

ELCA Churchwide Assembly– August 12-15, 2011

Rev. Tabitha Gallatin, Voting Member Report

I was privileged to attend the Churchwide assembly on behalf of the congregations in the East Central Synod of Wisconsin. I thank you for sending me there to do the work of the church on a churchwide level.

Overall, the experience of the Churchwide assembly was rich with worship, humor, inspiration, God's Word, fellowship, and serious discernment for God's call and direction for this church.

Specifically, I would like to share some information and observations regarding the assembly work that took place.

1. Congregational Changes.

Secretary David Swartling reported changes to the body of the church, particularly the numbers of congregations who are in the process of leaving the ELCA or those who have already disaffiliated from the ELCA.

832 Congregations have taken a first vote to consider leaving ELCA.

621 congregations have passed a first vote. 211 congregations where vote has failed.

517 congregations have passed a 2nd vote, and have been recognized as leaving by their synod council.

492 Congregations have been officially removed from Roster of the ELCA

I was surprised to see our synod in one who has experienced loss of 10 % or more, and that our synod was in the top 8 synods in greatest number of congregations to leave. Below is the top 5 of the top 8 synods.

<u>Synod</u>	<u># of Cong.</u>	<u>% of cong.</u>
SW Texas	28	16
Western Iowa	21	13
Montana	18	12
North Carolina	28	12
ECSW	15	11

Some synods have had one or zero congregations disaffiliate. So the distribution of congregations leaving the ELCA is not the same across all synods.

Secretary Swartling also presented some further evaluation regarding these changes. First, he shared that 54% of congregations leaving the ELCA are from cities/communities with a population of 10,000 or less. However, 25% of our large worshipping congregations (worshipping 801 persons or more/week) have also left the ELCA. So in terms of numbers, more congregations leaving are from rural or small town settings; but a higher percentage of large congregations in urban/suburban centers have left. Destinations reported for those congregations who have left are mainly LCMC (315 cong. 61%) and NALC (160 cong.)

All that said, Swartling reported that 95% of congregations remain in the ELCA. And 94% of persons, members of congregations remain in the ELCA. And financial giving, assets, benevolence and bequests are still stable. This attests to the strength which remains in the church organizationally, in terms of support and numbers.

2. Genetics Social Statement – adopted.

We were presented the final copy of the proposed social statement on Genetics, “Genetics, Faith and Responsibility.”

It was reported that the ELCA seems to be the first church body to develop a comprehensive ethical framework that addresses decisions and choices rooted in the context of genetic science in our lives and community.

The Genetics social statement can be found on www.elca.org/socialstatements/genetics. This statement addressed the area of genetics acknowledging that it affects the agriculture/food field, medical care/health, and social outlooks/research and institutions.

The key idea running thru the discernment and application of this social statement and work that persons do, is social responsibility, and the respect for the innovative stewardship of the abundance of life in creation. The vocation God establishes and grants us is to love, respect and promote the community of life with justice, wisdom and responsibility.

What I found profound from this work and the work of Churchwide assembly as this statement was being addressed, was the meaningful affirmation our Scientist brothers and sisters in Christ experienced. There was a sense from those in the sciences who are members of ELCA congregations, of an appreciation that they can work in the science field and do so thru the eyes of faith. And that the rest of the church and the civil society see it not as a contradiction, but a vantage point and a perspective that carries great integrity.

Wow! If nothing else would have resulted from this social statement being proposed, this affirmation would be enough for me, to recognize and celebrate our scientists who share our resurrection faith and thank God for them.

3. Living into the Future of the Church Together (LIFT – the ecology of the church)

I could write a whole report on this agenda item itself. Please see the website for content of this, and see all of the changes. www.elca.org/lift

The changes proposed out of this task force were adopted, some with amendments. The changes were structural, administrative, and theological/missional in nature. The affect of these changes are broad and cover a number of areas of ministry and life of the church, on a churchwide level, synodical and congregational level.

Other meaningful happenings at the assembly included initiating a churchwide Malaria Campaign drive, seeing and appreciating the living Lutheran video contest winners, and hearing in person from specialized ministry avenues of our Church together, like Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Disaster Response.

This report is certainly not comprehensive in nature, and only include a few highlights that I found important to report.

If you have any further questions, I am available to provide information.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve God at Churchwide Assembly,
Rev. Tabitha Gallatin