



A Brief Summary of Actions 2007 Churchwide Assembly

The Tenth Biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was held Aug. 6-11, 2007, at Navy Pier, Chicago. About 2,000 people participated, including 1,069 voting members. The theme was "Living in God's Amazing Grace: Thanks Be to God!"

Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson Re-Elected

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, 60, was elected to serve a second six-year term as presiding bishop. Hanson was re-elected on the second ballot with 888 votes of the 1,029 cast. Seventy-five percent of the ballots cast are required for election on the second ballot. The runner-up nominee, the Rev. Karl P. Donfried, received 73 votes. Hanson fell two votes short of being re-elected on the first or nominating ballot. He begins his second term Nov. 1. Hanson was first elected presiding bishop at the 2001 Churchwide Assembly.

David D. Swartling Elected Secretary

David D. Swartling, 60, a Seattle attorney, was elected to a six-year term as ELCA secretary. Swartling was elected on the fifth ballot, 611 to 366, over the Rev. Paul A. Schreck, executive for constitution and rostering interpretation and oversight, ELCA Office of the Secretary. Swartling will succeed the Rev. Lowell G. Almen, who has been secretary since the ELCA was formed in 1987. Almen announced last year he would not seek a fifth term and will leave office Oct. 31. He was presented the *Servus Dei* (Servant of God) Medal at the assembly, given to churchwide officers who are completing their terms.

Assembly Encourages Restraint in Discipline of Congregations, Leaders

The Churchwide Assembly made **no** changes to ELCA standards for professional leaders, declining proposals that suggested specific policy changes. By a vote of 538 to 431, the assembly asked its synods and bishops to "refrain from or demonstrate restraint in disciplining" people and congregations that call otherwise-qualified candidates in mutual, chaste and faithful committed same-gender relationships, and it called for restraint in disciplining rostered leaders in committed same-gender relationships. The proposal was adopted as a substitute for a recommendation of the Memorials Committee. Following the decision, Hanson said, "These are words of counsel. They are not words that change the standards of the church. They reflect the mind of this assembly as it seeks to give counsel to the leaders of this church." The Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality is currently developing a social statement on human sexuality for consideration by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. Voting members referred to the task force memorials regarding same-sex blessings, ELCA clergy standards and other matters. The assembly added an amendment to its referral on clergy standards, directing the task force to "specifically address and make recommendations to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly on changes to any policies that preclude practicing homosexual persons from the rosters of this church."

"Book of Faith" Initiative Affirmed

The assembly endorsed "Book of Faith: Lutherans Read the Bible," a five-year initiative to promote study of the Bible. The initiative grew out of a proposal the North Carolina Synod made to the 2005 Churchwide Assembly. One recommendation stressed the importance of Scripture for believers "throughout the ages" and thanked the North Carolina Synod for proposing the initiative. It was adopted by a vote of 1,000 to 19. A companion recommendation, adopted 956 to 68, gave specific suggestions for ways to "invite and encourage all members, expressions, institutions and partners of this church to commit themselves regularly and increasingly to hearing, reading, studying, sharing and being formed by God's Word."

Education Social Statement Adopted

With a 949 to 35 vote, the assembly adopted a social statement, "Our Calling in Education," which addresses issues of children's faith formation, equitable access to education, quality of U.S. public schools, and support for Lutheran schools, colleges and campus ministries. The assembly also adopted the statement's accompanying implementation actions. Several amendments were adopted, including the addition of language that addresses the specific needs of American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian communities as well as students with disabilities. Social statements are significant documents adopted by the Churchwide Assembly. There are now nine ELCA social statements.

Assembly Strengthens ELCA's Financial Future

Striving to strengthen the future financial resources of the ELCA, voting members accepted a report

with recommendations from the Blue Ribbon Committee on Mission Funding, appointed to study the ELCA's funding policies and practices. By a 623 to 52 vote, the assembly received "with gratitude" the committee's report, commended the content of the report for study and reflection throughout this church, and fostered a renewed commitment to "vigorous mission-support efforts." The assembly called for the development of a resource for presentation to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to "help congregations assess their responsible and accountable use of God's resources commended to their care."

Assembly Asks for Social Statement on Criminal Justice by 2013

By a vote of 957 to 68, the assembly directed the ELCA Church in Society program unit to develop a social statement on criminal justice for consideration by the 2013 Churchwide Assembly. Requests for the statement grew out of memorials from three synods. The social statement will be developed following consultation with church members and others involved in criminal justice, and it is expected to deal with topics such as the prison system, rehabilitation for those convicted of crimes and the current cost of incarcerating criminals.

ELCA Assembly Extends Full Communion Relationship with Moravian Church

Voting members extended the ELCA's full communion relationship with the Moravian Church in America to the East West Indies and the Alaska Provinces of the Moravian Church in America by a vote of 999 to 23. The 1999 Churchwide Assembly adopted a proposal for full communion with the Northern and Southern Provinces of the Moravian Church in America.

The assembly adopted several other proposals:

+ **Evangelical Lutheran Worship** was "received with thanksgiving" as this church's primary worship resource. Released in 2006, about 725,000 volumes of the book have been distributed.

+ It called for a churchwide strategy for responding to **HIV and AIDS** to build on and deepen current denominational engagement with the pandemic in the United States and around the world. The resolution urged further prayer, charity, advocacy and education efforts. The ELCA committed \$1 million to be used for the strategy's implementation. The assembly asked the Church Council to consider committing up to \$1 million more for implementation of the strategy.

+ The assembly invited renewed efforts by members and congregations to "reach and surpass, as soon as possible," a goal of \$25 million in annual giving to the **ELCA World Hunger Appeal**.

+ The assembly said Lutherans should study the situation in **Darfur, Sudan**, and advocate to federal officials on behalf of Darfur, a place where the U.S. government has called the mass killing "genocide." The action praised Hanson for the efforts he and the LWF have made to address the situation in Darfur.

+ Voting members declared their opposition to "any escalation of the war" in **Iraq** and asked this church to call on the U.S. government to "take immediate and comprehensive steps to end the violence and establish a peaceful, stable, and just society in that country." They urged the ELCA to engage in "moral deliberation about the situation in Iraq," urged concern for military personnel and their families, and asked ELCA members to make their views known to members of Congress.

+ ELCA congregations and other Lutheran agencies should provide a "welcoming and supporting environment for returning **military veterans**," according to an assembly resolution.

+ The assembly called on the ELCA to recommit to this **church's strategy for engagement in Israel and Palestine**, including a call for economic initiatives. An assembly amendment said that economic initiatives could, in consultation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, include "purchasing of products from Palestinian providers and exploration of the feasibility of refusing to buy products produced in Israeli settlements." The assembly also called for examination of investment activity by the ELCA and added an amendment that specifically excludes "the option of divesture." Awareness-building, accompaniment and advocacy activities are components of the strategy, adopted by the Church Council in 2005, and the ELCA "Peace Not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land" campaign that the 2005 Churchwide Assembly adopted.

+ With a 318 to 309 vote, the assembly asked **synod bishops to discuss their accountability** "to the adopted policies, practices and procedures of the ELCA" and requested that a report be brought to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.