



# Pacifica Synod



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

**22nd Annual Synod Assembly ♦ May 21-23 ♦ Riverside Convention Center**

## Our Hands at Work



Registration began at 8 a.m.

### Hearings

Made available for the first time, hearings started the assembly agenda. Those in attendance were able to sit in on discussions on the proposed Social Statement, budget hearing and resolution hearing. This was a time to listen to others views, get clarification or voice an opinion on these varied topics.

"I declare this twenty-second assembly of the Pacifica Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to be in session in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." With these words, Bishop Murray Finck opened the Pacifica Synod's 22nd Annual Assembly.



Bishop Finck responds to questions at hearings

### Bible Study

The Rev. Susan Briehl led the afternoon Bible study, ably assisted by musicians Tom Witt, Mary Preus and Mary Shaima. Her scripture for the study was the story of Jesus healing a paralyzed man, as found in Luke 5:17-26. This passage says those who had witnessed the healing "were filled with awe, saying 'We have seen strange things today.'"

Briehl believes that we, like those early witnesses, "will leave this assembly and go back into our daily lives having seen and heard strange things." She said that the friends of the paralytic were so faithful that they looked for, and discovered, a new way of getting to Jesus. They deconstructed the present reality (the roof of the home), enabling their friend to get through the crowds gathered around Jesus. They needed to get their friend closer to the compassionate God in Jesus and used their own hands to accomplish it.

Briehl asked: Where are those we know and love who are in need of Christ's love, healing and forgiveness? How can we help?

Where are [today's] paralyzed in need of healing, compassion and justice? We look up and those surrounding our mats are our friends with enough faith to make a way when there was none before.

Briehl concluded by noting that Jesus sent the healed man home, for that is where we are called to serve. At the close of this Assembly, we will be sent home, having seen strange things: life from death, wholeness from sickness, joy from sorrow.

### Treasurer's Report

Synod Treasurer Loren Fry presented a treasurer's report that showed the synod ending the fiscal year in the black. More importantly, he reported on how many different ways the synod works throughout the region using the mission support from the congregations.

### Bishop's Report

Bishop Murray Finck began his 2009 report to the Assembly with a humorous story of a wedding miscommunication that resulted in whispers amongst the congregation and the embarrassment of the clergy person. He then said, "I want to be very clear with you about several matters before this synod and the church of which we are all a part... I want to do no whispering with you in this assembly. We want no communication break-downs, no surprises, hopefully nothing lost in translation."

Noting the recent media coverage of studies showing "that more and more Americans are no longer connected in any way whatsoever with the Christian Church," he cited a convergence that is taking place to which we are all called to attend. Even as the population of the nation increases, so does the percentage of people not connected to the a church. Bishop Finck said, "The mission field in our own back yards is greater than ever, but people are not waiting in line to get into our doors and into our ministries." Add to this the current state of our economy and we may be looking at "a perfect storm" scenario.

He further noted that our society and our church are engaged in deep-seated, deep-rooted questions of morality, ethics, the law, and human rights, biblical teachings, and tradition. This was clearly seen in the very public way that President Obama's recent address at the University of Notre Dame. Bishop Finck said, "[Obama] said what has been true for many years, 'No matter how much we want to fudge it... the fact is that at some level, the views of the two camps are irreconcilable,' [and it's time to stop] 'reducing those with differing views to caricature.'" Obama finished by saying, "I do not suggest that the debate sur-



Bishop Finck recognized the following for the anniversaries of their ordination:

#### 50 years

David Babcock    Larry Gardner    Harvey Peters Jr.

#### 25 years

Dianne Eller    Gloria Espeseth    David Kieffer  
Randall Mundt    Kay Reeb    Thomas Chen  
Kim Eifert Krogstad

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rounding abortion can or should go away.” Responding to this, The Rev. John Jenkins, president of Notre Dame gave thanks for a president who was not “someone who stopped talking to those who disagree with him.”

After noting several successes experienced in the Pacifica Synod past ten years, Bishop Finck said that “Pacifica is in a very different place than it was in 1999. There is more talk of survival these ten years later. There are those who have decided to let go of the oars and are no longer willing to pull and strain with us through these difficult waters. There are some who want to be the church, more alone and unto themselves, rather than day-to-day connections of neighboring congregations, the conference, the Pacifica Synod and the ELCA.”

Bishop Finck concluded, “Whatever labels we bear – moderate, liberal, conservative, traditionalist, progressive, centrist, this is not the time for separate camps, but a time to be together in the church... When we read about the early church... when the church was not in agreement about a very important theological issue and practice, they came together... they worked it out... they loved God and they loved one another too much to pull apart or separate... from each other... I hope and pray that for the Pacifica Synod, and I hope and pray that that is also your hope and prayer. There is so much important work that we are needed to do together.



The Rev. Dr. Frederick Niedner

### Keynote Speaker

After being introduced by his cousin Bishop Finck, The Rev. Dr. Frederick Niedner began his keynote address noting the “COMpassion is one of those COM- words in our language, like COMMunion or COMMunity or COMpanion. Niedner noted that the Hebrew Testament word for “to have compassion for” is literally “to have a womb for.” To have com-

passion is to have a womb for someone – to treat others as if you were their mother and they were once in your womb. The word may also mean to treat someone as coming from the same womb as you do – a “womb-mate” – your flesh and blood.

He noted several Hebrew Testament passages that refer to the compassion of God and substituted the “womb” language. In the instance of Psalm 51, King David’s hope is that God’s steadfast mercy is [literally] an “enormous womb,” with room for “the commander and sinner in chief.”

Niedner concluded that compassion, “at least as seen in this metaphor, ... is a “mothering thing.” If we take the story of Hosea to heart, we see that for God, the question is never whether, but only when, love and faithfulness, mercy and compassion for God’s people, would cost God life itself. But that, too -- the embrace of the ‘Holy One in our midst’ -- requires hands, flesh and blood hands, hands on which that love is engraved forever. God is the compassionate God. God is the God of the great womb.

### Resolutions

- **Reception of Resurrection L. C. in Coronado.** Vice President Sheila Wenzel made the motion to receive Resurrection L. C. in

Coronado into the ELCA and the Pacifica Synod. **The resolution Passed with great enthusiasm and applause.**

- **Compensation Guidelines for Rostered Leaders of the Pacifica Synod - The resolution Passed.**
- **Memorial to Develop Social Statement on Human Disability** - Discussion followed, raising the questions of what is the difference with this memorial and the American with Disabilities Act. Response: ADA doesn’t apply to rostered leaders. Can we accomplish this without costing a lot of money? What is the budget impact? Response: None to the synod at this time. Only if churchwide decides to proceed will a fiscal impact be known. Why not a constitutional amendment? Response: Social statements foster advocacy, education and study. What about the fiscal impact on small congregations? Response: It is something we have to do, and we should do. Building codes are already the jurisdiction of cities. Do we have to list all disabilities? Response: Bring an amendment to the memorial: Time will be allotted for this in the next business session.

**Assembly Planning Team:** Helen Riggs asked everyone to trace their hand and write inside the drawing what they wish to do in service to God after you leave this assembly. The drawings will be strung together as a colorful reminder of our hands at work.

**Greetings** were given by The Rev. Matthew Seargeant on behalf of Bishop Mary Ann Swenson, presiding bishop of the California-Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, and by Bishop Dean Nelson presiding bishop of Southwest California Synod - ELCA.

### Opening Worship

The evening worship included an inspirational blend of new and familiar music led by Mary Preus, Tom Witt, Mary Shaima and Jason Klein.

The Rev. Susan Briehl offered the evening’s message on the theme of being “dressed in the Holy Spirit,” recalling for us the precious gift of our identity as children of God. Speaking to us through the story of “Abigail,” who suffered abuse in her household as a child and on the streets as a young woman, and who lost everything except her claim as a child of God, Briehl reminded us of the power of this identity. With seemingly nothing left of herself, Abigail could still remember and claim one thing: “Don’t forget I am a child of God.”

With the words, “Don’t forget” echoing in our minds, Briehl spoke of these words as a prayer of supplication imploring God not to forget his child; as a declaration of victory darkness; as a charge to the community of faith not to forget that those who are “least”—the ruined, the forgotten—are in need of our compassion.

The Reverend Heidi Hester was installed as Assistant to the Bishop and welcomed into her new role by the assembly in worship with a litany of support and affirmation, and a festive communion was celebrated.



Installation of Assistant to the Bishop The Rev. Heidi Hester

