

# SYNOD NEWS

The Spirit of Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA

July 2009

## Synodical Strategic Directions

- **Deepen the spiritual lives of people** to help them see God at work and help others see that too
- **Build a network** that uses our gifts, skills, and resources to maximize what we can do together and strengthen congregations in their ministry
- **Develop leaders, both lay and ordained**, who are equipped and engaged in God's mission in daily life
- **Enhance lives of service** to deal with social needs and issues that arise in local communities or across the synod
- **Strengthen the work being done with children, youth and families** to support ministries as they engage their communities

## Highlights of the 2009 Synod Assembly



GOD'S WORK, OUR HANDS  
*Exploring God's Work Among Us*

Nearly 700 people gathered at the Sovereign Performing Arts Center in Reading for the 22nd annual assembly of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod June 5-6, 2009.

The first assembly chaired by Bishop Samuel R. Zeiser since his election in 2008, the gathering devoted several blocks of time to identifying where God is at work in the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod and how God's people are being called to serve. These discussions were part of a visioning process which will help set the course for the synod in the coming years.



Responding to input from congregations and mission district assemblies,

members of the synod council presented a purpose statement and strategic directions that were affirmed by the assembly. Small groups then generated ideas of how these directions could be addressed by members of the synod.

During the first session of the assembly, outgoing synod vice

president Priscilla Schlenker Kinney was honored for her eight years of service. Two goats were donated to families in our companion synod in Tanzania in her name. In her remarks, she gave thanks for the growing openness and diversity she has seen in the church since her childhood, when she questioned why girls could not be acolytes.



On Friday evening the assembly became a quasi-committee of the whole, allowing informal discussion of the proposed social statement, Human Sexuality, Gift and Trust. The statement will be considered by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly this summer. While the discussion was lively, it was always civil.

The session concluded with a series of non-binding votes, which pointed toward a willingness of the

assembly to support the social statement and the implementing resolutions that go with it.



**Resolutions Concerning Sexuality Adopted**

Discussion of the social statement continued on Saturday when several resolutions came to the floor.



In a series of votes, the assembly encouraged the ELCA Churchwide

Assembly to adopt the social statement and the Ministry Policy Recommendations.

These recommendations would make it possible for synods and congregations to choose to permit persons in publically accountable, long-term monogamous same-sex relationships to serve in rostered ministries.



Another resolution asking the ELCA to develop resources to help congregations support such relationships was adopted by a vote of 294-112.

A resolution asking that the ELCA develop a process to restore to the roster persons who had been removed because they were in committed same-sex relationships was also adopted.

A final resolution asking that the Churchwide Assembly require a two-thirds majority vote to adopt any changes to ministry standards was defeated by a vote of 138 in favor and 241 opposed.

**Other Resolutions**

Resolutions adopted at the assembly included a call for the ELCA to support the work of Lutheran Disaster Response.



**Dawn Baxter Elected Synod Vice President**

Three candidates were nominated to follow Priscilla Kinney, who was constitutionally limited to two terms.

Edward Cool, Holy Trinity, Bethlehem, and Dawn Baxter, Allegheny, Knauers, addressed the assembly briefly on Friday evening. The third candidate, Jean Sandberg, St. Mark, Lackawaxen, was unable to be present because she was serving as a coach at the Pennsylvania Special Olympics.

The results of the first and deciding ballot were Dawn Baxter, 333; Edward Cool, 128; and Jean Sandberg, 41.



Ms. Baxter has served on the synod council for the last six years, most recently as the chair of the council's Program and Review committee.



Dawn is the director of the West Berks Mission District and parish secretary at Hope, Reading. She was a leader in establishing Family Promise of Berks County, an interfaith ministry to homeless families with children.

Another motion urged the ELCA to work with Project Connect in combating racism and raising up candidates for ministry from all ethnic groups.

**The Rev. Gregory Villalon Brings Greetings from the ELCA**

The Rev. Gregory Villalon, the Director for Multicultural Leadership Development of the ELCA Vocation and Education unit, was the ELCA representative to the assembly. The assembly met in Reading, the most multicultural city in the synod.



Pr. Villalon shared a video greeting from Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson and emphasized Bishop Hanson's observation that the church is called to serve at the intersection of fear and hope.

**Elections**

Elected at the assembly:

**Synod Vice President:**

Dawn Baxter

**Synod Secretary:**

Barbara-Anne Taylor

**Synod Treasurer:** David Hinrichs

**Synod Council:** Nancy Bleam, Pr. Lee Diefenderfer, Pr. John Hassler, Donald Smith

**Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia:** Mitchell Possinger



**God's Purpose for the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod**

Encountering and sharing God's word of love given in Jesus Christ—encouraging lives of service