

## Words From the Bishop - The ELCA gathers in Churchwide Assembly

Next week, close to a thousand voting members from across the ELCA will meet in New Orleans for a Churchwide Assembly, under the theme: "Freed and Renewed in Christ: 500 Years of God's Grace in Action." The "500 years" refers, of course, to the upcoming 500th anniversary of the Reformation. In our Synod we have a number of things going to commemorate the 500th: a series of educational materials on our web site, prepared by our Reformation Task Force; a May 2017 trip to the Luther lands with the Bishop; a joint service with the 2 Roman Catholic Dioceses on October 30, 2017.



This year's Churchwide Assembly is not likely to be as contentious as some past Assemblies have been. For one thing, there is no social statement on the agenda. The social statement on Women and Justice will be up for adoption in 2019. But even in the absence of social statements, the Churchwide Assembly is important.

This will be the first Assembly we have had since we moved from a 2-year to a 3-year cycle. It will also be the first Assembly chaired by Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton. A number of things have happened since the Assembly last met. A Theological Education Advisory Committee met for 2 years and made recommendations for the future of theological education. A churchwide conversation on the future direction of the ELCA was initiated, and we participated in it in our Synod at the Assembly. The Assembly will have opportunity to learn more about both these processes, as well as to contribute feedback.

The Assembly will elect a new Vice President. Carlos Pena, the current vice president, has decided not to seek another term. The position of Vice President is for a lay person, and it is a volunteer position. The VP chairs the Church Council and is involved nationally and internationally, representing the ELCA.

The Assembly will also consider a proposal to merge the "lay rosters" (AIM, Diaconal Minister, Deaconess) into a single roster of word and service (deacon.) This continues some of the work that was left unfinished by the Ministry Study done at the beginning of the ELCA.

The Assembly will note an ecumenical milestone. After 50 years of intense Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, we have come to agreement on a number of crucial issues. The "Declaration on the Way," which will be up for the Assembly's reception, was formulated by Catholic and Lutheran scholars, and outlines 32 areas of agreement achieved during the last 50 years. This is an historic moment in the history of the church.

The "Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery," passed by our Synod Assembly and forwarded to the Churchwide Assembly, will be up for discussion and vote. And there will be other memorials from other synods on a variety of issues.

The Assembly will adopt a budget, elect members of the Church Council, and conduct other business. But business is not all that a Churchwide Assembly is. It is daily worship, fine preaching, phenomenal speakers, opportunities to learn more about the ministries of the larger church, ecumenical partners and other partners. It is an opportunity to meet with your prayer partner, do Bible study, meet ELCA Lutherans from around the US and the Caribbean.

Our delegation will be sharing our experiences with you while we are there, through writings and videos of the event. You are encouraged to invite voting member to speak with your congregation or cluster when they return, or any time this fall. They are listed, along with their contact information, on pp. 119-120 in the directory. I ask you to pray for the Churchwide Assembly, and for our Montana Synod voting members during this week.

Being a voting member at a Churchwide Assembly is a wonderful experience. It is not too early to be thinking of candidates for 2019. We really welcome people from across the synod, all age groups, ethnicities, and points of view. It is a wonderful opportunity to see the church in action. The selection will take place at the 2018 Synod Assembly. This year, for the first time, there is a concurrent "Grace Gathering" for people who are not voting members. Depending on the response, it may become an ongoing thing.

Finally, the Churchwide Assembly is usually livestreamed. If you want to watch it, go to [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org), or the front page of [montanasynod.org](http://montanasynod.org), or contact Colter McCarty in our office. ([cmccarty@montanasynod.org](mailto:cmccarty@montanasynod.org)).

Blessings!

Jessica Crist, Bishop