

Ecclesia Plantanda

SEPA's 2012 Assembly focuses on Muhlenberg's motto: "The Church must be planted!"

Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA

May 2012

Our newest church

It's a long way from Liberia to East Lansdowne, but over that distance God planted and nurtured a small worshipping community in a refugee camp into a thriving Lutheran Church.

Page 2

'God's dandelion Church'

"The power of God through Jesus Christ springs eternal -- anywhere, anytime, anyplace." Below



'You are the ELCA'

The ELCA is the church that shares a living, daring confidence in God's grace" was the message The Rev. Dr. Sherman Hicks, brought to the Assembly.

Page 2

Plant! Water! Grow!



"This is a new season of health and vitality for the Kingdom of God, the ELCA, and the Synod." Below

Surplus Budget OK'd

The Assembly approved a 2013 budget that calls for ending the year with a surplus of approximately \$10,000. 91 congregations increased or maintained support in 2011.

Page 2

Learn more:

A complete summary of the Assembly, including articles and video highlights, can be accessed online: ministrylink.org/2012



Bishop Re-elected

The Assembly re-elected the bishop on the first ballot with exactly the 75% margin required.

"I've learned over the last six years that the Synod elects a pastor and forms a bishop. And you have formed me," Bishop Claire Burkat told the 2012 Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly May 4 after it re-elected her to a second six-year term as bishop.

"We are embarking on a new world of ways that we can network and reach out to one another, and God will multiply our efforts more than we can imagine," she said.

Burkat received exactly the 348 votes required to meet the three-fourths requirement of the 464 legal votes cast Friday morning.

The election came on the first, ecclesiastical ballot of the election process. The full Assembly hall erupted in applause when the result was announced. The Assembly then celebrated the election in song.

"I want to thank all of you for your love and prayer and support and forgiveness, and for your truth-telling -- even when I did not want to hear it," Burkat told the Assembly.



"I've learned over the last six years that the Synod elects a pastor and forms a bishop. And you have formed me."
-Bishop Claire Burkat

"I have been stretched and strengthened in ways I could not have imagined: spiritually, emotionally, vocationally, intellectually," she said.

'God's dandelion Church'

At the opening worship of the 2012 Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly, Bishop Claire Burkat compared the church to a dandelion.

"Just one bright yellow flower, when it's done blooming yields hundreds of tiny seeds that parachute through the air and land to take root, starting the process all over again," said Burkat.

She told the Assembly about seeds of word and service currently being spread throughout the Synod.

"We are called to spread the Gospel," said Burkat. "Everyone is a potential dandelion seed who believes that the power of God through Jesus Christ springs eternal-anywhere, anytime, anyplace."

Seeds of Mission

"This is a new season of health and vitality...for the Kingdom of God, for the ELCA, and right here in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod," Bishop Claire Burkat said in her address.

"I see lots of life," the bishop said, reflecting on her visits to congregations throughout her first term as bishop.

"I see many strong, healthy, mature plants, congregations deeply rooted in their communities that provide their neighbors with beauty and shade and food -- and the Gospel. Dedicated church leaders who are busy watering and fertilizing the soil of the Kingdom, and pulling out weeds that threaten to choke off our witness to the Gospel," she said.

"The good news we know and we proclaim is that we are not responsible for the growth - it's God who gives the growth!" the bishop said. "Our call is to faithfully plant, water and tend the garden, whether it is a season of growth or decline."

CELEBRATING OUR PAST, WELCOMING THE FUTURE

What relevance does the experience of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg planting the church across pre-Revolutionary Southeastern Pennsylvania hold for those of us engaged in ministry here today?



That's the question the Rev. Dr. Karl Krueger, Director of the Krauth Memorial Library and Professor of History of Christianity at The Lutheran Theological Seminary at

Philadelphia, set out to address in presentations to the 2012 Assembly.

Krueger offered some of Muhlenberg's experiences that present-day leaders might relate to. Even before he left for America his salary was downsized while his responsibilities increased. Once he arrived he experienced a "33-mile circuit with no SEPTA, no turnpike, just horseback for travel from place to place." He also had to learn English, the official language of the English colony of Pennsylvania.

Muhlenberg was clearly globally connected, as we need to be today. He maintained the connections with Halle and with India, where others had been sent. He also connected with others where he served, pastors and congregation leaders, and recognized they all needed assistance.

Dr. Krueger pointed out the dynamic spirituality that was a part of Muhlenberg's life. His box of daily prayer cards was a regular reaffirmation of the Word, and a guide as he followed Luther's formula to "pray, meditate and practice."

Muhlenberg also rethought theological education. He and his contemporaries were trained in Halle and elsewhere in Europe, but he saw the need to train pastors in the colonies, in context.

CREDITS

Editor: Robert Fisher, assistant to the bishop

Writers: Rev. Susan M. Lang, John Kahler

Photos: Rev. Jesse Brown

Faith-Immanuel Received

It's a long way from Liberia to East Lansdowne, but over that distance God planted the seeds of the church and nurtured a small worshipping community in a refugee camp into a thriving Lutheran Church received at the Assembly.

In 1996, a high-school student named Moses Dennis, who fled the Liberian civil war for a refugee camp in Ghana, was organizing a Lutheran worshipping community there. The young man gathered prayer groups house to house, said Thomas Kpanka, a fellow refugee. "He was hard-working, and always evangelizing," Kpanka said.



Immanuel Lutheran Church had been thriving on Penn Boulevard since 1906, but as the dawn of the 21st Century neared, "we had lost a lot of members," said former church administrator Virginia Leitch. "We reached a point where there were not many people coming."

By the time Immanuel's leaders asked the Synod for help to prevent the church from closing, Dennis had immigrated to Philadelphia where he studied at the Lutheran Theological Seminary. The Synod proposed calling Dennis to serve the dwindling Immanuel and to build a congregation of Africans. Kpanka had also resettled to this area, and a small group began meeting in his home for prayer and fasting. "When we started there were seven of us in prayer meetings," Dennis recalls. Soon there were a couple of dozen at prayer, and 70 people gathered for the initial worship. Today the new Faith-Immanuel Lutheran Church averages 160 people at worship.

In addition to a lively African praise service, Pastor Dennis holds traditional worship for a faithful Immanuel remnant twice a month. In addition to a thriving day care and scout groups, the church is home to the Christian Vision Broadcasting Network, an internet radio station linking Liberian immigrants locally with their homeland with a mix of gospel programming, preaching and social justice activism.

Though for years the church was known as Faith Worship Center, as time to be officially organized approached the leadership chose the name Faith-Immanuel to emphasize both its past and its future.

"I want to say thank you to the Synod, thank you to the bishop...and also thank you to the whole ELCA for helping us," said council president Samuel Kolleh. As a token of that thanks the congregation gave the Synod a birthday gift of \$5,000.

Surplus 2013 Budget Approved

The Assembly overwhelmingly approved a 2013 budget that calls for ending the year with a surplus of approximately \$10,000.

The budget anticipates income of \$2.26 million in partnership support from congregations and \$1.36 million in additional income, with expenses of \$3.61 million. The budget maintains partnership support to the ELCA at 53.5 percent of giving by congregations, and does not require revenue from sales of church properties or transfers from reserves to balance.

Earlier, the Assembly heard that 91 congregations increased or maintained partnership support in 2011, with 24 congregations sending 10 percent or more of their regular giving by members. In all partnership support revenue decreased by 4 percent in 2011. Due to nearly \$260,000 in ongoing savings produced by reducing staff and making targeted expense reductions, the 2012 spending plan expects to complete the year with a small surplus.

'You are the ELCA'

"The ELCA is the church that shares a living, daring confidence in God's grace" was the message the Rev. Dr. Sherman Hicks, Director for Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), brought to the 2012 Assembly.

Members of the Synod serve the wider church through the work of local members on Church



Council and on task forces and churchwide committees. He thanked the individuals and congregations whose mission support enabled the Synod to send over \$1.2 million to the ELCA and allow its partners,

agencies and global partners to fund important work in the world.

Partnership comes back to Southeastern Pennsylvania, where five churches are supported in mission development, over \$39,000 has been provided in hunger grants to help in ministry to the hungry and poor, and three SEPA congregations have received ELCA congregational renewal grants.



Get more info online at
**ministrylink.org/
2012**