# Saturday Synod Summary

# Synod Banquet

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Saturday evening the assembly met for a banquet at the Heritage Inn. The banquet provided an opportunity to eat together, sing, pray and honor pastors and deacons who have reached milestones in their careers and a time to note congregation anniversaries.

The assembly also honored those who are retiring from ordained ministry.

Pr. Pete Erickson, pastor at Our Savior’s Lutheran in Columbia Falls was given the Spirit of Hope award. He received the award for his leadership during “a time of transition” for the Montana Association of Christians. He worked with MAC for many years including serving as Treasurer, President, and Past President.

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| Montana Synod, ELCA | **6/3/2017** | [Edition 1, Volume 1] |

Montana

“THE CHURCH IS THE ASSEMBLY OF EVERY SEEKING SOUL.” - Gordon Lathrop

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS: Dr. Michael Trice

# Reconciled to God

Vocation and Voice share the same Latin root. What we do is always evident in who we say we are. Just like in the first century climate we all now have to be witnesses, voices of unity that exist in the disunity that existed then and exists now.

The church is the assembly of every seeking soul. (Gordon Lathrop). This brings to mind the first Pentecost when the early Christians were inspired by the breath of God, that blew through that assembly of seeking souls. At that time, life had changed and suddenly they were speaking languages not their own.

Pentecost reminds us of who we are as an assembly of seeking souls and how we discover anew the language of God and grace.

**Unity in the World**: there have been huge changes in our country and our world. There are seismic changes and we need to talk about them in our ministries. In addition to this, we are preparing for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Can what we bring as Lutherans be a gift to the world? To address this disunity?

Fact: After WWII, 1 out of 5 Lutherans in the world were displaced. This resulted in the formation of varying organizations such as the Lutheran World Federation and the United Nations (among others.) These were formed so people could have trust in the world. Trust that people were working for unity.

Story:

Luther talked of the Potter and the Clay. God is the Potter, we are the Clay. God shapes us, the Clay, for connection, for unity, for koinonia. The artist’s capacity to shape clay is identical to the what is emerging. The artist loves what the artist is creating.

God sees us as whole, as unified and one. It’s a story of unity. But there is also a story of disunity. We can see God’s deepest love in our fractures, in our disunity. Already, in the second Chapter of Genesis, we see a staggering display of disunity, one brother killing another. Abel and Cain. The covenant between them was broken.

But nothing can separate us from God. (Unity does not mean uniformity.) Christians disagree with each other ardently right now and yet, unity is already ours in Christ. We are all already members of the one body. We are not uniform, but we are all members of the body of Christ.

And we can work for reconciliation.

Scripture:

Every year the World Council of Churches comprised of 150 different countries, asks one region to provide scripture around unity.

This year, one of these provided scriptures is 2 Corinthians 5: 11-21 in which Paul is appealing to the idea of koinonia. Reconciliation and unity in fellowship. This term is one of the oldest in Christian vocabulary. How we are one, while on a pilgrimage that can take place in the valleys of the world. Reconciliation and unity is messy and complicated, this is true in our families, our congregations, our states, country and world.

This early usage of the language of koinonia has arced over time and events that Paul could not have imagined.

But unity can always arise from a place of disunity and failure. Seeing one another through God’s eyes as the unbroken clay jar. Through the brokenness of ourselves, God can make an appeal. Unity requires forgiveness.

Another scripture for the year is the Luke story of the prodigal child.

What if we read this story in a different way? From the Orthodox Christian belief that our connection with others is of utmost importance. Being disconnected means one’s humanity is disappearing. Our humanity is dependent upon our connection.

The prodigal child is the story of our returning to relationship, reclaiming our humanity together right now.

The assembly was then asked to share the facts, stories and scriptures that speak to us, that we use to shape a vision of unity, especially right now.

After the keynote address the assembly returned to business and greetings.

Bishop Crist gave a Bishop’s report, saying this is the 30th Montana Synod assembly. She told the assembly that our theme this year comes from one of the five synod benchmarks.

“Promote Unity” Only two words but those two words expand. When we came up with these benchmarks, we knew that promoting unity would be important. This has become even more important as the election process has divided our country.

The Apostle Paul talked about reconciliation. The church can and should be a place where people with different points of view can come together and listen to one another. As a result, our church has become deeply involved in ecumenism.

The 500th Anniversary has also become an opportunity for reconciliation. Our synod website has a whole section of resources for use in congregations, there are also resources on the ELCA website. Bishop Crist noted that we now have relationships with Catholics and high level Lutheran-Catholic dialogue.

Recommended books for use in study and congregational conversation:

* *From Conflict to Communion*
* *One Hope: Remembering the body of Christ*
* *The Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry and Eucharist*

Bishop Crist asked assembly participants to let the synod office know what is being planned in congregations to celebrate the 500th anniversary.

Next Bishop Crist gave an update on last year’s assembly, especially the passing of the

“Memorial Repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery” and then asking the churchwide assembly to do likewise. After some debate, the churchwide assembly did pass the memorial overwhelmingly.

Not long after the assembly, Standing Rock” became a household word. This became a large protest, the largest gathering of indigenous people ever recorded in this country.

What is the church’s interest in this? What business do we have there? The answer is simple, we made a decision at the church-wide assembly to stand with others for justice, this was a consequence of adopting the repudiation of the doctrine of discovery.

Bishop Crist said it is getting harder to find pastors. We have about half the number of seminarians that we did when Bishop Crist attended seminary. There has been a great cultural shift and seminary enrollment is down. Also, a number of congregations feel they can’t afford a full-time pastor.

Now, Bishop Eaton is starting a push for congregations to identify leaders. Synods are intentionally targeting younger people and looking to the next generation. There is also a push to help more students financially. The Montana Synod has a Fund for Leaders Scholarship toward this end, as well as a loan repayment fund. The synod can pay one month’s loan payment per year for each pastor with seminary debt who applies.

Bishop Crist also lifted up pastors who serve other denominations and yoked parishes as well as the many LPAs who are serving in Montana. Leadership is not just about pastors, it is about all of us, making connections between church and world.

Bishop Crist has spent the past year talking about our church social statements in the synod newsletter. These conversations are archived on the synod website.

The mission house build site is being prepared. The assembly is invited to a free lunch today at the site to see and learn more.

Last, the Bishop thanked the Synod staff for their good work that benefits the whole synod. She also thanked the synod council for their volunteer time.

After the Bishop’s report, the assembly received greetings from both Luther Seminary and PLTS/CLU. Both are working to encourage more student enrollment. Both are extremely grateful for the support from synods and congregations.

PLTS has recently moved to a new location, sad to say goodbye to their campus but needing to react to changing situations. They have now moved to downtown Berkeley.

Everyone is welcome to come and visit.

Both seminaries encouraged congregations to keep sending their leaders.

We also received greetings from the Mission Investment Fund and the ELCA Foundation. These organizations can help congregations in many ways. Visit their websites or contact them to learn more about resources they offer.

The Mission Builders will be working on the synod house this summer and they asked for help. They can use everybody with any ability, no experience necessary. Jim Dyess is the manager of the Mission Build project.

After these greetings, assembly participants were invited to a free lunch at the synod house site.

The assembly resumed at 2:30 pm for another keynote address by Dr. Michael Trice.

KEYNOTE: RECONCILED TO THE WORLD: A LUTHERAN APP

As Lutherans we have now experienced 500 years of stories. All those who went before us tell 500 years of stories.

This year we mark the half millennium and true to our theology we live in the “both” and the “and.” Both on the journey toward unity and living within disunity.

We need a Lutheran app to help us think about what we can bring to the world. An i phone is not a phone, it is a window to interpreting the world. It’s a medium to allowing access to everything, everywhere. The apps on the phone are the story. The Lutheran app is the story we bring as Lutherans to that interpretation of the world.

If we had an app, what would we include in the app? What do we believe are the features of our Lutheran identity in the world today?

1. We are a people who believe in the gift of hope as a response to a world of fear.
2. We live the gift of the gospel in a world bound by law.
3. We believe in the gift of abundance in the world of scarcity.
4. We believe in the gift of reconciliation in a world of division.

Let’s put our voices into our vocations as we seek the unity that God sees in us.

At this point Dr. Trice asked the group to talk in twos and threes and discuss what is the core of Lutheranism. What should be the core of this app? Some answers:

Love/saint and sinner/resilience/thinking about creating doors instead of building walls/uplifts all/we are able to recognize that this is God’s mission, God’s activity/Jesus walks through walls

We ended with the words from Luther’s hymn for Pentecost.

The group was dismissed to participate in a variety of workshops, followed by the evening banquet.