

Please share this with your members

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I am keeping you all in my prayers this Monday morning. I realize that there is a great variety of reactions to the approved resolutions from the churchwide assembly, and that there will be a great variety of conversations that you will be having at home, work, congregation, and neighborhood. I also realize that the span of reaction will be from rejoicing to grieving, from actively speaking to being unable to speak. Some will be wanting and looking for opportunities to tell colleague and neighbor what the ELCA has done, and others will be hoping that no one will ask them how they are feeling about what their church has done.

It is a time for listening to one another. There should be understanding that there are many who will want to express their joy in these decisions; there should be understanding that there are many who will want to express their deep disappointment in these decisions. They may both be expressed within the same family, within the same congregation, within the same conference, within the same community. It is a time for listening to one another.

I will be gathering the Deans of our conferences and the Leadership Support Committee on Thursday for this very purpose.

The Synod Council will be meeting for three days in early September for listening and for discussion.

The Orientation of new rostered leaders in our synod in early September will be a time for listening.

The Gathering of the Ministerium in October will provide a time for listening together. The time of gathering rostered leaders within every conference provides such times for ongoing listening.

While the will of the churchwide assembly has been made known, the specific policies and procedures will still be months in considering and developing. While I do not fully understand how all will unfold, I will keep you all updated in the coming weeks as information comes to me, and as I continue to participate in the Conference of Bishops.

Listen to the words of our presiding bishop, The Rev. Mark Hanson:

“I want to share some words. As one you have called to serve as pastor of this church, I have been standing here thinking about my 23 years as a parish pastor and how differently I would go into various contexts. Gathering with a family or a group of people who had just experienced loss, or who perhaps were wondering if they still belonged or in fact felt deeply that ones to whom they belong had been severed from them, I would probably turn to words such as Romans 8:

'Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ?'

But then I thought, what if I were going into a family, a group, or a community that had always wondered if they belonged, and suddenly now had received a clear affirmation that they belonged? All of the dividing walls and feelings of separation seem to have dropped away. That would be a very different conversation. I would probably read to them out of Ephesians:

'But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh, he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us....In him, the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.'

But then I thought, what if those two groups were together, but also in their midst were those who had neither experienced loss nor the feeling of the dividing wall of separation coming down, but were worried whether all that had occurred might sever the unity that is ours in Christ, and might be wondering if their actions might have contributed to reconciliation or separation? If all those people were together in a room, I would read from Colossians:

'As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.'

That passage gives invitation and expectation that those deeply disappointed today will have the expectation and the freedom to continue to admonish and to teach in this church. And so, too, those who have experienced reconciliation today are called to humility. You are called to clothe yourselves with love. But we are all called to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, remembering again and again that we are called in the one body.

...we finally meet one another not in our agreements or our disagreements, but at the foot of the cross, where God is faithful, where Christ is present with us, and where by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are one in Christ,"

I also share with you some words from Dr. Ishmael Noko, the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation who spoke following our decisions:

“As a guest of this assembly, I have listened and watched very carefully as you have taken this task very seriously. You have not addressed these questions as a stand-alone gathering. You have invited into your midst ecumenical partners and partners from other churches. Some of these ecumenical partners and sister churches have agreed or some have disagreed, with the direction you are taking. I want to emphasize that in this context, even the expressions of disagreements are signs of the indivisibility of the church of Jesus Christ.

As you lined up in front of the podium in the red line or the green line, you have spoken with one another from your hearts. You have spoken from your pain and from your struggles. You have spoken with respect for one another and with dignity. I have to say that. This manner of deliberating among yourselves does a great deal of honor to your church. Again and again I've heard you make reference to Paul's letter to the Galatians in which you say that we are to bear one another's burden, for in doing so, we fulfill the law of Christ.

This is a mark of a Christian community, which sharply distinguishes the Church from the ways of this world, in which each person bears their own burdens. But in the Church we are not allowed to bear our burdens alone. My presence here is a sign of how much we care for you. It is an embodiment of the prayers for your work from the Church around the world. Your pain is our pain. Your struggles are our struggles.”

It is a time for listening, for praying for and together, for giving thanks for one another in Christ, for being among one another. It is a time for listening.

I will do my best to be out among you listening to you. Email me, call me. I will do my best to back in touch with you. I have many notes and letters coming already.

The Rev. Richard Goeres, who serves St. Paul, Strasburg, said that he would invite people to gather around the table at the foot of the cross. Then he spoke to how the altar of St. Paul is right under a suspended large cross. Then he spoke to inviting people around that table in the sanctuary, and tables of meeting, restaurant tables, kitchen tables, coffee tables. To offer the life of Christ and to listen to the lives of His/his people. He is a very good pastor.

I keep you all in my prayers, and look forward to listening to you.

Yours in Christ,

The Rev. James F. Mauney

Bishop

Summary of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly

The will of the gathered ELCA was to deepen our faith through the Book of Faith initiative and our worship and to strengthen our outreach in responding to the great needs of hunger and those who suffer around the globe, particularly those with HIV, AIDS, and malaria. The intent of the assembly seemed to be to want to open the doors to all to come into the life offered in Jesus Christ.

I would begin by attesting to always catching my breath when I see again the breadth of the ELCA. Our ten voting members seemed very small in an assembly of 1045 voting members from all around our country, including the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico!

But we had a wonderful group of ten from the Virginia Synod! They remained highly engaged, speaking at the mikes, talking, sharing faith, exchanging ideas, praying with one another throughout the week. I was very proud of our group, and I commend their coming very prepared and their being fully present as well as being close and caring for one another. We were also joined with our two Assistants to the Bishop, The Rev. Jean Bozeman and The Rev. Chip Gunsten.

We enjoyed our time sitting next to our partner synod in the ELCA, the Southwestern Minnesota Synod with Bishop Jon Anderson and 30+ voting members!! We also enjoyed an evening of fellowship with them.

In addition to our voting members, three young leaders in our synod, were invited to come and meet together and to observe the first four days of the assembly. I was most proud to see Diaconal Minister Christie Huffman from Epiphany, Richmond, The Rev. Kristin Hunsinger from Christ, Richmond, and The Rev. Sarah Trone Garriott from Martin Luther, Bergton invited and participating in this special event! Our own Assistant to the Bishop, The Rev. Chip Gunsten, was the invited preacher for the closing worship of this gathering of young leaders within our church!!

The worship was inspirational with powerful preachers, huge choirs, wide varieties of instruments, long opening processions, with Holy Communion offered in the middle of the day, every day.

While you no doubt heard about several decisions, I want to make sure that you hear about some other decisions.

We voted almost unanimously to join in full communion with the United Methodist Church! For us in Virginia, who are partners with the largest Methodist Conference in North America, this is coming to the communion rail with a much larger gathering! Our 42,000 are in full communion with over 342,000! I have known Bishop Charlene Kammerer for several years now, and I am most

impressed with her leadership and faith! One of her assistants, The Rev. Tom Joyce, is the current President of the Virginia Council of Churches.

We voted to raise millions of dollars for the strategy of our church raising \$10 million through our World Hunger Fund against the spread of HIV and AIDS around the world.

We voted to begin an initiative through the Lutheran World Hunger Fund to join in partnership with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and the United Nations Foundation and to raise \$25 million for the controlling of the spread of malaria, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. The United Nations Foundation is supporting this effort with a major grant.

We re-elected Carlos E. Pena as the Vice-President of the ELCA for a six year term. In the 5 ballot election process, however, we even had our own Dr. Robert Benne in 5th place in the balloting!!

We approved the Social Statement on Human Sexuality with the necessary two thirds majority.

We approved “that the ELCA commit itself to bear one another’s burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all.”

We approved “that the ELCA commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable life-long monogamous, same-gender relationships.”

We approved a much longer resolution on how the previous two resolutions would be implemented. This resolution also included a conscience clause for members who believe we should not allow such roster actions.

As the resolutions were voted upon and results seen on the screen, there were tears flowing all around the assembly hall. There was a majority of people there who had waited through many years for the passing of these resolutions that brought to people they loved greater acceptance and participation in the ELCA’s

rosters. There were tears of gratitude for the coming of these votes. There were also many who disagreed with these resolutions who found these decisions hard to bear and hard to share and so tears came as well.

You may see the votes taken by going to elca.org and looking under Assembly Actions.

These were some of the major actions.

We watched almost two dozen wonderful videos by individuals and congregations responding to the theme, "God's Work. Our Hands." So many delightful expressions of creativity about serving in the Name of our Lord. They were delightful!

The videos of active congregations and faithful folks made me homesick to return among you, grateful for the life we have together within this synod, and aware of the many vital ministries and connections we have throughout the country and world as the church.