


ELCA NEWS SERVICE

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2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly Addresses Variety of Topics

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CHICAGO (ELCA) -- The 11th Biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) acted on a variety of topics including adoption of a full communion relationship with the United Methodist Church, funding for a churchwide HIV and AIDS strategy, development of a Lutheran Malaria Initiative, a social statement on human sexuality, revisions of ministry policies, a social statement on justice for women and budget proposals.

The assembly re-elected Carlos Peña, Galveston, Texas, as ELCA vice president for another six years. It acted on a variety of resolutions from synods (memorials) and resolutions from voting members on topics such as immigration, Israel and Palestine, and health care reform.

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, ELCA presiding bishop, chaired his fourth churchwide assembly. Hanson is also president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Geneva. ELCA secretary David D. Swartling assisted Hanson and voting members.

The Minneapolis Convention Center was the site of the assembly, Aug. 17-23. About 2,300 people participated, including 1,045 voting members. The theme was "God's work. Our hands."

The next churchwide assembly is Aug. 14-20, 2011, at the Orlando (Fla.) World Center Resort.

Full Communion with the United Methodist Church Adopted

By a vote of 958-51, the assembly adopted a full communion agreement with the United Methodist Church (UMC). This is the ELCA's sixth full-communion relationship and the first for the UMC. The assembly also established a joint commission to oversee the relationship by a vote of 922-15. In 2008 the UMC General Conference adopted the same proposal. Full communion means that the two churches identify in one another a common Christian faith; agree to mutual recognition of Baptism and the sharing of Holy Communion; worship together and recognize each other's ordained ministers for service in either church; express a common commitment to evangelism, witness and service; engage in common decision-making on critical matters; and agree to a mutual lifting of criticisms that may exist between the churches.

Carlos Peña Re-elected Vice President

Vice President Carlos Peña of Galveston, Texas, was elected on the fourth ballot to a second six-year term as vice president with 580 votes, 60.8 percent of the votes cast. Peña was elected over Ryan M. Schwarz, McLean, Va., who received 264 votes, and Norma J. Hirsch, Des Moines, Iowa, who received 110 votes. There were 97 nominees on the first ballot.

HIV and AIDS Funding Proposal Adopted

The assembly voted 884-41 to approve a proposal to raise \$10 million over three years to support the church's HIV and AIDS strategy. A \$1 million goal encouraged by the 2007 Churchwide Assembly will be included in the \$10 million. The ELCA Church Council approved the strategy in March.

Development of Lutheran Malaria Initiative Approved

By a vote of 989-111, the assembly approved continued development of an initiative to fight malaria, particularly in Africa. The Lutheran Malaria Initiative (LMI) is a shared effort with Lutheran World Relief (LWR), the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the United Nations Foundation. The assembly authorized continued receipt of gifts designated for the LMI, and asked that a report and recommendations for a possible churchwide LMI campaign be presented to the 2011 assembly.

Budget Proposals for 2010, 2011 Adopted

By a vote of 863-71 voting members adopted churchwide budget proposals for 2010 and 2011. For 2010, voting members approved a current fund income proposal of \$76.69 million for the churchwide organization and an ELCA World Hunger Appeal income proposal of \$18.7 million. For 2011, they approved a current income proposal of \$76.78 million and a World Hunger income goal of \$19 million.

Social Statement on Justice for Women to be Developed

By a vote of 754-176 the assembly approved development of a social statement on the topic of justice for women, to be considered by the 2015 Churchwide Assembly.

Assembly Adopts Memorials, Resolutions

+ **Immigration:** Adopted 873-82. The assembly called for comprehensive reform of U.S. immigration policies and processes, called for suspension of immigration raids until reform is enacted, and asked for a message on from the ELCA on immigration this year.

+ **Lutheran Disaster Response:** Adopted 929-20. The assembly acknowledged this collaborative ministry of the ELCA and the LCMS and acknowledged that a strategic planning process for LDR is under way. It encouraged the ELCA "to continue to deepen and develop its process for working together with churchwide units, synods and social ministry organizations in times of specific disasters." The assembly asked that a progress report be presented to the Church Council in 2010, and amended the proposal to recommend creation of a permanent LDR advisory committee.

+ **Israel/Palestine:** Adopted 690-125. Voting members resolved to advocate for a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. They called the ELCA to lift up the voices within both communities, especially those who are victims of violence. The resolution also calls for care for the people of Gaza and support for U.S. financial assistance that funds "peace and cooperation for all parties to the conflict." An amendment to the memorial called for the ELCA to "evaluate and refine its peace-making efforts to demonstrate as fully as possible the balanced care for all parties" expressed in the "Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine."

+ **Worship, liturgical materials in Braille:** Adopted 926-10. This memorial called for affirmed and celebrated materials being provided to people with impaired vision, acknowledged funding challenges and limits for this work, and asked for a report to the Church Council in 2010.

+ **Project Connect:** Adopted 919-19. The memorial recognized "the immense contribution of communities of color within and beyond this church," encouraged those involved with Project Connect to share learnings with the wider church, renewed the ELCA's commitment to confront racism, and encouraged review of factors that inhibit people of color from "the fullness of

leadership in this church."

+ **Human disability message:** Adopted 785-88. The assembly declined to authorize development of a social statement on human disability, but requested that ELCA Church in Society instead consider developing a message on human disability.

+ **Health care reform:** Adopted 799-126. The resolution provides that "each person should have ready access to basic health care services that include preventive, acute and chronic physical and mental health care at an affordable cost." The assembly requested that the urgency and sense of the resolution be communicated to Congress and the White House.

+ **Batak Special Interest Conference:** Adopted 845-15. The action strikes from the ELCA's bylaws reference to the "Batak Special Interest Conference of North America," a move supported by Batak members of the Indonesian ministries of the ELCA.

+ **Thanks:** The assembly also adopted resolutions expressing appreciation for ELCA churchwide leaders and staff, plus local hosts and the people of the Twin Cities. Other memorials and resolutions were referred to the Church Council or churchwide units for response.
