

Synod Summary
Friday, May 31st

Bishop Jessica Crist opened the 2019 Montana Synod Assembly with a responsive reading and prayer.

Introductions:

The synod council and the staff of the Montana Synod. Bishop Crist introduced the parliamentarian and the church-wide representative Rev. Philip Hirsch head of ELCA Domestic Mission, ELCA Region 1 Church Council representative John Lohrmann, Bishop Shelley Wickstrom, Bishop Kristen Kuempel and visitors from the Cape Orange Diocese, South Africa Bishop Motsamai Zachariah Manong, and Rev. Adam Tlaisego Khunou, Rev. Dr. Laurie Jungling, Bible Study leader. Bishop Crist thanked those who are helping with music, power points, and technology and sound. She welcomed new pastors to the synod and new interns.

The secretary of the Montana Synod, Rev. Amanda Liggett, presented her report, directing the assembly to her printed statement in the reports book. She shared a letter of greeting from the Allegheny Synod. Rev. Liggett reviewed the minutes of the 2018 Montana Synod Assembly. The minutes are available on the Assembly website, and links have been sent out in the weekly synod newsletter.

The treasurer, Sue Ost, made a report and presented the budget. The 2019 and 2020 budgets reflect projected giving from congregations. Giving is down and the first three months of 2019 have been the lowest since 2001. There has been encouragement from the synod towards individuals and congregants to encourage giving. The treasurer shared that gifts to the Montana Synod ministry partners were reduced by 5%, but the budget for travel decreasing costs with the new synod building and its technological capabilities. Also, cash reserves helped with budgeting. She shared that the Montana Synod constitution requires that we keep a cash reserve for situations like this. Agreement to revise the 2019 budget to decrease the expected Mission Support has led to discussion to reduce the budget again for 2020. Many organizations receive support from the Montana Synod, and they are very grateful. Our expenses are within the budget for now, and the Montana Synod just completed an audit successfully through an independent accounting firm. The review revealed that the Montana Synod is financially sound. Sue Ost gave a presentation about the budget including where some of the monies go within the synod office, within the Montana Synod and out into the state, country and the world as a whole. The assembly will vote on the 2020 budget on Sunday.

Rev. Philip Hirsch addressed the assembly with a report and greeting from the ELCA Churchwide office in Chicago. Rev. Hirsch is the head of ELCA Domestic Mission. He shared the importance of mission in the United States and asked, what does this look like for us here in Montana and Wyoming. He gave credit to the work that is being done here in the Montana Synod with the indigenous populations, prison population, and the impoverished working class. He then began to explain the ecclesiastical ballot and how this works for a

Bishop election. He described how there is no campaigning and that they need a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote for it to be approved. This portion closed with a prayer.

The Plenary I session opened with Rev. Hirsch, Vice-President of synod council Dick Deschamps and Bishop Crist all taking turns to explain the nominating process for bishop, synod council, and other synod committees. Biographies of nominees have been available on the synod website and in the assembly packets. Bishop Crist took additional nominations and then voting members voted for their nominations in the first ballot voting for both the office of the bishop and offices other than the bishop. The vote is completed and taken for counting. They will announce the results later in Plenary II.

Bishop Crist's Report:

Bishop Crist started by welcoming everyone and explaining how this meeting is unique as it is a Bishop election and she will be retiring, so this is her last report as Bishop. She reported on the new synod headquarters as being green and how it has diverse space open to all, tech ready, energy efficient, zoom, Skype, and telephone. She explained that although the synod staff are still out on the road weekly preaching and working the new building is saving money on the travel budget with large screens and adequate space for meetings. She shared how the Chapel in the new building is a small, quiet, place for contemplation and prayer. They have people from the city of Great Falls who see the building from the outside and want to come in as they are curious about the facility.

Bishop Crist then acknowledged the loss of synod council President Tom Gossack in January. Tom had been the vice-president of the synod council and a dedicated advocate for the success of the synod. She spoke up how the new Lay Pastoral Associate (LPA) 2.0 program is growing, and a new program will be starting in Sidney, Montana in Fall 2019. Bishop Crist then shared about various growing ministries within the Montana Synod such as the Spirit of Life bike shop on the Fort Peck reservation out in Eastern Montana. She also spoke of a growing ministry in Missoula. She described how the Montana Synod is unique in that it has the balance of both urban and rural ministries and the population of the church is declining, but supply and demand are changing. She congratulated the 125+ ELCA congregations that were holding steady in the synod and congratulated the newest congregations. She shared the success of the Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) option for potential leaders in the synod. The success of the synod's partnership with the Bolivian Lutheran Church has helped them consider implementing an LPA program. She welcomed our guests from the Cape Orange Diocese from South Africa. The Cape Orange Diocese is the Montana Synod's companion synod. She updated everyone on the success of both the Wyoming and Montana Association of Christians (WAC and MAC). She shared the WAC and MAC's success in advocating for prisoner's rights and taking away the death penalty. Bishop Crist shared the success and continued support of the Sexism, Faith and Woman document, inter-religious commitments and the resolution on the Doctrine of Discovery. Churchwide still hasn't engaged with the Montana Synod's resolution on the Doctrine of Discovery, and the disappointment in this considering Native Americans are the largest minority in the state of Montana. The non-engagement negatively affects the Montana Synod's ability to continue Christ's work in advocating for the poor and disenfranchised. Bishop

Crist encouraged attendees to remind their ELCA sisters and brothers of this unfinished business.

- *12 years highlights from Bishop Crist's time as leader of the Montana Synod*
 - New Synod building
 - Congregations: 4 new congregations (All Saints, Freedom of Christ, New Hope, Spirit of Life (Fort Peck))
 - Congregations: 6 closed,
 - Full communion agreements (UCC, UMC, Presbyterian, Episcopal)
 - Reformation, Doctrine of Justification, Catholic-Lutheran Helena Cathedral joint worship
 - Reaffirmed 1995 agreement with the Association of Montana Jewish communities
 - Indigenous neighbors; 2010 (apology to the tribes, committed to taking it to the tribes, still working on this)
 - Synod identity: practicing word and sacrament, ownership of the church, savoring learning, looking outward not inward, listening post pleased: with synod staff, candidacy. Frustrated: economy, jobs, and low membership.
- *Meet the Future Boldly, Deep in Faith in Witness, Support Global Mission*
 - Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp (counselor from Cape Orange Diocese)
 - Pastor Hermon ordained in Bolivia in April 2019
 - Region 1 governing council does not exist
 - MAC WAC (Montana Association of Churches (now Christians), (same with Wyoming)
 - LPA programs (a gem in the synod) encourage people to continue this work. People from another synod came to Montana Synod to see how we do it
 - Office operations: 12 years ago- paper newsletters move to email, now all digital and weekly, staff in the office to help with tech,
 - Camps still exist but changed, campus ministry exists but changed, social ministry organizations, same-sex marriage pastors.
 - Four social statements: education, human sexuality, genetics, criminal justice (faith, sexism, and justice)
- *Looking Ahead: 31 years ELCA*
 - We are called to meet the future boldly
 - Hopes for the church: 2020 50th anniversary for the ordination of women in the ELCA
 - Largest mainline Protestant group in Montana (our voice matters)
 - Beyond partisan decisiveness
 - Risks for the sake of the gospel
 - Interconnectedness, accompaniment
 - White church in Indian country - (come to terms with the genocide of Native peoples)
 - Young people voices are needed moving forward

- *Conclusion:* Thankful to have served the Montana synod for 12 years, thanks to everyone in attendance for their support.

Following the Bishop's report Synod Council member John Sheppard gives a detailed report of the nominating committee and how the process will work moving forward with the bishop election and the second ballot. He explains the ballot for positions other than bishop and that the nomination for this have been taken and will be voted on tonight in the Plenary II session. Fifteen people nominated for the various openings for office other than bishop such as president, treasurer, region representative in the first ballot. The assembly disperses for supper, to convene again at 7:00 p.m.

Plenary Session II opens as the assembly returns to hear the results of the first ballot at 7:00 p.m. The votes reported for both the bishop election initial vote which produced 43 candidates for the office of the bishop. The results of those running for any office other than the bishop the winning candidates were assigned their positions, and this part of the voting process closed. There are no further ballots needed for offices other than the bishop. Credentials reported a total of 248 ballots recorded. It was then explained that out of the 43 possible candidates those who wanted to withdraw from the next voting session of Bishop needed to do so before the end of the night, or tomorrow morning between 7:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m.

The plenary session closed and Bishop Crist begins to report various milestones, retirements, and achievements of leaders within the synod. The night ends with a worship service.