

MISSION MOMENT

**2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly:
The Breaking-In of God's Kingdom at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly
By Deacon Vicki Hanrahan**



On August 5-10, our synod's delegation of 18 joined nearly 1,000 members from 65 synods at the Wisconsin Center in Milwaukee for the ELCA 2019 Churchwide Assembly. Shown in the photo above are our members from the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin, and visible are two of the 5 members of our partner synod, the ELCA Caribbean synod shown far right. We sat next to our partner synod members including Bishop Idalia Negròn throughout the assembly.

Held every three years, "We are Church" was the theme of this year's assembly, and the manifestation of that theme throughout did not disappoint. Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton gracefully led our lively, faith-filled, diverse body of Christ, acting as God's church for the sake of the world. What a privilege it was to praise God with each other throughout the decision making, voting, gathering around meals, Holy Communion worship, singing together, rallying for immigration reform at the Homeland Security Office, and celebrating the culmination of the Campaign for the ELCA!

We prayed often, especially before voting. At one point, Bishop Eaton prayed with us just because someone came to a microphone as a point of order and suggested that we hadn't prayed in a while. We were making important decisions that needed the Holy Spirit's breath!

There were many glimpses of the breaking in of God's Kingdom. A collection of brief reflections from our voting members over the next two weeks will give you a special glimpse. Included also is a summary of the voting matters that were acted upon. We hope you will share this news within your congregations and will take some time to click on the links to additional resources to dive deeper. More stories will be shared in future issues as there's simply too much to distillate into one issue.

Thank you dear church for sending all of us to this important gathering where we can have a voice in the future of this church that we love. A portion of your offerings to your congregation get sent on to the synod and we send over 50% of the mission support we receive to churchwide, so in this way it is coming back to us to provide these opportunities to be church together for the sake of the world. Voting Matters and Outcomes of ELCA Churchwide Assembly 2019.

This past week's churchwide assembly was full of important votes and actions, including:

- Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton was reelected for a second six-year term on the first ballot. 897 votes were cast, and 670 votes were needed for election. Eaton received 725 votes, which is 81.19% of the vote. Eaton is the first ELCA presiding bishop to win re-election on the first ballot.
- Sue Rothmeyer, a deacon who serves as executive for administration with the Office of the Secretary, was elected secretary, a full-time position which acts as executive administrator and leader on all constitutional matters and interpretation. More: <https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/8001>
- A declaration of apology to our siblings of African descent, which was received by the African Descent Lutheran Association with thanks and a call for accountability and living into the words shared.
- Approved resolution declaring the ELCA is a "sanctuary church body," encouraging participation in the ELCA AMMPARO initiative for migrant children, discernment of care for our immigrant neighbors in our context, and the promise of forthcoming resources for this work. Until the final resolutions of the assembly are published, for now, the best summary of this action can be found on the New York Metropolitan synod's website as this is the synod that brought this memorial forward to the assembly: More: <https://www.mnys.org/evangelical-lutheran-church-declares-itself-a-sanctuary-denomination/>
- Approved support for the World Council of Church's Thursdays in Black, awareness movement for a world without rape and violence.
- Voted to commemorate June 17 as a day of repentance, in honor and remembrance of the martyrdom of the Emanuel 9.
- Approved a declaration for inter-religious commitment, reaffirming ecumenical and interfaith partnerships.
- Approved the recommendations from a strategic task-force which has been studying how to work toward authentic diversity in our church.
- Approved memorials: affirming but not "endorsing" the Poor People's Campaign, care for immigrants and refugees, and other statements.
- Adopted a new social statement, "Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action," and its implementing resolutions. Background: <https://www.elca.org/womenandjustice>
- Constitutional change for Deacons (rostered ministers of word and service) to be ordained, from the previous practice of consecration.
- Celebrated the milestones of 50 years of women's ordination, 40 years since the first woman of color was ordained, and 10 years since full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ clergy.



For more details of these voting matters, the ELCA News page offers news releases for almost all of them: <https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/Recent-News-Stories>

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All Plenary and Worship Services were live streamed. If you missed them, you can view them from the ELCA Churchwide Assembly site: <https://elca.org/churchwideassembly>



Signing for the deaf and hearing impaired was provided in part by one of our synod's best: Timothy Mumm. Thank you Tim, for serving in this important way! We appreciate your ministry!

REFLECTIONS FROM SOME OF OUR CHURCHWIDE VOTING MEMBERS



Nathan Nelson Houstin – Trinity (Madison)

"I am so humbled and grateful that I was chosen to represent the SCSW at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Milwaukee this past week. It was a truly inspiring and powerful experience. We voted on important matters such as racial reconciliation, rejection of white supremacy, interfaith and ecumenical work, sexism and gender equity. What a blessing to be part of this critical work for our denomination! The highlight of the week was the worship organized to celebrate the 50, 40, 10. 50-year anniversary of the ordination of women, 40th anniversary of the ordination of the first woman of color, and the 10-year anniversary of the ordination of members of the LGBTQIA+ community. The Holy Spirit was undeniably in the room. "



Miriam Bohlman Kunz – Lake Edge Lutheran Church (Madison)

"For me, Churchwide Assembly was a productive, exhausting week. It was amazing to see 1,000 people from around the country so passionate about the ministry of our church, and then to remember that these 1,000 people are only a small representation of almost 3.5 million people that are members of our church. It truly served as a reminder that God is working through many people across the country and around the world. It was a week full of celebrations, including that of a commitment to interfaith work and the anniversaries of the 50th of women's ordination in the Lutheran church in the US, the 40th of the first ordination of a woman of color, and the 10th of LGBTQIA+ serving openly. It was also a week of lament of how the church has been complicit and an active participant in racism, but as a body we committed to strive for authentic diversity in our church. For me, the highlight of the week was marching to the ICE facility for a prayer vigil. I was near the very front, and once we reached the facility, which is on a hill, it was amazing to look back and see the almost never-ending stream of people marching together. It was amazing to see how God's love and grace can call us to

action, not just individually, but as a community."



Rev. Matthew Pook - Pastor, St. John's Lutheran Church (Evansville)

"I am proud of the good work we are doing through the ELCA. The spirit of love for all people was powerful and pervasive through the Churchwide Assembly. It was inspiring to work together to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ and promote peace and justice far and wide. One of my highlights was adopting the Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment in the presence of dozens of faith leaders across traditions who are full of love, support, and hope for our common work together. It was also great to see old friends and remember our connections through Christ." (Rev. Pook seen here in the center).



Heidi Muenchow – First Lutheran Church (Beaver Dam)

"It was truly an honor to be a young adult voting member from our synod for CWA. As a young mom and a Youth & Family Leader at First Lutheran in Beaver Dam, I found it to be an amazing opportunity, and a privilege, to come together as representatives of the whole Church and have a voice. It was wonderful to connect with other leaders in our synod and beyond. As I reflect, this is something that I am going to take with me forever. We made some big decisions as the ELCA and to say that I was there as a voting member is a little surreal! My heart has been aching for a way to help migrants and refugees and those effected by gun violence. Now I feel I will have tools to help facilitate change because of the decisions we made as an ELCA. If you are able, I would recommend attending the next CWA in Columbus, Ohio!"



Jen Kooistra - Director of Youth, Family & Education Ministries, St. John's Lutheran Church (Oregon)

"Church Wide Assembly was a week full of inspiring work, study, fellowship, and worship. (Daily worship was an amazing array of music, language, and visual impact.) One of the most notable moments to me was listening to The Rev. Dr. Niveen Saraas read scripture in Arabic during one of the daily worship services and lead us in one of our daily Bible studies. She was born and raised in Bethlehem, Palestine. At an assembly which celebrated the 50, 40, and 10-year anniversaries of women ordained for ministry, it was striking to have a woman from the Holy Land speaking to and leading us. In fact, it was amazing to have people from all over the world with various religious beliefs in attendance, especially as we considered and passed the "Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment". We have work to do, Church, but we are not alone in it."



Rev. Mae Jean Zelle - Pastor, Lake Edge Lutheran Church (Madison)

"We began the session to consider the Declaration on Inter-religious Commitment by singing "Dona Nobis Pacem", the beloved plea for peace "Grant us peace", in Latin. After a few tense moments of debate and an overwhelmingly positive vote in the presence of dignitaries from many of the world's religions I wanted so much to sing it again. Instead (Thank you, Holy Spirit) we sang an equally lovely song of peace, "Peace, Salaam, Shalom." "Yes!" I thought as tears of joy fell, "Yes, it is time to sing of peace together in as many languages as we can."



There were many glimpses of the breaking in of God's Kingdom on August 5-10, as our synod's delegation of 18 joined nearly 1,000 members from 65 synods at the Wisconsin Center in Milwaukee for the **ELCA 2019 Churchwide Assembly**. Our two-part series continues with additional highlights.

On Thursday, August 8, the **ELCA launched our participation in the World Council of Churches Thursdays in Black Campaign towards a world without rape and violence**. The Assembly was invited to wear black as an expression of our commitments through the 2015 ELCA social message, Gender Based Violence and support of the WCC campaign.

What is the Thursdays in Black Campaign?

Thursdays in Black grew out of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998), in which the stories of rape as a weapon of war, gender injustice, abuse, violence, and many tragedies that grow outward from such violence became all the more visible. But what also became visible was women's resilience, agency and personal efforts to resist such violations.

To learn more and to find a Toolkit from World Council of Churches to promote Thursdays in Black in Your Congregation: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/get-involved/thursdays-in-black>

Link to ELCA Social Message on Gender Based Violence:

<https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Gender-Violence>

In order to explore as much as possible, we as a body of voters, divided and conquered! While others were at the **AMMPARO prayer vigil and march to the Immigration & Customs Enforcement building** in Milwaukee, I was invited to attend the **World Council of Churches** lunch where I was blessed to hear from the most remarkable women who gave inspiring testimonies to the much needed work of our church. Moderator of the World Council of Churches Central Committee, Dr. Agnes Abuom, from the Anglican Church of Kenya, shared "Sexual and gender-based violence is one of the most pressing and most urgent problems that require our concerted efforts. It has become a severe pandemic to which the church must continue to respond." Shown here, I am with the Rev. Nicqi Ahswood to my right, who was most



interested to learn about the work that our synod is doing alongside Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin to combat Human Trafficking, and Dr. Agnes Abuom to my left. I was grateful for the opportunity to affirm their work by telling stories of how we are hard at work for the same cause in this part of God's kingdom. What a privilege to stand with these women whose lives are centered on helping some of the most vulnerable in our world, victims of rape and violence. Their address was part of the WCC **Thursdays in Black** campaign message.

We also celebrated the anniversary of **50 years of women's ordination, 40 years since the first woman of color was ordained, and 10 years since full inclusion of LGBTQIA clergy**. The celebration began with an impressive procession of over 400 ordained women into the worship service that day. Our rostered were well represented. See a wonderful 5 minute video that captures the joy and excitement!

<http://bit.ly/ELCAWomensProcessional>



Reflection from Rev. Rebecca Ninke

Rev. Ninke, Pastor, Brooklyn Lutheran Church (Brooklyn) attended the Churchwide Assembly as a featured author with her daughter, Kate, who co-authored "There's No Wrong Way to Pray," published by Augsburg Fortress, the ELCA publishing ministry. I caught up with them at their book signing in the Augsburg Booth. Pastor Rebecca shared:



"It was really delightful being there! (I've worked with some of the people staffing 1517's booth for 16 years writing curriculum, so it was a mini reunion.) During the signing, some people who had gotten the book earlier told us how they were using it at home or in church—a copy to parents at baptism in churches or grandparents reading to grandkids, etc. Kate got asked a lot of good questions about her half of the creative process — fun for the mom to hear her answers. A camp counselor bought copies to use at camp—that made this camp staff alumni happy!"

To order the book: <https://www.augsburgfortress.org/store/product/9781506449326/There-No-Wrong-Way-to-Pray?c=285840>

One of the best God-sightings for me at the Churchwide Assembly was being wonderfully surprised to see this group of Adults at worship on Thursday, August 8. These friends attended the assembly as visitors from **Midvale Community Lutheran Church (Madison)**. Led by Rev. Ken Smith, this fun group attended the Churchwide Assembly while on one of three summer field trips as part of their Adult Bible School! How cool is that! Since it is Summertime, I decided I liked thinking of them as participating in Adult VBS! The vision and actuation of this way to feed our souls is such a creative idea, we think it is worthy of this week's Mission Moment.



As explained in their brochure about it, Adult Bible School (ABS) is a new learning opportunity for adults at Midvale Community Lutheran Church. Learning ministry and growing in the faith for all age groups is a strength of their congregation and Adult Bible School grows on that tradition.

Their theme for the summer is Community (part of their congregation's name) as they focus on Christian Community: Its biblical roots, its spirit, current conversations and challenges, and foundation. The program is

developed by the Adult Education Committee and coordinated by Rev. Ken Smith, a member of that committee and visitation pastor for Midvale. The focus of this CWA Holy Communion service was on Ecumenical and inter-religious partnerships, so this was a great day to celebrate being part God's beloved community in the world.

Midvale has clearly looked at one of their strengths as a congregation being that currently over ten pastors and one deacon rostered in the ELCA are members of their congregation. In addition to their called pastors, Rev. Katie Baardseth who led a session on Forgiveness and Rev. Blake Rohrer, who led a session on the Future Shape of the Church Community, these rostered served as resources for congregational reflection and discussion. Several of them took part in this year's summer opportunities for adults as volunteer instructors. Their summer schedule included topics such as Contemporary Spiritual Practices, led by Deacon Judy Nolde, Lamentations for Today's Laments by Pastor Larry Pinnow, Creation Untamed & Biblical Narratives of Creation led by Rev. Jeff Wild and Reflections and Poetry with Rev. George Bauman. Field trips included a Rural and Urban Dialogue for Lutherans in Wisconsin: A Half Day Conversation with Pastor Dick Inglett who leads the synod's Small Town and Rural Ministry initiative. The third field trip included a morning at Edgewood College learning about the use of illustrations with the St. John's Bible.

Research indicates that by the year 2033, there will be more people living that are over the age of 65 than under the age of 65. Adult Bible Study and field trips seem like a wonderful way to continue to engage with this beloved community of Christ followers! Well done Midvale Community Lutheran!

