

**Report of the 20th Pacifica Synod
Dennis and Margo Astroth Attending from
Bethlehem Lutheran
By Dennis Astroth**

Margo and I attended the 2007 Pacifica Synod Assembly in Waikiki, Hawaii on the island of Oahu. The assembly was held from May 2 to May 5 at the Waikiki Marriott Resort. The theme of the assembly was Ho’omana’o – Remembering and Ho’ola – Renewing.

Each morning of the assembly Bishop Murray Finck led a Stretch and Pray session on the beach at 6:30AM. A bible study session followed at 7:30AM with various speakers. The business of the assembly started at 8AM.

Statistics / Facts

There are approximately 55,000 ELCA members in the Pacifica Synod.

The Pacifica Synod assembly attendance included:

124 clergy

123 female lay persons

99 male lay persons

346 total voting members

There are two companion synods to the Pacifica Synod:

- The Basel Christian Church in Malaysia on the island of Borneo
www.geocities.com/bccmtrn/english.html
- The Southwest Synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
www.elca.org/countrypackets/ethiopia/church.html

Financials

<i>Summary</i>				
	2006-07 Actual	2007-08 Budget	2007-08 Spending Plan	2008-09 Budget
<i>Grand Total Income:</i>	\$3,161,857.50	\$3,368,750	\$3,068,740	\$3,186,250
<i>Grand Total Disbursements:</i>	\$3,127,975.21	\$3,378,000	\$3,083,750	\$3,184,521
<i>Net Income (Loss):</i>	\$33,882.29	(\$9,250)	(\$15,010)	\$1,729

- 70% of synod income comes from congregational mission support
- 55% of synod spend goes to the ELCA
- Bethlehem pledged \$40,000 to the Pacifica Synod for 2006

The 2008-09 budget was approved by vote of the Synod Assembly

Recommendations

A synod recommendation to increase the baseline salary for rostered leaders by 3% - PASSED

Resolutions

A **Cherish Our Children Initiative** passed unanimously. The Cherish Our Children Initiative seeks to protect sexually exploited children. A synod Cherish Our Children ministry team will be established and this ministry will seek to involve 50% of the synod congregations in the Cherish Our Children Initiative by the year 2012.

An **Israel-Palestine Memorial** to the 2007 Churchwide Assembly passed after much discussion. The members, congregations, synods, churchwide organizations, and agencies and institutions of the ELCA are encouraged to support and advocate for vigorous and urgent efforts by the United States government to bring about a just two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Margo and I both voted in favor of this memorial.

A **Healthy and Growing Congregations** resolution passed unanimously. This resolution directs the synod to continue to develop a network of coaches available to all congregations desiring to revitalize their ministries and encourages all to utilize this coaching network.

A **Mission Support Resolution** was amended and passed after discussion. The original resolution referenced a 1991 resolution that encouraged each congregation to set, as a goal, giving 15% or more of its unrestricted (undesigned) income to the synod by the year 2000. This original resolution encouraged each congregation in the synod to meet the goal of the 1991 resolution and further asked for a written annual declaration from each congregation of its intent. The amended resolution directs the synod to send the 1991 resolution to each congregation by June 1, 2007. Each congregation will meet to discuss past and future mission support. A report of these meetings will be sent to the Vice President of the Pacifica Synod by August 1, 2007. A Task Force on Mission Support, appointed by the Synod Council, will study these reports and other mission support issues and provide a report and proposed actions to the 2008 Pacifica Synod Assembly.

A **Comprehensive Immigration Reform – Humane and for the Common Good Resolution** was referred to a synod Immigration/Housing Ministry Team. This resolution called for humane legislation and policies both in the church and in the government and, further, that the church speak with a compassionate, strong, and prophetic voice on behalf of all immigrants. Margo and I both supported the resolution and voted against referral.

A **Mayday Call of Immigrants** failed a 2/3 assembly vote to get to the floor. This resolution was very similar to the Comprehensive Immigration Reform resolution. Margo and I both voted to bring this resolution to the floor.

A Sexuality Study: “Free in Christ” Study Booklet and Response Resolution did not come before the assembly due to lack of time during the business sessions. This resolution seeks to encourage members of the Pacifica Synod to order or view the “Free in Christ” Study Booklet and respond by November 1, 2007. It is expected that the 2008 Pacifica Synod Assembly will be asked to provide discussion and response time for the first draft of a social statement on sexuality. The sexuality question will come before the churchwide assembly in 2009. Although this resolution did not come before the assembly, Margo and I support the intent.

Ho’omana’o Ho’ola
Remembering and Renewing
By Margo Astroth

The above theme for the Pacifica Synod Assembly has great meaning for our church in how the Hawaiians define these words. For them, the “Ho’omana’o” or “remembering” part has to do not only with thoughts but with active learning and becoming part of a cultural identity. The symbol used is the rainbow, God’s covenant or promise to remember us even if we forget God. There were, as it turned out, many opportunities to see lovely rainbows in the heavens in Hawaii as it often rains while the sun is shining. The people of Hawaii remember and worship God with great diversity.

I was struck by how the speakers we heard helped me to understand that we need to do more to make our church more culturally diverse and meaningful to all those who wish to worship with us. On the last day of the assembly, our speaker, Rev. Sherman Hicks, who represents the ELCA in dealing with multicultural ministries, shared statistics about the lack of diversity in the ELCA. Nationally, 97% of members are European American and 3% make up all the other people of color. In the Pacifica Synod, we do not do much better, with 92% European Americans and 8% “other”. In our synod, European Americans are only 43% of the population! Pastor Hicks related his work to the Pentecost story where “all” were filled with the Holy Spirit. In other words, no one has a corner “on the market”. The church needs to get back to where it was at Pentecost with being multicultural. I appreciated the opportunities I had to see how our Hawaiian Lutheran churches work so well with other denominations and make worship more culturally diverse.

The opening worship did just that. We worshiped in a beautiful Roman Catholic Church, St. Augustine’s, and listened to the choir sing in Hawaiian, to the word spoken in Mandarin, Dutch, Cantonese, Hawaiian, and Japanese.

The next day, as we began the business of the synod, we heard the story of Hawaiian history. The Hawaii Conference of the United Church of Christ, the primary missionary group who settled on the islands, recounted how their group and the US government conspired to overthrow the Hawaiian monarchy by imprisoning Queen Liliuokalani. It was during her imprisonment that she wrote a lovely prayer, forgiving her captors. That

prayer is now sung in churches throughout the islands and was sung in our services as well. The UCC apologized in 1993, one hundred years after the overthrow. The US government also apologized later that same year. It was in this spirit of “remembering” that was very meaningful to understand how we need to honor each other’s culture and learn from these moments in history.

That afternoon we were part of a group who visited two Buddhist temples. As with the theme of the conference, it was in the spirit of helping us understand the cooperation between the different religious groups. Bishop Finck participated in the installation of a Buddhist bishop later in the afternoon at one of the temples which we had visited. The Buddhists are the largest religious group in Hawaii with the Lutherans being less than one percent of the population. However, because of the close cooperation of the church bodies, Lutheran churches actually seem to be more active than their percentage indicates. Part of our field trip experience was having lunch at a local congregation. St. John’s Lutheran is involved in an around the year homeless program, much like Bethlehem’s participation with the Interfaith Shelter Network. Those needing shelter are rotated on a weekly basis among an ecumenical group of churches. St. John’s also lives out cultural diversity within its worship. There is a group that routinely performs the Hula as a form of worship throughout the year. Those dancing are members of the congregation whose European roots are stretched as they learn what the Hula can contribute to worship.

On Friday afternoon I attended a workshop on Hula in worship. I learned to dance the Doxology in “Hula” A quote from a pastor of a church in Hawaii: “Hula was an expression of the spirituality of the Hawaiians; it is sacred...Theology is the explanation of faith coming out of a cultural context. So if you get theology out of Western Europe...into a Pacific Island culture, it is not going to fully translate.”

At our closing service at St. Augustine’s on Saturday, the women of St. John’s did a hula. The word was again read in many different languages. The sermon was on the second part of our theme for the assembly, “renewing” or “Ho’ola” Pastor Krueger connected the word “aloha”, made up of two words, “alo” meaning “that which faces you” and “ha”, “breath or essence of life”, with the word for renewing. The greeting "aloha" traditionally has two people putting their foreheads together and sharing a breath. Ho’ola is made up of “ho” meaning sharing what one has been given, and “ola” meaning life. The word “Ho’ola” or “renewing” is sharing or giving healing and life. In looking at Christ’s resurrection, we should not hold that in but share that life giving love of Christ with others. Pastor Krueger suggested that as Jesus says, “Even as I have ‘aloha-ed’ you, go ‘aloha’ others”. I came away with the thought that we need to think about how we can even do more at Bethlehem to share God’s love in a way that honors and respects the diversity of our local community. I am proud of our outreach programs to our Latino neighbors, both in Encinitas and in Mexico. I was disappointed that the assembly did not pass any of the resolutions working towards a just immigration policy. I did speak up as a delegate, suggesting that the synod act boldly for our immigrants. To me it seemed that is what Bethlehem would do, and it is part of the spirit of “remembering” not to repeat the mistakes we made with our Hawaiian brothers and sisters.