

“God’s impossible story is all around us...”

Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber offered message during opening worship

The Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber from House for All Sinners and Saints opened the Assembly, focusing on the visit Mary made to Elizabeth after both experienced heavenly visits telling them of future motherhood.

Recalling a childhood visit to a Catholic friend, Bolz-Weber said Protestants aren’t sure what to do with Mary, tending to dust her off at Christmas time and including her with the family’s nativity set. She went on to tell of the common, peasant girl who lived out an impossible story, with few noticing her even though God was walking with her.



Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber

God’s impossible story is all around us, Bolz-Weber said, and we name the miracles as ordinary. Mary is disguised today in the people who come to need us and serve us.

Assembly passes Midland governance resolution

The 2013 Nebraska Synod Assembly voted overwhelmingly to adopt a resolution touting the need for a strong partnership between the church and Midland University and requesting that the college restore representation to the church in its governance structure.

Pastor Mike Ostrom of Lincoln, one of the resolution’s authors, said the school’s governing board failed to consult the Synod when it removed the Bishop and other formal representation from the board last year. Critics of the proposal noted the strong turnaround Midland has made under its current administration and questioned whether the church’s involvement would aid continued growth.

As amended, the resolution requests that Midland University include a seat on its board for the Bishop with voice and vote as well as involvement of the Synod in other advisory boards. The Bishop is charged with reporting the college’s response back to the 2014 Synod Assembly.

Contributors: Jim Muratore and LaRayne Topp. Photography: Lyle Fodnes and Bob Oleson.



YOUR NEBRASKA *lutheran*

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2013 NEBRASKA SYNOD ASSEMBLY

“We have a simple and deep truth to tell...”

Bishop Brian Maas addresses his first Synod Assembly

Putting on the full armor of God – St. Paul’s advice to Christians in Ephesus – was the theme of Bishop Brian Maas’ report to the 2013 Nebraska Synod Assembly.

As soldiers once put on breastplates and helmets, today’s Christians are invited to put on the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation to battle through the struggles in our own lives: selfishness, poverty, injustice and truth.



Bishop Brian Maas

“Truth demands we hold one another accountable and speak the truth in love,” the bishop said.

He challenged members of the 250 “friendly ELCA congregations in Nebraska” to also practice hospitality, proclaim the Gospel of peace by serving others and having one-on-one conversations about shared beliefs.

“We have a simple and deep truth to tell the Gospel of Christ in a shallow and complex world,” he said.

Bishop Maas encouraged engaging in Bible study, but not so that people can focus on how they disagree.

“Dissection is a great way to learn, but not for the frog,” he said. “The Bible is the same way.”

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Redefining religious and spiritual

Dr. Diana Butler Bass said spiritual climate change underway

Dr. Diana Butler Bass held up Martin Luther as an example of someone who brought adaptation to the spiritual climate of his day.



Dr. Diana Butler Bass

She said Pew Foundation statistics show the number of Christians in the U.S. has dropped from 97 percent to 75 percent over the past five decades.

“We are now a religiously pluralistic nation,” Butler Bass said. Protestants are no longer a majority group, something she called a “significant spiritual climate change.”

She suggested that the terms ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ have been redefined. The term *religion*, she said, no longer reminds people of institutions, but rather of organized religion. The meaning of the word *spirituality* has changed from a nontraditional religion to an experience connecting with oneself and the divine.

Today, Butler Bass concluded, the majority of people consider themselves both religious and spiritual, and not mutually exclusive. Life in the 21st Century begins with belonging, and leads believers to a place where they believe and love God, she said.

“The world and its questions have changed,” she said. “What you are going to do is up to you.”

Bishop: “We have a simple and deep truth to tell...”

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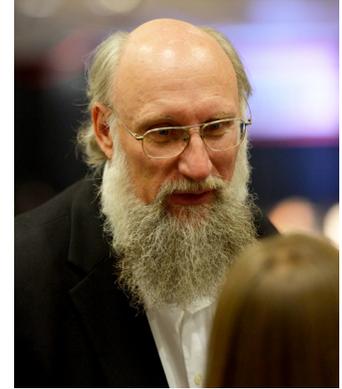
Bishop Maas spoke of a new opportunity for ELCA Lutherans in a recent invitation to be part of the Tri-Faith Initiative, a new worship and education campus under development in Omaha that will incorporate Christian, Jewish and Islamic faith centers. He also reminded participants that the Synod and its agencies provide more direct services to individuals in need than any other organization in the state.

“Mission is not only possible,” he said, “but inevitable.”

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ”

Dr. Craig Nesson led Assembly in Bible study

Dr. Craig Nesson presented the Assembly with a Bible study that keyed in on part of Romans 1:16, which says “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ...”



Dr. Craig Nesson

Nesson described God as an evangelizing and missionary God, one who created the world, its creatures and man as reflective of the love of God. Nesson also said God leads Christians to live in a life-giving relationship with God, each other, and all of creation.

If the ELCA is to be an evangelizing church, he said, all members, not just the pastors or the congregation’s evangelism committee, need to be equipped for speaking the Good News to others. According to Nesson, the best kept secret of the Reformation is the priesthood of all, found in an evangelizing church.

As baptized Christians claim their role as evangelizers, Nesson said, they can deliver a message for the life of the world to a world that is dying to hear it.

Assembly offering

The generosity of the Assembly was reflected in their gifts to two special offerings.

Preliminary counts indicate that the Assembly gave at least \$20,500 to the primary offering for the ELCA Malaria Campaign and their work in Tanzania. The Assembly also gave approximately \$8,500 to Lutheran Disaster Response to care for those affected by the recent tornadoes in Oklahoma and Missouri.

Milestones observed

The Synod Assembly celebrated two significant milestones.

The Assembly acknowledged the 25th anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with a celebration luncheon. The Assembly also observed the 20th anniversary of the Synod’s official relationship with the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, joined by several brothers and sisters in Christ from Tanzania.