Submitted,
Pastor Amanda Liggett
Secretary, Montana Synod