

**2003 ASSEMBLY MINUTES  
PLENARY SESSION THREE**

Saturday, May 17, 2003  
8:30 AM

Bishop Strobel called the session to order and introduced Secretary Taylor to open with prayer. The bishop presented gifts representing the various areas of the synod to Bishop Berg and his wife.

Bishop Strobel then called upon Pastor Michael Bodnyk for the report of the results of the first ballot. Those results were as follows:

For Synod Council (Clergy):

Number of votes cast: 577

Number of Illegal votes: 0

Number of legal votes: 577

Number Needed to Elect: 289

Donald Hayn - 425

Carl Werner - 152

Bishop Strobel declared Donald Hayn elected.

For Synod Council (Lay Male):

Number of votes cast: 564

Number of illegal votes: 1

Number of legal votes: 563

Number Needed to Elect: 282

Edward Cool - 101

John Szabo - 152

Lloyd Wertz - 310

Bishop Strobel declared Lloyd Wertz elected.

The fiftieth anniversary video of Pastor Arthur Kleintop was shown.

Pastor Paul Braden presented the 2004 Compensation Guidelines for clergy and for rostered lay leaders. Pastor John Pearson asked that the compensation guidelines for supply pastors be included with the compensation guidelines. Bishop Strobel asked for discussion, called for the vote, and the resolution was adopted.

Pastor Woody Maxon presented the report of the Witness and Service team.

Pastor Kurt Garbe and Pastor Carl Filer presented the report of the Companion Synod Committee for the South-Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

The bishop introduced those who are completing their SALM training:

- Robert Billig Jr.
- William Dimmich
- Martin Everhart
- Stephen Moosch
- Martha Hawk-Nagle
- Christopher Rothharpt
- Joseph Tacker
- Emma Weaver
- John Ziegler

Stephen Moosch presented to Bishop Strobel a specially-designed cross from the class.

Bishop Strobel invited the candidates for roster status to come forward. One candidate has already been ordained and has begun her ministry. She is Pastor Jeanne Beadle. Dawn Richie from this synod will be ordained next month.

The bishop introduced the rostered leaders received by transfer from other synods since the last assembly:

- Robert G. Argot, Allegheny Synod
- E. Robert Burkhart, East Central Synod of Wisconsin
- Mark Crozier-Christy, Southeastern Pennsylvania
- Christian D. Eichorn, North Carolina Synod
- Kenneth C. Haubert, Southeastern Pennsylvania
- Douglas S. McKeeby, Lower Susquehanna Synod
- Richard W. Schoenleber, Southwest Pennsylvania
- Jack A. Seltzer, Southeastern Pennsylvania

Bishop Strobel presented the pastors who retired since the last assembly:

- Judith B. Helm
- Thomas J. Keener
- Eddie A. Nilsen
- Deborah M. Wagner
- David J. Wartluft

Pastor David Rowe presented the first report of the Committee on Reference and Counsel.

I. The committee has received the following resolutions concerning gambling:

A. Received from Pastor Glenn Simmons and Pastor Jim Wolford:

WHEREAS, the Northeastern PA Synod has repeatedly expressed its opposition to the expansion of gambling in Pennsylvania,

WHEREAS, the legislature of the Commonwealth of PA is currently considering legislation which would permit the introduction of slot machines at PA horse race tracks,

WHEREAS, some Native American tribes are seeking access to land in PA on which to build a casino,

**RESOLVED, that this Synod, gathered in Assembly, reiterate its continuing opposition to the expansion of current and new gambling opportunities in PA,**

**THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that members of NEPS congregations be encouraged to contact their PA legislator and the Governor to express opposition to any expansion of gambling.**

B. Received from Alan C. Rosenbaum, St. John, Wilkes-Barre:

**RESOLVED, that members of congregations be encouraged to write and call politicians to stop expanded gambling, including slot machines in PA.**

The committee recommends the adoption of the first resolution. Following discussion, it was adopted.

II. The committee received the following resolution from Pastor Carl Shankweiler:

WHEREAS, from the year 1970 to the year 2000 the baptized membership of our synod declined from 211,744 to 165,440, a drop of 46,304 persons or 22 percent, and

WHEREAS, in that same period the confirmed membership declined from 153,336 to 121,170, a drop of 32,166 persons or 21 percent; and

WHEREAS, from year to year from 1970 to 2000 there was always a drop in our baptized membership except for the period 1975 to 1976, when there was an increase of only 63 persons, showing that for us membership decline is not an occasional fluke or the fault of any one congregation, pastor, bishop, staff member, or committee, but a well-established part of our church life; and

WHEREAS, the quip of the Rev. Curtis Olson, a former Lutheran Church in America deployed staff member for evangelism, continues to hold true, i.e., that “the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod was never so large as on the day it was founded”; and

WHEREAS, if that same rate of losing 46,304 baptized members per thirty year period continues, the last Lutheran in Northeastern Pennsylvania will expire, resign, or move on March 9, 2107 (cf. Daniel 12:11-13), which is only slightly more than 100 years from now; and

WHEREAS, other curious religious groups before us have come down to their last members (such as the “last of the celebrates—two unmarried Sisters” who died in 1813 at the Ephrata Cloister; the Harmonists at Ambridge, Pennsylvania, of whom the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission states, “their economic vitality, like their membership waned. . . . In 1905 the Society was dissolved”; and the Shakers, about whom Winthrop Hudson writes, “Although the communities remained prosperous, a steady decline in numbers had set in by 1850. A century later only a handful of elderly men and women remained”), and so there is a precedent of becoming nothing more than fodder for museums and history books—a precedent that we may not want to share; and

WHEREAS, during the past thirty years we have heard many reasons for this decline: the boats bringing Lutheran immigrants stopped coming, American Lutherans discovered The Pill, it’s only the effect of roll cleaning, the conservative churches are growing because Americans are seeking escape from the 1960s-Vietnam War-Watergate era, the demographic changes in Northeastern Pennsylvania are working against us, we Lutherans do not know how to witness effectively, we are too

theologically correct and pure to learn from denominations that are growing, we are too liturgical (or too un-liturgical), we are too middle class, we are too intellectual (or too removed from contemporary thought), we do not start enough new congregations, we have too many congregations with an anti-growth/anti-change mentality, we have too many introverted clergy, etc., etc.; and

WHEREAS, the consulting firm of Pollyanna, Ostrich, and Pride has repeatedly told us that all we need to do is remain positive and hopeful and our future will be bright because “this is the synod of the Lord, the synod of the Lord, the synod of the Lord” (cf. Jeremiah 7:4); and

WHEREAS, our decline has been occurring during periods when some areas of our synod have seen general population growth and when there have been periods of strong religious interest in our American culture; and

WHEREAS, the real reasons for our pattern of decline need to be known before we can plan effectively for growth, if such is desired, and/or witness more effectively to the Gospel (which should be our real motivation and concern), and

WHEREAS, I do not know the solution to this problem (otherwise I would reveal that answer in church growth workshops, turning a tidy profit, rather than sit home and write resolutions) and, given our track record, I have no confidence that anyone else knows the solution either;

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the bishop of the synod be requested to establish a task force of open-minded, research-oriented persons holding diverse opinions and styles to investigate the true reasons for our synod’s ongoing decline in membership and suggest steps that would make our witness more effective and/or of forward-looking antiquarians and liturgists who can develop an appropriate liturgical rite with no responses for congregational participation to use when the last Lutheran in Northeastern Pennsylvania turns out the lights in Wescosville on March 9, 2107.**

The committee recommends the adoption of the following substitute.

WHEREAS, the congregations of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod have experienced a steady decline in membership over the last thirty years, and

WHEREAS, Bishop Kress has reminded us this weekend of the pain of a society in which people have forgotten that they have forgotten God, and

WHEREAS, the ELCA Church Council has recommended for adoption by the 2003 Churchwide Assembly an evangelism strategy. “Sharing Faith in a New Century: A Vision for Evangelism in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,”

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod in assembly affirms the objectives of the ELCA evangelism strategy, and urges its congregations to commit themselves to these objectives:**

- **Pray for the renewal of this church**
- **Prepare and renew evangelical leaders**
- **Teach discipleship**
- **Start and renew congregations**

The substitute was adopted.

III. The committee received the following resolution from Pastor Arthur B. Wyse, Pastor Keith Rohrbach, Pastor Steve Belinski, Pastor Bruce G. Osterhout, Pastor Eckhard H. Grimm, Pastor Robert G. Kaltenbaugh, Pastor Carol B. Kehler, Pastor Jay A. Serafin, Pastor Byard J. Ebling, Pastor Charles E. Fair, Pastor Eleanor J. Beadle, Deborah Matern Graf, AIM

WHEREAS, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod is in partnership with Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations and organizations that provide Advocacy Ministry on behalf of all Lutherans in our synod territory, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and

WHEREAS, both kinds of organizations do valuable ministry on our behalf, and

WHEREAS, when one of these partner organizations takes unilateral actions without consultation that could directly affect the budget of another partner ministry, it directly affects the ministry of this Synod;

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Synod Council of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod be authorized to direct Synod support money from the organizations taking unilateral action and give the same amount to the aggrieved organization,**

**AND, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that here-to-for all partner social ministry organizations take no unilateral action that directly effects the budgets of other Social Ministry Organizations, other Lutheran organizations and congregations without appropriate consultation with all parties including this Synod.**

The committee recommends the following substitute for adoption:

WHEREAS, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod appreciates and affirms the gifts and mission of both its Social Ministry Organizations (Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries, Lutheran Congregational Services, and the Good Shepherd Rehabilitation Hospital) and the Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania, and

WHEREAS, the synod does not have the authority to directly instruct Social Ministry Organizations, but certainly can encourage and urge, and

WHEREAS, both service and advocacy are essential to the public witness of the Church of Jesus Christ, and

WHEREAS, Social Ministry Organizations often need a voice to lobby for their ministries, and the church always needs to do advocacy by giving voice to the powerless, and

WHEREAS, ministry partners need to be mutually supportive and in conversation concerning matters of mission and funding;

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod in assembly urges its Social Ministry Organizations to be in conversation with the Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania, and**

**BE IT RESOLVED, that the secretary of the synod write a letter to each Social Ministry Organization on the synod territory declaring its support for advocacy, and seeking a similar spirit in each of them, and**

**BE IT RESOLVED, that the Bishop in either his annual consultation or special conversations with the Organizations, lift up the importance of advocacy, and**

**FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Synod Council be encouraged to consider shifting funding to give adequate support to both Social Ministry Organizations and Advocacy.**

After discussion, the substitute resolution was adopted.

The bishop announced that the Service of Healing would immediately follow this session. After worship, members will go to forums and to lunch. The assembly will reconvene at 2 PM. Secretary Taylor gave announcements.

The Service of Healing followed, with Bishop Robert Berg preaching. In his sermon he said:

Meeting under the assembly theme “Making Christ Known: For the Healing of the World”, we have come now to a healing service and a time to reflect on John, chapter 5, verses 2-9.

In our text we find Jesus in Jerusalem for a festival gathering of the Jews. He had come from Cana in Galilee where sometime earlier he had changed water into wine at a wedding celebration. During his most recent time in Cana he had been approached by a royal official from Capernaum whose son was dying. He asked Jesus to come and heal his son. Jesus, rather than going, simply told the man his son would live. The official believed Jesus’ words and

started back home. His servants met him on the way and told him the good news that his son was OK. Then together they concluded that the man’s son had been miraculously healed exactly at the time Jesus told him his son would live. John tells us this was the second sign Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Once in Jerusalem, Jesus found his way to Bethzatha Pool. It was an interesting place. Beneath the pool was a subterranean stream, which on occasion bubbled up and stirred the waters. Belief had it that this periodic disturbance was caused by an angel, and that when it happened, the first person to enter the

water would be healed from whatever ailed the person. Because of his condition, the man simply could not be the first one in. He explained all this to Jesus, and our Lord responded by telling the man to stand up, pick up his mat, and walk. He did, and was healed. Imagine the joy that must have been felt by this man who had been ill for 38 years. He had experienced the healing power of Jesus, and did not have to rely on the somewhat suspect healing power of the pool.

Miraculous healings were a part of Jesus' ministry. Many people in many towns were healed, but Jesus did not heal every person in every town. As important as his healings were to the people healed, they had even deeper and more profound meaning. They were, as John says, signs. They were signs of who Jesus was, and they pointed to a healing not just for individuals and whatever ailed them, but to a greater healing for the world.

John the Baptist referenced that healing as recorded in the first chapter of the Gospel of John when he first saw Jesus. *"Here is the Lamb of God,"* he said, *"who takes away the sin of the world."* Jesus, himself, speaks of it in verses 16 and 17 of John, chapter 3: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*

The greater healing Jesus came to do was to be a miraculous healing of the world. God saw a world in need of healing, and in Christ Jesus God came into the world to do for the world what it could not do for itself. God saw a world broken with sin, in need of healing, and sent his only Son, Jesus, to do

something about it. It is a healing that leads not only to an abundant life in this world, but also to eternal life.

Knowing that Jesus came to bring healing to the world, do we continue to ask God for specific physical and emotional healing, for healing of broken relationships, for healing of the earth, and a host of other healings? Yes, we do, and when those healings come, we thank God. But believing in Jesus, knowing the love God has for the world, our eyes are opened and we come to understand how important it is for the world to hear the story of God's love, forgiveness and new life in Jesus. And yes, God's world, the world in which we live is still in need of healing. It is that state Bishop Stobel referred to: already, but not yet. This week alone, with bombings in Chechnya and Saudi Arabia, the cities of Seattle and Chicago going through terrorist attack rehearsals, continued unrest in Iraq and the Holy Lands, and even in the somewhat remote, quiet, and safe context of the county of Wisconsin where I live, 3 raids conducted on methamphetamine labs, are only bits and pieces of the fact that our world needs healing.

### **MAKING CHRIST KNOWN: FOR THE HEALING OF THE WORLD.**

The story of God's love in Jesus, the Christ, does have the power to bring healing to the world. He is the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world through his death on the cross for you, for me, and for the world. How Jesus lived and what Jesus taught are still today what the world needs for healing. And so as a people of God in God's world, we are called to tell the story, called to an evangelical life. We are called to be witness, each and every one of us as baptized Christians. That we should focus "the living out of our

lives of faith” on evangelism is what people of the ELCA said clearly in last year’s synod assembly conversations on strategic planning. And so, this year we had conversation around evangelism and how congregations are doing evangelism. We all have faith stories to share. We can learn from one another as we tell those stories, and we can invite people to lives of faith as we tell those stories. Prompted by his experience at two Global Mission Events and the Triennial Convention of the Women of the ELCA, Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson shares in a letter some words on evangelism. At those events where there were maybe 3,000 people he asked how many people had invited someone to church in the last month. The number of hands that went up he could count on the fingers of one of his hands. Bishop Hanson writes: *“Most of us have come to the faith because someone else has brought us. Many of us were brought to the font by our parents. Others were invited to Sunday School by a friend, or to church by a neighbor who was excited about what was happening there. You and I have an exciting story to tell and the good news of Jesus to share. What are we waiting for?”*

I want to close with a story about telling the story. One morning at 7:15 the phone rang. It was our older daughter, Missy, who had a question about something. After talking over the reason for her call, Missy said. “Oh, just a minute, Emma is in the back seat, and we’re here in town on the way to her first day of pre-school, and she wants to talk to you.” The cell phone was passed to the back seat and 3 ½ year old Emma came on. “Hi Grandpa. I’m going to school today.” “That’s wonderful, Emma”, I said, “You’re getting to be such a big girl.” Her response: “I’m almost as big as you now, Grandpa. I

have a dress on Grandpa, and I have a new back pack with school things in it.” “That’s great,” I said, “I’m sure you look pretty in your new dress, and those things you have in your backpack will be fun to use in school. I hope you have a wonderful day, Emma.” And then what seemed to be out of the blue and disconnected from our conversation, she said, “Grandpa, I tell people about Jesus.” I was caught a little off guard, but after a couple seconds, I said, “That’s wonderful, Emma. I am happy that you can tell other people about Jesus.” “Do you want to hear, Grandpa?” “Sure,” I said. And then she began to sing, “I’ve got peace like a river, I’ve got peace like a river, I’ve got peace like a river in my soul.” She continued on with the next two verses: I’ve got joy like a fountain, and I’ve got love like an ocean. Then she said, “Here’s mama.” Missy came on, and I asked about the change of topic in my conversation with Emma. How did we get from the first day of pre-school to “I tell people about Jesus.”? She laughed and said, “The pre-school is at the local Missouri Synod Church, and as we pulled into the parking lot, Emma noticed the church. The song is one she learned in our Sunday School.”

As Bishop Hanson wrote in his letter, “You and I have an exciting story to tell and the good news of Jesus to share.” It’s a story about peace, joy, and love. “What are we waiting for?”

What if ½ of the baptized members of this synod were intentional about inviting and encouraging just one other person to worship and be a part of a faith community. What would happen in our congregations? May we all look for opportunities to tell others about Jesus. May we learn to do that better from one another, even and especially folks, from the children among us.

May we sense in our hearts a renewed focus on evangelism, because it is a matter of the heart, it is about a conviction in us and among us that there is nothing (absolutely nothing) more important in life than faith in Jesus Christ. There are many things that are important, but nothing more important than faith in Jesus Christ.

How we speak about Jesus and live out our lives of faith does make a difference in the world. After all, as Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians, "...we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us...", an appeal to a world which still needs healing. Amen.