



Compelled by  
the Love of Christ  
- II Corinthians 5:14

# 2009 Nebraska Synod Assembly Review

## ASSEMBLY HEADLINES

**Bishop Dave deFreese** challenged Assembly participants not to let fear govern them. **"Will we be different?"** he asked. He suggested congregations exit survival mode and focus on mission and ministry. He asked each mission center to send him a paragraph outlining its ministry to the poor.

**The Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale** asked participants, "What are you compelled by?" She reminded everyone that "God did not bring us here by accident. God brought us here by assignment." She also said **"it's not complicated"** because Christ gives us lessons of how we should walk with Him and love others.

**Rev. Michael Housholder** stressed unity in the church focused on the love of Jesus Christ. He cited surveys that demonstrate the challenges facing Christianity in America today. But he said, **"People are starving to hear about God's grace... Give them the word of God."**

A **"Sense of the Assembly"** survey on human sexuality indicated a split among participants regarding the church's view on same gender relationships. Similar division appeared to exist relative to the issue of rostering individuals involved in same gender relationships. Most notably, however, was **the tone of discussions surrounding the issue**, which by all accounts **was respectful and carried out in Christian love.**

The Assembly received an update on the **Synod's capital campaign**, which has **raised \$3.6 million of the \$7.5 million campaign target.** Much work is yet to be done as the campaign enters its second phase.

The Assembly unanimously adopted the 2009 and 2010 budgets, maintaining its **57 percent mission share with churchwide**, something in which the Nebraska Synod has been a proud leader on the national level.

The Assembly **adopted seven resolutions and rejected four**, three of which were related to the human sexuality issue.

The **2010 Synod Assembly** will be held June 4-5, 2010, at the Heartland Events Center in Grand Island. The theme will be **"Joy in the Journey."**



## Compelled by the love of Christ...

The 2009 Nebraska Synod Assembly, held June 5-7 at Midland Lutheran College in Fremont, will be remembered for being compelling... compelling speakers, compelling discussion and compelling its members to share the love of Christ with others.

The theme of this year's Assembly was "Compelled by the Love of Christ," taken from 2 Corinthians 5:14-15: "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and was raised again."

Assembly participants were challenged to go back to their communities and share the love of Christ. A "reverse offering" was held in which each participant was given five wooden coins to share with others at home. On the back of each coin was the address of a new web site launched by the Nebraska Synod to share inspirational stories of how others have been "Compelled by Christ." Others are invited to share their stories there as well. The site is located at <http://CompelledByChrist.org>.

In all, 635 voting members were in attendance when the Assembly began June 5.

Bishop Dave deFreese laid out the goals for the Assembly: to worship God, to deliberate carefully and thoughtfully, to learn from God's word, to be informed and to be transformed.



Bishop Dave deFreese

## Bishop Dave deFreese: "Will we be different?"

In his report to the Assembly, Bishop Dave deFreese raised several questions relative to the Assembly's theme of "Compelled by the Love of Christ."

- \* Will we be different?
- \* Does the love of Christ matter?
- \* Does it make a difference?
- \* What are we compelled to do?

The Bishop told the crowd about a local PTA organization that recently raised \$20,000 for school use. When the school principal approached the organization with a request for \$250 to help an underprivileged student to summer science camp to catch up on her studies, the request was met with much debate about tight economic times, and ultimately the request was rejected.

A young Lutheran mother at that PTA meeting stepped forward and offered to donate \$50 toward sending the girl to science camp. Soon after a teacher and others followed suit, and enough money was raised to send the student as well as two others to the camp.

Fears of the world often guide our decisions, but the question for the church is "Will we be different?" he asked.

The Bishop showed the now-famous video from the TV show "Britain's Got Talent" in which 47-year-old Susan Boyle, an unemployed woman who lives alone with her cat Pebbles, shocks the cynical audience with her vocal rendition of "I Dreamed a Dream" from Les Miserables.

"That was a Good Friday crowd," he said, referring to the TV show's audience.

Calling the performance "a modern morality play," Bishop deFreese said there is a lesson in that video for all; each of us is like Susan Boyle.

"God placed Susan Boyle here to sing," he said. "God uses ordinary people to surprise the world with beauty."

The Bishop said that too many church mission centers have lost sight or forgotten their purpose. He showed another video that challenged viewers to count the number of passes made by actors dressed in white, while other actors dressed in black did the same. By the end of the video, it became apparent that those who focused solely on the number of passes made missed a person dressed in a bear costume moonwalking through the scene.

Mission centers, he said, miss the opportunity for ministry when they are too focused on what the world wants them to pay attention to. Mission centers need to focus on seeking a need and meeting it with the love of our God, he said.

"Quit trying to survive... It's not what we're called to do... Mission and ministry is the lifeblood of what we do," Bishop deFreese said.

The Bishop asked Assembly participants to send him a single paragraph describing their mission center's effort in ministry with and among the poor.

Finally, the Bishop put a new twist on the old African-American preacher's saying, "It's Friday. But Sunday's coming."

The Bishop said we should consider what we will do to be compelled by the love of Christ after worship on Sunday.

"It's Sunday. But Monday's coming," he said.



## Feed the Roots... Grow the Forest / Synod Budget

Pastor Roger Sasse, chairman of the Feed the Roots... Grow the Forest Capital Campaign, gave the Assembly an update on the campaign's first-year progress.

Sasse said 167 congregations have pledged to the campaign. To date, approximately \$3.6 million of the campaign's \$7.5 million goal has been raised. He cited initiatives such as Operation IDEA, the Institute for Spiritual Direction, lay leadership conferences and Peace in the Parish as examples of what the campaign funding is able to do in helping move the ministry of the Synod forward.

Assembly members also gave their unanimous approval to the revised 2009 budget and the preliminary 2010 budget. Both budgets presented only minor changes to the previous budgets. Most notably, the budgets maintained the Synod's strong churchwide mission share level of 57 percent, widely acknowledged as among the highest nationally.



## Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale: "It's not complicated."

The Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale is a native of Roanoke, Virginia. She is the founding pastor of Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur, Georgia. The church has shown great growth and Hale has been recognized nationally.

Hale's dynamic speaking style sparked the assembly as she spoke specifically to the theme, "Compelled by the Love of Christ." She challenged participants to "be who you are," and asked them "What are you compelled by?"

Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth" and "You are the light of the world." Hale encouraged everyone to celebrate the divine nature of the salt and the light and be what Christ calls us to be.

Hale was passionate and straightforward in her critique of what is wrong in society. "God has chosen to bring us here for a purpose in the world. God

did not bring us here by accident. God brought us here by assignment," she said.

Hale acknowledged that people across the country and our world are searching for more than what "money, things and relationships can bring them." She countered, "This is our cue...we are called to represent God, to stand in the gap between these people and God."

Hale demonstrated a passion for social justice and focused on who Jesus calls "the least of these." Hale presented information highlighting the overwhelming list of people who could qualify as the "least of these" ... from the hungry and homeless to the imprisoned and ill.

"Be His ambassador," she said.

In her second address, Hale's theme was "It's not complicated."



Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale

She noted that children live each day to its fullest, "filled with unlimited possibilities and loving everyone around (them) unconditionally. As adults, we complicate everything."

In Paul's letters, we are told that we are wealthy in Christ and he gives us lessons about how we "walk" in life. Hale said it matters that we know what we believe because when we "know what we believe, we know how to behave."

## Rev. Mike Housholder: "People are starving to hear about God's grace."

Pastor Michael Housholder from West Des Moines, Iowa serves Lutheran Church of Hope, one of the fastest growing Lutheran churches in the nation. He has a deep passion for sharing Jesus' love through preaching, evangelism and mission outreach.

With self-effacing humor, Housholder both entertained and encouraged the Assembly crowd, urging them to embrace who they are, even their imperfections.

Housholder focused on unity and commonality among the participants, particularly given the difficult issues facing them.

"Jesus did not politely suggest, 'Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.' He commanded it. Be about more than the issues in front of us. Be about the love of Jesus Christ." Housholder said. "I don't know about you, but even if things

don't go my way, I'm going to stick around."

In his second presentation, Housholder said, "If we are going to be a faithful Church, we have to be connected to Christ—the power sources, the fire of God's spirit." He joked, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is Lutheran sometimes."

Housholder outlined the challenges facing Christianity in America today. He cited a recent survey in which 61 percent of Americans perceived Christians as being more about organized religion than ministry. Another survey he noted indicates there are 25 million more self-identified atheists in America today than in 1990.

He said that a preoccupation with "culture wars" is partly to blame.

Acknowledging that he, too, has strongly held opinions on various issues, Housholder asked, "Is it really



Rev. Mike Housholder

worth losing 25 million people to win the culture wars?"

Finally, Housholder urged the audience to be messengers of God's grace in the world.

"We have to find a way to proclaim God's grace to those who need to hear it," he said. "We are called to be the messengers in the world... People are starving to hear about God's grace. What they are finding out is that living for these 'things' isn't doing it for them. Give them the word of God."

## Sense of the Assembly Survey: Human Sexuality

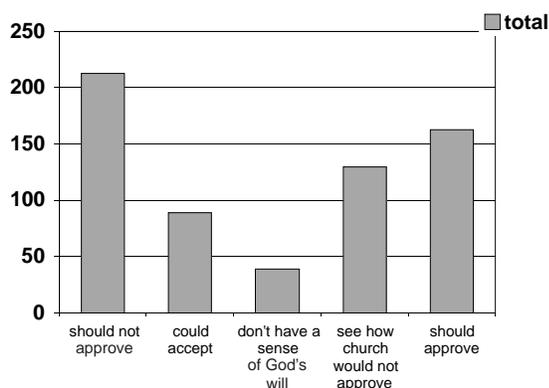
Members of the Assembly spent much of Saturday morning discussing the issue of human sexuality and recommendations of a church wide task force regarding the rostering of individuals in monogamous, publicly-accountable, same-gender relationships. Following small group discussions, participants filled out a "Sense of the Assembly" survey.

Bishop Dave deFreese said the conversation may not be an easy one to have because it will trigger strong emotions for many. He invited Assembly participants to engage in a discussion that is distinctly different from that taking place in the rest of the world.

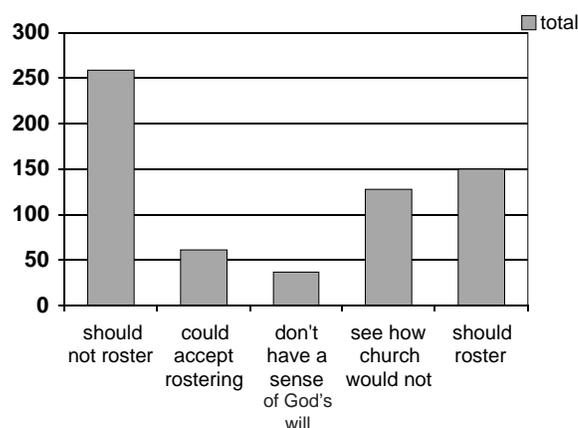
"The world has turned this issue into an act of striving for winners and losers," he said. "Rather, you and I seek to serve our Christ."

The survey questions and results were as follows:

Question 1: "As to the question of same-gender relationships, I believe that..."



Question 2: "As to the question of rostering persons in a same gender relationships, I believe that..."



## RESOLUTIONS

The 2009 Synod Assembly considered 11 resolutions and took the following actions (\* - 2/3 vote required for approval due to late filing):

**Resolution 1** asks for support for the Tour de Revs, a fundraising effort for ELCA World Hunger, specifically asking each congregation to consider contributing at least \$5 per member. Adopted.

**Resolution 2**, as amended, lifts up Midland Lutheran College and Dana College, and encourages the Synod to consider using the two colleges' facilities for events, including the Synod Assembly on a biennial basis. Adopted.

**Resolution 3** declares the Synod to be a "ONE Synod" and endorses the goals of the "ONE Campaign." Adopted.

**Resolution 4** encourages congregations engaged in building projects to use energy efficient means with

as close to NetZero carbon emission impact as possible. Adopted.

**Resolution 5**, as amended, encourages the Synod to consider leasing only those vehicles that meet high environmental standards. Adopted.

**Resolution 6**, as amended, encourages congregations and members to strive to use "people first" language when referring to those living among us without proper legal documentation. Adopted.

**Resolution 7**, as amended, encourages the Synod to strive to incorporate at least one of the ELCA's social statements into each assembly and theological conference. Adopted.

**\*Resolution 8** would have permitted seminarian interns to be seated on the floor of the Synod Assembly with the members of their internship congregation. Failed.

**\*Resolution 9** would have memorialized the Churchwide Assembly to require a two-thirds vote on any proposals pertaining to changes in rostering policy or same sex blessings. Failed on a 341-204 vote.

**\*Resolution 10** would have memorialized the Churchwide Assembly to adopt the proposed social statement and recommendations offered by the churchwide task force. Indefinitely postponed.

**\*Resolution 11** would have called upon churchwide to adopt policies prohibiting discrimination based on homosexual or heterosexual orientation. The resolution also would have memorialized the Churchwide Assembly to preserve the right of local congregations to call, employ or appoint rostered leaders and other ministry leaders within ELCA guidelines. Failed.