

Nebraska Synod Assembly, June, 2022: ***Let Your Light Shine!***

The main business event this year was electing a new bishop. The process was thoughtful, and very spirit-filled. There were 9 candidates who came out of cluster meetings. There were opportunities to hear each of the candidates speak to various questions. An additional candidate was added after the first ballot. There were four more ballots that gradually whittled the number down to the final two for the fifth ballot. Rev. Scott Johnson, campus pastor at Midland University, is the new bishop of the Nebraska Synod, to be installed September 24.

Bishop Susan Candea, from the Central States, preached a powerful sermon at the opening worship on Friday. Her basic message was to not hide our light under a bushel, but to shine—to be Christ in the world. We are to actively show love to our neighbors, serving others in all kinds of ways.

Bishop Mike Reinhart from the Gulf Coast Synod in Texas gave keynote speeches. He gave two excellent talks encouraging congregations, using the image of a garden:

Pray  
Plant  
Water  
Feed  
Weed  
Compost (added after the convention, which is on the Synod Website)

1. We are to pray wherever we are and at all times!
2. Plants are fragile, and he talked about taking care when receiving seedlings. We must continually invite. 80% of people who visit a church are personally invited. Utilize prayerful planning.
3. We must water and feed carefully and regularly in all kinds of ways. Be a positive presence in the community. Embody the word. Make friends and encourage friendship. Find out why people come. Everyone is an evangelist—ushers, greeters, etc. Don't hide fellowship hall.
4. How do we give people spiritual food? Don't get people burned/scorched.  
Top Ten things to do to draw a crowd:
  - a. Breakfast
  - b. Coffee
  - c. Concert
  - d. Blood drive/blood mobile
  - e. Special music
  - f. Some kind of activity for kids (trunk or treat, for example.)
  - g. Funerals
  - h. Weddings
  - i. Open house—with food
  - j. Bouncy house

Then, how do you keep folks at your church?

When God touches a heart, generosity follows.

Evangelism and ministry are the same thing.

Growing churches have 90% of their congregation doing ministry, and 10% in administration.

Dying churches have 10% of their congregation doing ministry, and 90% doing administration.

Weeding needs to be done. Stand up to bullies. Have the courage to say no. Don't run away from conflict. Pruning must be done, too.

Dr. Lawrence Chatters, a Midlands grad, psychologist, and now Advisor to the Director of Athletics and HR for UNL.

He shared his personal story and talked about growing up being different, which led to his themes on FAITH:

F Forgiveness

A Advocacy

I Intentionality—right way, right reason, and right time for things; show gratitude and want to make a difference in other people's lives.

T Truth—we as a society are getting farther and farther from truth

H Humility—to understand that no one knows everything

We are resilient, and each of us is responsible for change. Start where you are.

Bishop Brian's report:

90,000 members in 230 congregations in the Nebraska Synod

150 years as a Lutheran body (includes predecessors to the ELCA.)

The Nebraska Synod is the leader in mission support to the ELCA, and a leader in World Hunger Appeals.

The Nebraska Synod is known as an innovator. We ask questions.

Fewer in attendance bodily—1/2 to 2/3 fewer persons attend church that's everywhere.

There are fewer volunteers, and very tired leaders.

Be patient.

Rostered leaders need counseling and spiritual direction. Help them tend to their health.

We have more participants via livestreaming, and that will continue.

We need to continue to do more creative ministry, with prayer and discernment.

Church will not look like it used to.

Clergy shortage, as well as short on deacons and PMA's: in 2013, there were 25 congregations needing pastors at Synod Assembly. Today there are 56. That's with the same staff in Synod office.

Bishop Brian feels like a parent with a hungry child, but the cupboard is bare.

The Church of the Way, an online only church, failed and closed this past fall.

We swing and miss, but you need to swing.

We're not done planting new churches.

Sad that we are not more diverse, and we keep working on that. Watch a documentary to work on not offending others. Be willing to apologize and be open to diversity.

Bishop Brian is very troubled by sheep stealing—by other Lutheran bodies going in to create doubt and conflict and work to get congregations to leave ELCA.

We are part of the world, and it is sneaking into the church. Ask questions and listen. We can disagree agreeably.

Many things do let your light shine:

1. Leaders are phenomenal

2. We are disciples of Jesus Christ, but remember, if it's not challenging, you're not doing it right.
3. PMA programs are a strong model of effective ministry leaders
4. Seeking the Spirit Within is great.
5. Sow the seeds to identify and raise up leaders. The ELCA call process has changed so that more first call pastors stay in their home synods.
6. Leadership development takes place, such as the Road to Emmaus learning institute
7. The Vitality Initiative for Congregations is successful
8. Synod efforts in diversity include RARE, JEDI, and other LGBTQIA offerings.
9. We are blessed with ecumenical partnerships with United Methodists, Presbyterian Church USA, Moravians, United Church of Christ, The Episcopal Church, and the Reformed Church in America.
10. Our 13 Serving Arms ministries are great—not perfect, but impactful.

The world needs Grace more than ever. Give the new bishop space, and be patient. The installation of new bishop is September 24, 2022 at 1 pm in Kearney.

Stop doing awful things to other Christians!

We are impactful, blessed, but challenged. Relationships matter. Let your light shine with confidence and hope.

There were some Synod Council elections, and the results are found on the Synod website. There was also some recognition for those leaving the Synod Council and Synod staff.

Respectfully submitted,  
Brian and Deb Lund