

Miscellaneous Synod Assembly Highlights



The *Nebraska Synod Assembly* gave an offering for the Campaign for the ELCA, to be designated evenly between Renewing Congregations in Nebraska and the ELCA Fund for Leaders. The final amount of the offering will be reported once all of the contributions have been received.

The first annual *Nebraska Synod 5K Run* was held, attracting 66 runners and walkers, along with nine youth who participated in a one-mile fun run.

A *children's drama workshop* was held for ages 7-13 that gave the youth involved the opportunity to put together and perform a drama for the Night of the Arts program.

More than **50 prayer shawls** were made by Assembly participants for ELCA seminarians.

Youth Convo '14 was held simultaneously with the Synod Assembly, offering 25 young people a chance to participate in Assembly sessions and workshops as well as enjoy specially designed programming.



The Assembly debated and **approved two resolutions**:

- *Resolution 2*, offered by several members, urges parishes to embrace and involve people with various disabilities and designates the month of March as Disability Ministry Awareness Month within the Nebraska Synod.
- *Resolution 3*, offered by the Synod Justice Committee, encourages congregations to enter creatively into ministry with those incarcerated in hopes of reducing recidivism.

Three other resolutions were offered. One was ruled out of order and the other two, both of which were filed after the 90-day deadline, were not debated due to the expiration of time for consideration of resolutions.

The Assembly **adopted a preliminary Synod budget for 2015**.

The *Assembly elected individuals to fill various vacancies* on Synod Council, the Discipline Committee and the Consultation Committee.

Bishop Maas announced that the **2015 Nebraska Synod Assembly will be held May 28-30, 2015**, at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney.

Your feedback is valuable to us. If you attended the Nebraska Synod Assembly, please take the online feedback survey. To do so, go to:

<http://www.nebraskasynod.org/assembly/survey>

Contributors: Amanda White and LaRayne Topp. Photography: Lyle Fodnes and Bob Oleson.

YOUR NEBRASKA *lutheran*

SPECIAL EDITION:

2014 NEBRASKA SYNOD ASSEMBLY

Bishop Brian Maas: "It's not complicated..."

Proud to be part of a church that "makes things, not takes things"

Keeping with the 2014 Synod Assembly's focus on baptismal identity, Bishop Brian Maas reminded the nearly 800 participants that they have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.



Bishop Brian Maas

"That's a piece of permanency and one of the greatest gifts we have to share with the world," he said. "That identity is ours because of God's love."

Encouraging everyone to examine their gifts, the bishop asked Assembly members help the Synod in a process of strategic visioning - asking ourselves what God asks us to do and determining how we will respond. A vital congregation results from focusing on our impact in communities as well as in the lives of members, he said.

The benefits of that outreach are expanded when partnering with the church's serving arms.

"Lutherans are responsible for providing more care to people than any other group in the state," Bishop Maas said. "By the time you hear of a disaster that has taken place, your church - through its exceptional disaster relief ministry - is already on the way to help."

The bishop noted that he's proud to be part of a church that "makes things, rather than takes things." Groups outside the ELCA look for congregations in which they can create divisions and dissent.

"It's not complicated," he said. "Jesus called us to make disciples, not take disciples. We are those who make things, through whom God works to make things."

A challenge currently facing the Synod is that one in seven Nebraska ELCA churches is in the middle of a call process.

"We continue to recruit the best pastors," he said. However, the bishop encouraged more conversation about utilizing lay leaders, such as Parish Ministry Associates, to do some of the work now completed by pastors.

"Think imaginatively," he said.

Paul Hoffman: “End, beginning, middle...”

Keynoter challenges congregations to “welcome the stranger”

The Rev. Paul Hoffman presented the Assembly’s three keynote addresses, reminding us that we are children of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and marked with the Cross of Christ.



Rev. Paul Hoffman

Hoffman most recently served as pastor at Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church in Seattle, Washington. Earlier in his ministry, he served at Sinai Lutheran Church in Fremont.

Hoffman said contemporary Christians expect their story of faith to include a beginning, middle and end. However, he used the story of the raising of Lazarus to stress that life with Jesus has a different order: end, beginning and middle.

“Christ has died; Christ has risen; Christ will come again,” Hoffman said. “End, beginning, middle. Until we’re willing to talk about death as a part of our lives in Christ, we can’t talk about Christ’s resurrection in our lives.”

Hoffman spoke of a woman who was welcomed into his congregation and baptized as an adult. An unchurched widow, the woman began to hear hope in the Gospel of Christ and to experience the comfort of a community of faith.

When the congregation was asked to provide space for some of Seattle’s homeless tent dwellers, some church members threatened to leave, expressing fear and concern. She, however, explained that if the congregation refused to reach out to those in need, she would have to leave the congregation.

“God sends us out in the thick of life to love and serve,” Hoffman said.

He said that as members “welcome the stranger” into the congregation, the congregation itself is transformed, fearing dying and change less, and appreciating our rising more, equipped to reach out to a world in need. We are all called and equipped to invite others to “come and see,” he said.

Hoffman also led the Assembly in a small group Bible study aimed at changing the leading question from “What does this text mean?” to “How is God speaking to me and to us in this text?” Such a question, he said, helps when engaging those who are new to the Christian faith.

The 2014 Nebraska Synod Assembly Planning Team

Chairpersons: Pastor Paula Lawhead, Pilger/Stanton; Pastor Sarah Ruch, Allen/Concord. Members: Steve Brown, Omaha; Jon Fredricks, Omaha; Day Hefner, Lincoln; Kari Hoeft, Lincoln; Pastor Bill Nelsen, Fremont; Makenzie Patrick, Fremont; Pastor Howard Rasmussen, Lincoln; Amanda White, Lincoln.

Barbara Berry-Bailey: “You are the hand of God that leads.”

Presiding Bishop Eaton: “We are one church all across the nation.”

The Rev. Barbara Berry-Bailey represented ELCA Churchwide at the 2014 Synod Assembly, bringing greetings from Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton.



Rev. Barbara Berry-Bailey

“You are the hand of God that leads,” Berry-Bailey told those in attendance. She stressed the importance of the work the Nebraska Synod does to “do God’s work in this world.”

She shared a video featuring Bishop Eaton in which the ELCA leader discussed the good work of hidden ministries that help do the work of us all. Bishop Eaton said, “We are one church all across the nation.”

Berry-Bailey thanked the Nebraska Synod for the various ways in which it has shared God’s gifts with the world this past year, including more than \$531,000 given to ELCA World Hunger and \$193,079 to the ELCA Malaria Campaign.

Paul Oman: A Very Special Night of the Arts

Five people share personal faith stories amidst a backdrop of music

The 2014 Synod Assembly’s Night of the Arts was quite the artistic treat for the senses.

Pastor Paul Oman of Drawn to the Word Ministries treated Assembly goers to his artistic gifts by producing a painting depicting the story of the Ascension. A drawing at the end of the night sent the painting home with folks from First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Nebraska City.



Oman told the audience that his calling to arts ministry began after his career as a science teacher and his time as a parish pastor in Wisconsin. On Good Friday in 2006, he collaborated with his church’s music director to combine his painting with song to tell the story of the crucifixion.



Rev. Paul Oman

“Little did I know, from that event of about 35 people or so, that these doors would open up,” he said. “My hope is to bring the word of God to life and to make these stories live again.”

Oman now travels widely, painting Scripture stories in congregations all over, including a recent trip to China to share the Easter story.

The evening, hosted by Debbie Maas, also featured stories from several people offering their own personal faith stories and having songs tied to their identity in Christ performed for the crowd by Assembly music director Jen Hill and her ensemble of musicians.