

Grand Canyon Synod Assembly

Black Canyon Conference Center, Phoenix

June 10-11, 2011

By Rachael Pitts

The conference provided opportunities for attendees to learn more about our missions, the synod, and vote for volunteers to serve on committees. Two resolutions were put forward for the assembly vote, and synod finances were reviewed. The assembly also participated in Bible study and worship, including the Eucharist on Saturday. Lots of public speaking and workshops provided educational opportunities, and the two lunches featured foods from Senegal and Lithuania. Bishop Steve Talmage conducted most of the plenary sessions, augmented by many speakers.

Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church sent Pastor Lara Forbes, and delegates Nick Pegelow, Rachael Pitts, and Marissa Melgar. Faith belongs to the Capital Group, which is geographically located in Phoenix, and serves as a discussion and voting segment of the synod. Next year's assembly will be in Las Vegas.

Missions

The financial report indicated that funds for the missions are down from a peak in 2008. Contributions for missions are reduced. Here are the numbers for the 2012-13 Mission Plan:

Revenue	\$2,064,882
Expenses	\$2,170,498
Change	(\$105,616)

Grace Lutheran is a heat and respite center during the summer, and welcomes water and dollar donations. Mount of Olives does food and thrift store outreach -- they feed about 20,000 per year. Concordia collects, and sells 60 lbs. of produce for \$10. There is a mission partners booklet that is available online on the Grand Canyon Synod website.

A list of mission grant recipients included locations in Arizona and Nevada:

- Maricopa Lutheran (south of Phoenix)
- New Journey, Fountain Hills
- House of Prayer, Rock Point
- Oromo, Las Vegas
- Chapel of Improvement, Las Vegas
- La Sagrada Familia, Phoenix
- Vida Nueva, Phoenix
- San Juan Bautista, Tucson
- La Primera, Mesa

The assembly had an opportunity to hear speakers from some of these missions. We had the good news that San Juan Bautista in Tucson is thriving under the stewardship of Pastor Pablo Espinoza, formerly of Faith Church. The Rock Point mission is creating a positive impact in Rock Point among Native Americans, where the mission is a true community center, providing important community amenities. The members of New Journey left their church when it withdrew from the ELCA, and now as a small group worship together on Saturday night at the Methodist Church.

Bishop Steve asked us to pray for each other, think creatively and strategically, turn scarcity thinking into abundance thinking, continue tithing, and work ecumenically. Ecumenical work involves serving small rural communities, some with Mormon majorities, and fewer resources. You can learn more about the Grand Canyon Missional Leadership Academy on the website (missionalleadership.net). There will also be an ELCA Latino Lay Mission Academy online in the summer of 2011. Increasing mission support is an investment. We need to create mission partnerships (which we are already doing), take a local interest, and audit mission progress.

We saw short films about the missions in Vilnius, Lithuania, and Senegal. Bishop Sabutis of Lithuania could not attend, but sent a letter.

The Church-wide Council of 37 members and 65 synods reported on their mission goals. There is a continuing effort to eradicate malaria and worldwide hunger, and address the HIV / AIDs problem. Lutheran Disaster Response has been busy this year with tsunami and disasters in the Midwest. Income is down and the Council has reduced staff numbers. 771 churches have discussed and possibly voted or will vote on leaving the ELCA because of policy changes in the last year.

Resolutions

The assembly voted on a resolution to condemn bullying. There was no opposition to the resolution.

*Resolution 11.01 – Speak out and act to prevent bullying, harassment, and related violence.
Amended to include implementation.*

A resolution (#11.02) was also put forward to more closely monitor mission activities and expenditures. This resolution was also approved.

Workshops

There were several workshops offered. I attended “God’s Evolving Story of Life,” conducted by Pastor Ron Rude. Ron combined a discussion of Biblical commentary on the natural world with ecological realities that we are all aware of. The old world view that earth belongs to homo sapiens is no longer viable, and Christians must create a new relationship with God’s creation, with our neighbors, with our inner spirit, and with God. We must follow Jesus into a healed relationship.

I also attended a workshop on church websites and email opportunities. Our own website provides many of the information opportunities that were recommended in this workshop.

Bishop’s Message

Bishop Talmage pointed out that we live in a world of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Leaders are challenged and must engage the community in the search for progress. We must continue our work in missions and ministry. Build bridges and make connections with vision, understanding, clarity, and agility.

Report of Bishop Mark Hanson

The Bishop reported via DVD, “We are Free in Christ to Serve.” This DVD discussed a Pastor in Philadelphia who seeks to serve the homeless, and has created a support network. It also covered the Bishop’s visit to Haiti, deeply into earthquake recovery, and developing a coffee growing industry.