



**NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD
2006 ASSEMBLY MINUTES
PLENARY SESSION TWO**

Wachovia Arena
Wilkes-Barre, PA
Saturday, May 20, 2006
8:30 AM

Bishop Strobel called the Assembly to order. He thanked the local arrangements committee, the sound technicians, Carol Weiser, Pastor Catherine Ziel, the worship leaders, and all who helped with the planning.

Vice President Kinney thanked the Bishop for his faithful ministry. He replied that every day he gives thanks to God for this "relentlessly interesting ministry."

He introduced Pastor Martha Sipe, Chairperson of the Elections Committee. She presented the results of the election for Synod Council. The results were as follows:

For Synod Council (Clergy):

Number of votes cast: 495	Patrick W. Poole - 171
Number of Illegal votes: 4	Carl A. Werner - 120
Number of legal votes: 491	Carl D. Shankweiler - 200
Number Needed to Elect: 246	

There was no election.

Churchwide Assembly – Group C, Clergy:

Number of votes cast: 523	Ralph A. Boyer, IV - 133
Number of Illegal votes: 6	Paul D. Braden - 197
Number of legal votes: 517	Paul E. Buzzard - 142
Number Needed to Elect: 259	Cindy G. Camp – 254
	Barbara A. Davis – 219
	Mary W. Gade – 235
	Kurt E. Garbe – 268
	Charles H. Grube – 206
	Robert G. Kaltenbaugh – 129
	Lyn L. Langkamer – 211
	Harry M. Laubach, Jr. – 119
	Wayne A. Matthias-Long – 274
	Thomas E. Richards – 128
	Dennis S. Ritter – 206
	Robert A. von Frisch – 115
	Carl A. Werner – 152
	Samuel R. Zeiser – 175
	William E. Zimmermann - 175

Bishop Strobel declared Kurt E. Garbe and Wayne A. Matthias-Long elected.

Churchwide Assembly – Group C, Lay Male:

Number of votes cast: 518	Joshua Buzzard - 382
Number of Illegal votes: 0	Edward C. Cool - 367
Number of legal votes: 518	Guy W. Ehler - 396

Number Needed to Elect: 260

Martin L. Everhart – 382
Stephen P. Fellman – 383
Michael P. Reitz – 421
Rene Rodriguez – 363
Bruce R. Saylor – 441

The bishop declared Joshua Buzzard, Edward C. Cool, Guy W. Ehler, Martin L. Everhart, Stephen P. Fellman, Michael P. Reitz, and Bruce R. Saylor elected, with Rene Rodriguez serving as first alternate.

Churchwide Assembly – Group C, Lay Female:

Number of votes cast: 576
Number of Illegal votes: 7
Number of legal votes: 569
Number Needed to Elect: 285

Nadine R. Anderson - 206
Nancy L. Bleam - 214
Anet Catina - 166
Elizabeth M. Elterich – 207
Deborah M. Graf – 269
Barbara A. Keener – 219
Linda M. Maule – 189
Ruth T. Miller – 359
Catherine Mordosky – 161
Jean Sandberg – 192
Susan T. Schellenberg. – 212
Barbara G. Taylor – 249
Marlane Druckenmiller – 239

The bishop declared Ruth T. Miller elected.

The second ballot was distributed. Voting took place, and the ballots were collected.

Pastor Dick Wolf's fiftieth anniversary video was shown.

Phil Harris held a question and answer session. He discussed the relationship between the ELCA and the LCMS. He also discussed the new resource on Lutherans studying the Bible.

Pastor Gary Harke, executive director of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches, brought greetings.

Bishop Strobel invited the candidates for roster status to the stage to introduce themselves:

- Rachael Dietz
- Heeralal (Mukesh) Cheedie
- Bruce Saylor
- Nancy Moore

Pastor Cheryl Meinshein introduced those serving as SALM's.

The Bishop noted that several rostered leaders have entered our synod since the last Assembly:

- Robert Bohm, transferred from the Lower Susquehanna Synod
- Robert Loucks, transferred from the New Jersey Synod
- Amy Godshall-Miller, transferred from the Delaware-Maryland Synod, serving at Schwarzwald, Jacksonwald
- John Miller, transferred from the Delaware-Maryland Synod, serving at Schwarzwald, Jacksonwald
- Wayne Lupole, transferring from the Upper Susquehanna Synod, to serve at Christ, Hazleton

Dean John Fritch introduced pastors who retired since the last Assembly:

- David Hill
- F. Peter Muhr
- Grace C. Olson
- Valerie K. Reinhold
- Robert C. Schlotter
- Arthur B. Wyse
- Ronald C. Yergey
- George P. Zacharda

LIFT awarded the prize of a polo shirt to three members of the Assembly.

Secretary Taylor made several announcements.

Bishop Strobel announced that worship would follow this session and that the afternoon session would begin at 1:30 PM.

The Service of Holy Communion followed. Bishop Strobel was the preacher. Taking as his text John 15:1-8, he said:

This familiar text from the Gospel of John seems relatively simple at first hearing. Jesus is the vine. We are the branches. Vine and branches are joined by *abiding* (a characteristic term in the Johannine literature). And Jesus' Father is the *gregoros* – the vinedresser, who prunes the branches to make the vine more fruitful. Simple, right? I would like to suggest that, upon closer reflection, the branch/vine relationship is breathtakingly complex.

But first, a personal confession about this vine business. When we moved to Bowers from Chicago nearly 26 years ago, there was a vine growing on and around our back porch. Its roots were close by in the back flowerbed. It continued to grow for our first few years, producing a few leaves, but no fruit or flowers. Then, it began to threaten to come into the house through the kitchen window. It was time to find out what this thing was and to act accordingly – to be a vinedresser, a *gregoros*, pruning and, perhaps, removing and burning.

I learned from the neighbors that this barren nuisance of a vine was a wisteria. How many of you have or know about wisteria? When they bloom they are utterly spectacular. But this wisteria of mine showed no signs of ever attaining that exalted status. So . . . let it go for another couple of years to see if it would fulfill its promise. Two years later, with just a few leaves, no blossoms, and tendrils creeping through the kitchen window, it was time for drastic action. Prune to the point of removal, branches, vine, roots and all. After significant labor – did you ever try to dig up wisteria roots? – the larger pieces were saved as kindling for the fireplace. Almost biblical, right? Gathered, thrown into the fire *and burned*.

Every time I encounter this text from the 15th Chapter of John, I cannot help but recall my vinedressing of this barren wisteria. But recently I have been forced into some serious soul-

searching and conscientious reconsideration of my impulsive, radical pruning.

Just a few days ago, the Reading Eagle ran an article in the Garden Section titled "Wisteria has a long, tangled history." The article, tracing the history of wisteria from China and Japan to Europe and the Americas, confronted me with this discomfiting fact about wisteria: "Among seed-grown wisteria, some individuals may not flower for twenty years; the average is about 8 to ten years after germination. . . . The problem with seedlings is you don't know if you have a 20-year bloomer until at least ten years have passed." And then, as if addressed to me personally, "This is why so many gardeners find themselves at odds with their uncooperative plants." Oy vey! Perhaps my wisteria was a twenty year bloomer. Perhaps if I had pruned more patiently our back porch would now – 20 years later – be adorned every spring with those magnificent blossoms! I do hope and trust that the divine vinedresser will be more patient with me than I was with our back-porch wisteria!

Indeed, that newspaper article laid on me a real guilt trip: What if. . . ? But, that's my problem. Let's get back to the Gospel text by way of the first sentence of the article: "A wisteria vine in Ushijima, Japan, measured 32 feet in circumference and produced over 80,000 trusses of flowers in a 1920 report." Now that is a vine bearing fruit!

Jesus' description of his relationship with his disciples, the church, as true vine and branches, joined by abiding, seems so very simple. But at this synod assembly, I trust you – we – have begun to appreciate the magnitude and complexity of this vine, who is Jesus Christ, and its branches, which is his church – congregation, synod, ELCA, one, holy, catholic and apostolic – the communion of saints abiding in the true vine. Just a few examples. . .

Last evening, you experienced Bear Creek Camp – our camp. Think about its multi-dimensional ministry and the complexity of this branch of Christ's vine. How many of the congregations of Southeastern and Northeastern Pennsylvania synods are touched by this "outdoor ministry"? How many boys and girls, young women and men experience this intense encounter with Christ and his gospel? The staff, it is truly international. Parish pastors serve as weekly chaplains, and the formation of camp counselors is provided by faculty from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. And then there are the day camps that spread to congregations throughout our synods. We are learning that outdoor ministries are the most fruitful source of future rostered leaders for the church. Just a camp? It is a complex, multifaceted branch of Christ's vine in partnership with many other branches!

How spectacularly and effectively this vine of God's mercy and compassion blossomed and bore fruit in the natural disasters of the year past. From the tsunami in the South Pacific and Indian oceans, to the flooding along the Delaware River, to Katrina and its almost incomprehensible physical destruction and financial, emotional and spiritual devastation, and then finally the earthquake in Kashmir: our congregations, our synod, our ELCA and Lutheran World Relief have been twining branches that have carried Christ into the midst of loss and misery.

But with how many other partners, both ecumenical, religious and secular? A complex branching, indeed!

How many of you have traveled to the Gulf Coast or the banks of the Delaware to help? How many of you have contributed to Lutheran Disaster Response or some other charitable agency? Finally, special thanks to Lutheran Congregational Services for coordinating our synod's response and to Pastor Cindy Camp and Diakon for their assistance.

A vine, branches abiding together. Simple? As we look more closely we see just how complex are the branches of this vine, which is Christ himself.

Finally, let's look at a branch quite close to me. My daughter, Erika, has completed her second year of seminary, preparing to be a pastor of the church. Our synod is the most generous contributor to the educational ministry of her seminary, the Lutheran Theological Seminary at

Philadelphia. Your offerings and your congregation's mission support are educating my daughter for the ministry. Additional support comes from the ELCA, our synodical support of candidates for ministry, scholarships from her congregation, Trinity, Reading.

(Trinity, Lehighton, also is very generous with scholarship support.) She will do her internship in the year to come in Waltham, Massachusetts, with Pastor Tom Maehl as her supervisor. Tom did his internship in our synod at Good Shepherd, Kreidersville. And her decision to prepare for ordained ministry was made in a trip we made to our companion synod in Argentina, especially in response to a question our guest Roberto Stein asked on that trip: Erika when are you going to decide to become a pastor?

The vine, its branches abiding. It seems so simple, but when we look closely, we see how complex, intertwined and networked the branches really are. The vine, it is Christ Jesus. The branches: they are the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, nothing less than the communion of saints. We are the branches, but we are intertwined with Lutheran, ecumenical, and secular branches that are global and beyond our measuring.

That wisteria vine with which I began was a local challenge, confined to our back porch. My challenge to you, you who at this assembly have experienced the broad horizons and complex branches in partnership with your congregation, this synod and the ELCA during these two days...my challenge to you is to carry this expanded perspective back home. There, remind your sisters and brothers in Christ, over and over again, that the vine and branches of the 15th Chapter of the Gospel of John are not a back-porch matter confined to the local congregation. No, the branches we are have been flourishing and bearing fruit for nearly two thousand years in partnership with a cloud of witnesses that only God the vinedresser can number.

Jesus' concludes this gospel text by saying, *My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.* Just think and give thanks for how much more glory we give, how much more fruit we bear together with all the disciples than we could ever do on our own!