



**Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod  
2008 Assembly Minutes  
Plenary Session One**

Split Rock Lodge, Lake Harmony PA  
Thursday, May 29, 2008  
7:00 PM

The twenty-first annual Synod Assembly of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod for 2008 took place from May 29 – 31 at Split Rock Lodge, Lake Harmony, Pennsylvania. The theme of this assembly was "Called Together in Mission: Faithful and Bold."

Bishop David Strobel led The Order for the Opening of a Synod Assembly.

Bishop Strobel declared that a quorum was present. He expressed the gratitude of all present to those involved in making arrangements for this assembly: the Worship Task Group, and the many volunteers, especially those from the local congregations. He said a special word of thanks to Pr. Eileen Le Van, who organized the prayer shawl project which produced over 1500 prayer shawls for the assembly.

Bishop Strobel explained that synod secretary Barbara-Anne Taylor was not present because of recent surgery. He stated that Carol Moyer, a member of the synod support staff, will be serving as secretary *pro tem*. To facilitate her work on such short notice, he asked the assembly to waive the requirement that minutes of each session be submitted for review at the start of the next session. Hearing no objection, the requirement was waived.

Bishop Strobel called attention to the Rules of Procedure as printed in the Bulletin of Reports. He reminded the assembly that only those seated at tables would receive ballots. He explained the use of the red, green, and yellow voting cards, including the use of a green or red card when going to a microphone to indicate whether the speaker is talking for or against the motion. He reminded voting members that motions must be in writing and given to the secretary at the time they are brought to the floor.

Bishop Strobel then noted that the privilege of the floor was extended to Mission District Council chairs; members of Ministry Teams in connection with their reports; representatives of institutions and agencies; presidents of the synod Women of the ELCA, Lutheran Men in Mission, and Lutheran Youth Fellowship; and the ELCA representative The Rev. Kathie Bender Schwich, who will address the assembly several times.

Bishop Strobel noted that several pastors from four of our full-communion partner denominations are serving Lutheran congregations. He noted that these pastors may be granted voice and vote. Hearing no objection, it was so ordered.

Bishop Strobel introduced Pastor Günther Rudolph, superintendent of the Evangelische-Lutherische Kirchenbezirk Löbau-Zittau (Löbau Zittau District) of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland.

Bishop Strobel introduced several other people present at this assembly: Ms. Lauren Whipkey of the ELCA Board of Pensions; Dr. Phil Krey, president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia; and The Rev. Peggy Wuertele, Region 7 Coordinator.

Pastor Paul Buzzard asked that the rules of the assembly be changed to allow lay ministers appointed by the bishop in the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod to be granted voice at this assembly. It was suggested to change the wording to allow serving SALMs to be granted voice at this assembly and only this assembly. This passed and the change was adopted and put in the rules for this assembly.

Bishop Strobel then called upon the synod vice president, Priscilla Schlenker Kinney, who presented the following resolution:

**Resolved, that the 2008 Synod Assembly program be adopted.**

Since this motion came from the Synod Council, it needed no second. The resolution was adopted unanimously by a voice vote.

Vice President Kinney reported that copies of the 2007 Minutes have been corrected and certified by the bishop and secretary and are prepared for deposit in the archives.

Pastor John Pearson presented the report of the Constitution Committee. He drew the assembly's attention to the continuing resolution S9.01.A08 adopted by the Synod Council and printed on page 13 of the Synod Council report in the Bulletin of Reports.

ELCA representative Pastor Kathie Bender Schwich took the chair and described the duties of the bishop and gave a brief description of the process for the election of a bishop.

Pastor Bill Zimmerman presented the report of the Credentials Committee. There were 637 registered voting members.

Mr. Ed Cool, chairperson of the Elections Committee, asked all visitors to leave the area reserved for voting members. Pastor Bender Schwich led the assembly in prayer and the ballots were distributed. The balloting was closed and the ballots collected.

Bishop Strobel resumed the chair and introduced the fiftieth anniversary video of Pastor Byard Ebling.

Bishop Strobel called attention to the list of nominees and the biographical information about each in the Bulletin of Reports. Bishop Strobel then opened the floor for additional nominations for the various positions. They were as follows for Churchwide Assembly: Lay Male – Rene Rodriguez; Lay female – Nancy Bleam; Clergy – Manfred Bahmann. The bishop declared the nominations closed.

The bishop pointed out that there are several nominees running unopposed or who have been nominated by their mission districts for en bloc election. It was moved and seconded that the secretary cast a unanimous ballot for these nominees. Bishop Strobel called for the vote and declared the following people elected:

- Synod Council: Leslie Wagner, Christie Kaufman
- Committee on Discipline: John Houck, Dennis Moore, Grace Olson, Susan Ruggles, Suzanne (Tucker) Irwin, Gwen Krapf, Sherry Lockhart
- Church in Society Program Committee: Gail Kees, David Newman, William (Woody) Maxon
- Voting Members of Churchwide Assembly (upon nomination by their mission districts): Ronald Mordosky, Edward Cool, Walter Hampton II, Eileen Koehler, Kathy Smith, Joanne Rush, Harold Hand, Diane LaFauci, Randeale Albers

Bishop Strobel called the deans forward to be installed. They were Bruce MacLaughlin, Bethlehem-Easton; Thomas Irwin, East Berks; Robert vonFrisch, Hazleton-Lehigh; Richard Gardner, Lehigh; Mary Gade, Northern Lehigh Valley; Kenneth Buckwalter, Pocono; Joseph Scholtes, Schuylkill; Charles Grube, Scranton-Wilkes-Barre; and Fred Opalinski, West Berks.

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary video of Pastor Lars Staaby was shown.

Bishop Strobel introduced Pastor Herb Gifford, chairperson of the Committee on Reference and Counsel. He noted that resolutions received by the Committee on Reference and Counsel less than two weeks before the opening of the Synod Assembly will be brought before the assembly to decide whether or not they should be considered. Each resolution will be considered only if the Assembly votes by a simple majority to consider it.

The following resolution was received after the deadline:

**VI. The following resolution was received from Pr. Paul Buzzard**

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod memorialize the 2009 assembly of the ELCA, requesting that the process be started in making any needed constitutional, bylaw, and policy changes that would grant voice and vote at synod assemblies to Synodically Authorized Lay Ministers, under appointment by their bishops.

Bishop Strobel asked the assembly if they wished to consider this resolution. He called for the vote and it was affirmative. He then explained that the resolution would be brought back at a later report.

Pastor Gifford announced that all resolutions must be received by the committee no later than noon Friday. He then presented the first report of the Committee on Reference and Counsel:

- I. **The following resolution was received from Pr. Jira Albers; Pr. Kathy Ash-Flashner; Doris Binner, AiM; Marlane Druckenmiller, AiM; Pr. Chris Eichorn; Elizabeth Elterich, AiM; Karen Matthias-Long, AiM; Ruth T. Miller, AiM; Pr. Wes Poole; Leesa Wimmer, AiM; and Pr. Bill Zimmermann.**

WHEREAS, all the baptized when they affirm their baptism promise "to hear the Word of God" and "to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed"; and

WHEREAS, all parents and sponsors covenant to place the Holy Scriptures in the hands of their children and nurture them in faith and prayer; and

WHEREAS, rostered leaders (pastors, Associates in Ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers) vow to be diligent in their study of the Holy Scriptures; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA has begun a Book of Faith Initiative inviting everyone to join the conversation, to make a commitment, and to become part of the initiative (see <http://www.bookoffaith.org>); therefore be it

RESOLVED, that we become a "Book of Faith" synod, committing ourselves to live in and from the Word of God in all our meetings, assemblies and events, so that as we regularly and increasingly hear, read, study, share and are engaged by God's Word, we lead by example in faithful service and holy living; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the bishop of our synod—who "as its pastor, shall be a teacher of the faith of this church and shall provide leadership for the life and witness of this church"—in coordination with the synod advocate lead this initiative personally and through collaborative programmatic work with congregations of the synod; and be it further

RESOLVED, that all voting members of this synod assembly covenant together to begin a regular practice of Bible study and prayer, gathering with others in their congregation and/or community to speak and hear the Word from one another; and be it further

RESOLVED, that we celebrate and continue to support and strengthen those places where Scripture is already taught and engaged, such as Women of the ELCA and Lutheran Men in Mission Bible studies, camping and campus ministries, lay schools,

congregation councils, Sunday school and other educational groups, clusters, and mission districts; and be it further

RESOLVED, that we encourage all congregations to become a 'Book of Faith' congregation, which will find expression by

- exploring new opportunities for engaging the Bible,
- sending sufficient numbers of members to synod events for training as Bible study leaders,
- including biblical study as an integral part of all meetings and groups,

in order to become more fluent in the first language of faith—the language of Scripture—that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered, and sent by the Word.

Marlane Druckenmiller, AiM, asked that this resolution be delayed until the second resolution is presented so people can attend the forum on Friday. The resolution will be considered on Friday.

**II. The following resolution was received from Pr. Jay R. Wetzel; Judith J. Gifford, Union, Schnecksville; Bruce Hill, Heidelberg, Heidelberg; Diana J. Hill, AiM; Pr. Bruce MacLaughlin; Ruth T. Miller, AiM; Pr. Daniel Shook; Kathy Smith, Trinity, Hecktown; Pr. Jimmy Lee Werley; Melanie E. Werley, AiM**

WHEREAS, approximately 800,000 adult Pennsylvanians below the age of 65 have no health insurance and are not eligible for government funded insurance; and

WHEREAS, 162,000 Pennsylvania households in 2007 had very low food security, a 14% increase over the previous year, and with demands on food pantries rising, yet the availability of food products to food banks and pantries decreasing; and

WHEREAS, 8.7% of Pennsylvania families are living below the poverty level and the number of the working poor is increasing; and

WHEREAS, the United States government implemented an Economic Stimulus plan through which individuals and families are receiving checks ranging from \$300 to \$1,200; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA Conference of Bishops has encouraged members of ELCA congregations, as part of a public church that witnesses boldly to God's love, to tithe their Economic Stimulus check; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod urge its members to step forward by tithing their government funded Economic Stimulus check to agencies that provide

goods and services to those Pennsylvanians who lack the necessities for health and wholeness.

The committee recommended adoption. The resolution was adopted.

**III. The following resolution was received from Pr. Bruce D. MacLaughlin, Pr. Peter A. Pettit, Pr. Jimmy Lee Werley, Pr. Cheryl Meinschein**

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has committed itself to peacemaking through the "Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine" adopted at the 2005 Churchwide Assembly, which assumes that ELCA action will among other things (§II.A.)

*provide clear and reliable information to ELCA members,  
be balanced in terms of its care for all parties in the conflict,  
be shaped by a commitment to listen and learn from companions and from both those with whom participants agree and those with whom they disagree,  
take responsibility for careful consideration of the political and humanitarian implications of our theology,  
and reflect ... zero tolerance for anti-Jewish and/or anti-Muslim sentiments or actions;  
and*

WHEREAS, the Strategy seeks among its outcomes (§II.B)

*a better understanding among ELCA leaders and members, along with their legislators, about the situation in Israel and Palestine,  
a deepening of mutual understanding between Jews and Lutherans and Muslims and Lutherans through dialogue and shared action,  
the enrichment of ELCA strategy for engagement in the Holy Land through these relationships, and  
increased cooperation and collaboration between the ELCA and Jewish groups in the U.S.—and with groups within Israel—that seek peace with justice in Israel and Palestine; and*

WHEREAS, the church's calling to cultivate a culture of peace involves a process of informed moral deliberation that seeks "the powerful vision of difference in unity..., call[ing] us to engage differences, not to ignore or fear them ... [and] to strengthen [our] own particular communities in ways that promote respect and appreciation for people in other communities" (ELCA Social Statement on Peace, §5A); and

WHEREAS, the war of words in the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict includes both intentional and negligent misrepresentations of the history of the region and of Arab, Israeli and Palestinian actions and policies; and

WHEREAS, our moral deliberation must take adequate account of a region with a long, complex history, for which different parties have widely disparate narratives and interpretations, and with multiple conflicts including those between the Israelis and Palestinians, between different Palestinian factions, and between nations in the region; and

WHEREAS, the quest for peace between Palestinians and Israelis has recently been complicated by the increasing regional influence of Iran, which has avowed a strategic goal of annihilating Israel and has supported militias with the same intent; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA has been and remains committed to accompanying our Palestinian Lutheran brothers and sisters in their suffering and in their striving for Palestinian political autonomy and recognition in a viable, contiguous state; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA in its 1994 Declaration to the Jewish People expressed the "urgent desire to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people," whose corporate identity and self-expression is intimately tied to the State of Israel; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod memorialize the 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to reaffirm this church's commitment to peace-making in the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict through implementation of its Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine to the fullest extent possible, and in so doing to:

1. embody a multilateral solidarity with the State of Israel and the Palestinian people as the primary communities involved and with all those with whom we find common cause for peace, justice and dignity; and
2. acknowledge the State of Israel as a legitimate political self-expression of the Jewish people, as well as the urgency of national sovereignty as a political self-expression of the Palestinian people; and
3. educate and equip members, congregations, synods, personnel and affiliated agencies of the ELCA for advocacy on behalf of all parties to the conflict who seek peace;
4. resist preferential identification with any party in the conflict that may inhibit our roles as witnesses for peace and facilitators of reconciliation; and
5. renounce the use of language and materials that caricature or over-simplify the conflict, dehumanize Arabs, Israelis, or Palestinians, or challenge the political legitimacy of their respective national movements, and counsel our strategy partners against such use; and

6. encourage and empower ELCA members, congregations, synods, personnel and affiliated agencies to become more familiar with and engaged with both Israeli and Palestinian schools, humanitarian organizations and co-existence projects.

The committee recommended adoption. The resolution was adopted

**IV. The following resolution was received from Nadine Anderson, St. John, Easton; Pr. Manfred Bahmann; Pr. Peter Bredlau; Sharon Ann Burns, St. Peter, Bethlehem; Pr. Grace Olson; Christine Summy, AiM; Pr. Richard Summy**

WHEREAS, the ELCA has repeatedly welcomed gay and lesbian people into its life (including resolutions of the 1991, 1995, 1999, 2005, and 2007 Churchwide Assemblies), and congregations throughout the ELCA are faithfully and effectively served by qualified ordained and lay rostered leaders who are in committed same-gender relationships; and

WHEREAS, in March 2009 (well before this Synod's 2009 Assembly), the ELCA Church Council will decide which recommendations concerning the ELCA's ministry rosters it will make to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, and this Synod desires to communicate its views concerning rostered ministry as the Church Council prepares its recommendations on the matter; and

WHEREAS, a congregation that wishes to call as its pastor or lay rostered leader, an otherwise-qualified person in a committed same-gender partnership, should be permitted to do so, while at the same time a congregation that does not wish to call such a pastor or lay rostered leader cannot and should not be forced to do so; and

WHEREAS, the document known as "Vision and Expectations," the document known as "Definitions and Guidelines," and the policy on reinstatement to the rosters of this church may be amended by the Church Council at the direction, by a simple majority vote, of the Churchwide Assembly (see Preliminary Minutes of the 10<sup>th</sup> Churchwide Assembly, pages 64 and 80, explanations by Presiding Bishop Hanson and Secretary Almen); now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA, meeting in Assembly, direct the Synod Council to submit a resolution to the ELCA Church Council to take the following actions regarding the ELCA's ministry rosters:

To direct the Committee on Appeals to develop an amendment to the documents known as "Definitions and Guidelines" that removes provisions precluding "practicing homosexual persons" from the rosters of this church; and

To direct the Vocation and Education unit, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, to develop an amendment to the documents known as "Vision and

Expectations" that removes provisions requiring persons who are "homosexual in their self-understanding" to "abstain from homosexual sexual relationships"; and

To direct the Vocation and Education unit, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, to develop an amendment to the documents known as "Vision and Expectations" that inserts the following: "Ordained and lay rostered leaders in a same-gender partnership are expected to uphold the same standard as all ordained and lay rostered leaders, namely, to live in fidelity to their partner within a relationship that is mutual, chaste, and faithful"; and

To direct the Vocation and Education unit, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, to develop an amendment to the policy on reinstatement to the rosters of this church that permits the reinstatement, without the usual requirement of five consecutive years without call, of persons who have resigned or been removed from the rosters solely because they are in a mutual, chaste, and faithful committed same-gender relationship; and

To direct the Church Council to take the steps necessary to amend "Definitions and Guidelines," "Vision and Expectations," and the policy on reinstatement to the rosters of this church in conformity with the amendments developed (pursuant to the preceding directions) by the Committee on Appeals and the Vocation and Education unit.

It was decided to vote on this resolution at a later report.

**V. The following resolution was received from Nadine Anderson, St. John, Easton; Pr. Manfred Bahmann; Pr. Peter Bredlau; Sharon Ann Burns, St. Peter, Bethlehem; Pr. Grace Olson; Christine Summy, AiM; Pr. Richard Summy**

WHEREAS, we discern the Holy Spirit's work in the 2005 Churchwide Assembly as (1) affirming that the current disagreements on homosexuality are between people of faith seeking to live in faithful obedience to the command of Jesus Christ and the call of the Holy Spirit, (2) leading the church to live together amidst our disagreements, (3) inviting continued communication, openness and understanding among all members of this church; and

WHEREAS, the 2005 Churchwide Assembly affirmed its trust for pastors and lay rostered leaders and congregations as they discern ways to provide faithful pastoral care for all to whom they minister, including persons in a committed same-gender partnership; and

WHEREAS, many congregations in the ELCA count as valued members and leaders baptized persons who are in a committed same-gender relationship and who desire to make public their promises of love and fidelity, seek to invite God into their relationship to help in the fulfillment of their promises, and long for the blessing of their church

communities and the fullness of the prayers, encouragement and consolation that these communities of faith provide; and

WHEREAS, a growing number of states have legally defined and recognized relationships between two persons of the same gender and many in this church's congregations are entering into such relationships; and

WHEREAS, many congregations in the ELCA yearn to provide pastoral care for the same-gender couples among their members by witnessing and supporting their promises of lifelong fidelity and by offering support in the name of God as they fulfill these promises- now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA, meeting in Assembly, encourage pastors and lay rostered leaders and congregations to provide pastoral care to same-gender couples by witnessing or affirming their promises of lifelong fidelity, and by invoking God's help and offering the congregation's support as they fulfill these promises; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA, meeting in Assembly, direct the Synod Council to submit a resolution to the ELCA Church Council to direct the ELCA Worship and Liturgical Resources section to develop resources to assist pastors and lay rostered leaders and congregations who wish to provide pastoral care to same-gender couples by witnessing or affirming their promises of lifelong fidelity, and by invoking God's guidance and offering the congregation's support as they fulfill these promises.

It was decided to vote on this resolution at a later report.

Vice President Kinney took the chair. She pointed out the report of the Bishop beginning on page 5 of the Bulletin of Reports. She reminded the Assembly of the reception tomorrow evening honoring Bishop and Doris Strobel and all those who served on the Synod Staff for the past twelve years. She asked for questions on the Bishop's report.

Bishop Strobel resumed the chair and called attention to the Reports of the Vice President and the Synod Council and asked for questions. Vice President Kinney presented her report and noted that the only action in the Synod Council report that is to come before the Assembly is the adoption of the Program Proposal, which will be presented on Saturday.

Bishop Strobel asked Vice President Kinney to present the report of the Secretary. He called upon Treasurer Dave Hinrichs to present the Report of the Treasurer.

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary video of Pastor George Hein was shown.

Pastor Ziel made several announcements, including the information that the results of the first ballot would be posted at the registration desk and in the main lobby by approximately 10 PM. Names to be withdrawn must be submitted by 7 AM. Forms to withdraw from the ballot and forms for biographical information would also be available.

Bishop Strobel announced that opening and closing prayers would be led by members of the Synod Council. Martin Everhart closed with prayer. The bishop announced that the assembly was in recess until 8:30 AM tomorrow.