

## 2023 Nebraska Synod Assembly Report

The theme for this year's assembly, as well as for the whole synod for June, 2023-May, 2024 is "Go, and..." Bishop Johnson and the guest speakers, Rev. Maristela Freiberg; and Rev. Christopher Otten, all focused on this theme. Each month, there is a focus or action to complete the "Go, and..." starting with "Pray" this month. The Synod has provided activities and resources for devotion and reflection for each theme, as well as resources for leadership teams: <https://nebraskasynod.org/go-and/>

The opening worship was meaningful, and Bishop Johnson's message of "traveling light" was excellent. Carry what is essential. The key is figuring out what is essential? Is the benefit worth the cost? Listening to others is vital.

Pastor Christopher Otten gave some updates on ELCA churchwide ministry. He also focused on his role as assistant to the presiding bishop in heading up all ELCA chaplains—within the military, as well as in hospitals, prisons, long-term care facilities, and retirement centers. He is a retired Air Force Chaplain, who also served as pastor in various congregations, sometimes while also serving as an Air Force Chaplain. He had much to share about ELCA Chaplains, and important to know is that they are particularly valued within federal government agencies, as ELCA pastors are well equipped for ministry anywhere, and they work with EVERYONE, regardless of their beliefs (or non-beliefs). We have much to be proud of in the wonderful ministry that takes place in our congregations, in our Synod, and in our churchwide ELCA.

We met Pastor David Pinkston new head of Seeking the Spirit Within, as he led a devotion and prayer session, emphasizing the need for all of us to take time for God, and to breathe while we do so.

Pastor Maristela Freiberg, Director of Evangelical Mission, NJ Synod, led two sessions on how God is nudging each of us to "Go, and..." We paired up to share thoughts of our own gifts and how we've used them compared to what is calling us in the future. Each of us is being commissioned, and we are not alone.

Bishop Johnson gave a Synod report. There has been streamlining of staff and changes in how the work of the Synod is being carried out. He is definitely a team leader who emphasizes that they are a team, and that he is still learning much about serving as Bishop of the Nebraska ELCA.

Workshops were offered twice, and I attended two.

The first was all about chaplaincy with Pastor Otten. He is a very engaging speaker, who explained lots of details of ELCA chaplaincy. An important one is how folks can make serving as a military chaplain and a congregation simultaneously can work, and really save congregations some money.

The second one was all about hunger in Nebraska. The presenter is a public health person in NE Nebraska. She explained definitions used by the USDA and FDA, and programs available throughout Nebraska. Attendees shared some ideas and activities of things being

done in their areas, supported by their congregation. I got applause when explaining our church community garden where all the produce is given to local food pantries.

Some business did take place—passing the budget for 2024, passing the 2024 compensation package recommendations for 2024, and passing a resolution to form a Synod Committee to come up with guidelines for assisting pastors and lay leaders with mental health issues.

As always, it was a joy to serve Lord of Love as a voting member for this year's Synod Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,  
Deb Lund