

***Minutes of the 2019 Assembly
Of the
Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod of the ELCA***

Date: May 17-18, 2019
Venue: Kinsmen Lutheran Church, Houston, Texas

Minutes

The 42nd Assembly of the TX-LA Gulf Coast Synod was called to order by Vice President Robert Rivera.

Pr. Tracey Breashears Schultz, our new Bishop's Associate, regaled us with the story of how she got from the parish to the Synod staff. At the end of her story, she announced "That is how the Holy Spirit works." She then challenged us to be ever mindful of always listening to the Holy Spirit.

We approved the Consent Agenda, which included the Standing Rules and the Assembly Agenda.

Pr. Wyvetta Bullock, the ELCA Churchwide representative, was introduced. She then walked us through the role of a bishop, noting that the constitutional provision setting forth the duties of a bishop was the longest provision in the Synod constitution. She followed that with an explanation of the ecclesiastical ballot. We then cast the First Ballots for Bishop.

We had nominations for six Synod Council positions and four positions each on the Discipline and Consultation Committees. Five of the Council nominees and all of the Committee nominees were running unopposed.

We heard from our Central African Republic (CAR) team.

We had the first of four wonderful and thought provoking keynote addresses from Peggy Hahn. She noted to us that we are called to be "church" in an ethnically diverse and gender fluid world, a world ever increasingly populated by folks who have no religious affiliation (the "nones"). She asked the question that would underlie the rest of her presentations: "What is God's dream for me and for my congregation?"

We heard about all the Mission Investment Fund is doing.

Kathy presented the audit results to the Assembly and moved the Assembly adopt that audit. The motion was passed.

The Peru Companion Synod team presented a report.

We heard from Carol regarding the first ballot of the bishop's election. There were 180 valid ballots. Bishop Mike received 145 votes which is more than the 75% needed for election. Pr. Bullock declared Michael Rinehart the winner and bishop of this synod for his third six-year term.

After a report of the Credentials Committee was received and accepted, the unopposed candidates were elected by acclamation. We then cast ballots for the open Synod Council position for Lay Female.

We heard from Dudley Piland, the Board Chair of Live On. Among the matters in that report was the wonderful news that Live On had fully funded all scholarship requests from seminarians this past year.

The Assembly was asked to address two sets of changes to the Synod's by-law, one presented by the Live On Board of Directors and the other by the Synod Council. All recommended amendments were approved.

Bishop Mike then gave us his report. What was rather sobering were the following facts. 1. A century ago, 2% of all Christians lived in Africa. Today, Africa is now 50% Christian. 50 million baptisms last year in Africa. At the current rate of growth, by 2025, 30-40% of all Christians will be African. 2. Christianity is growing in Korea with Christians accounting for 1/3 of all Koreans. 3. China is 10% Christian. More people worship on Sunday in China than in the U.S. 4. 460 million Christians in Asia by 2025. 5. In the U.S., 23% of our population says "no religion" which is the same percentage as those who say they are Catholic. 6. Twelve years ago, in our Synod, 1/2 of our congregations had worship attendance of 100 or less – today it is 2/3. 7. 20% of the U.S. population is in the 18-34 age group, but only 10% of our congregations represent that demographic. 8. Many Millennials (born 1984-1998) "view the church as...politically corrupt and morally hypocritical. After all, historically, the church marginalized women, support enslavement and subsequent extermination of native peoples, supported segregation..., often using the Bible to make their point." So, that is the challenge facing us, a difficult one, but not an impossible one.

The Election Committee reported that Julie Mulkey was elected to the Synod Council.

After receiving an updated report from the Credentials Committee, heard from the Reference and Counsel Committee, who presented to the Assembly one resolution and one memorial. The Assembly approved the resolution that our Synod would be an AMPARRO synod and too that we would memorialize the 2019 Churchwide Assembly to become a signatory to the Earth Charter.

Pr. Chris reported that the Town and Country Mission Society had replaced the Brenham Mission Society and was working on rural and small town missions.

Peggy returned for her second keynote address. She told us that “If I cannot be honest with myself, I cannot be honest with the church.” The discussion centered around two kinds of churches: the “nowhere else to go” church and the “no place I’d rather be” church.

Our second day began with a wonderful devotion based on Psalm 66:1-6. Led by Pr. Jen Kindsvatter, we explored both the order of God and the wonders of God.

Then Matt Kindsvatter, the Lutherhill Executive Director, provided many reasons which we all should avail ourselves of the marvelous opportunities at Lutherhill. He told us that last year over 5,000 people attended the variety of gatherings at Lutherhill, and more than 1,200 folks were guests at the Zion Retreat Center. The theme for this year’s camping season is “Be Someone”.

Peggy’s third keynote address included the statement that too many congregational leaders do not know how to measure success. She noted that counting \$ and # of butts in the pews is not the best metric for a spiritual community. She admonished the Assembly that shifting metrics is key to the future of the church, shifting from “lag” metrics (or matters that have already occurred and thus over which we have no control for change) to “lead” metrics (future occurring). One challenging note came from Kathy Patrick who opined that we are ashamed of even appearing to be vulnerable.

For the last time, we heard from Pr. Mindy Roll about the wonderful life at Treehouse campus ministry at Texas A&M and Blinn College. It was most gratifying to hear that there was a regular group of 65-70 students that are part of this ministry from Lutherans, to lapsed church goers, to “nones”. We they prayed for Mindy and her family as they embark on a year-long adventure in residence at Holden Village.

Pr. Bullock gave the ELCA report. The item that received the loudest applause was the news that ELCA World Hunger received \$23.5 million in donations last year, which is the largest single-year amount of donations in the history of ELCA World Hunger.

Pr. Tracey took us through the various elements of her new position and it is patently obvious that her enthusiasm for this new call is quite infectious. She presented the 2020 Clergy Compensation Guidelines, which the Assembly approved.

Peggy let us know that starting a movement requires first a public risk-taker and then the first follower. She then challenged us to start a movement.

The 2020 budget was approved.

Pr. Karin Liebster moved that “we do everything in our power (i) to end the use of Styrofoam; (ii) not to use #6 plastic; and (iii) to recycle.” This motion and seconded and then was approved by the Assembly.

In 2020, Mike observed that we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women and that our 2020 Assembly will be held on May 15-16, 2020, location TBD.

We closed with devotion led by Pr. Kari Niedermeier.

Respectfully submitted:

John Turnquist
Synod Secretary