



Pacifica Synod—ELCA
Office of the Bishop

Taking Care of Business

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. -Jeremiah 29:11

God has a plan for us and I believe God wants us to address our “business” as the church with intentionality. I offer a two-page word of reflection and encouragement for this synod regarding one aspect of our planning for the days ahead. I ask that these two pages also be passed on to all who attended the recent synod assembly in Honolulu and given to all church council members.

Our recent synod assembly is now behind us and many evaluations have been received. The bills are being paid and the statistics are being gathered. A full report of this first-time-in-Hawaii assembly will be presented to the Synod Council in its summer meeting and summarized for the rest of the synod when it is completed. Thank you to all who took the time to fill out an evaluation.

There were two major themes in the hundreds of evaluations we received and heard. Far and away, the people of Pacifica were pleased with the assembly. There were so many positive comments and expressions of thanks that we know, for the most part, this was a wonderful experience for almost all of the people who attended as voting members and guests.

However, there was another theme that was less positive that threaded its way into the evaluations with some frequency. It had to do with the “business” of the church in the resolutions and the time allotted for the assembly to conduct the matters before us. So what follows is a bit of history, some realities of assembly planning and an encouragement.

Every year we address a number of resolutions at the synod assembly, which is the highest legislative authority of the Pacifica Synod. Historically, this synod has had relatively few resolutions so that there has been time in the agenda for keynote presentations, workshops, forums and roundtable discussions on critical issues facing the church. We have almost always had adequate time to deal with all the submitted resolutions and memorials, perfect them according to parliamentary procedures and cast our votes for or against the proposed assembly action.

Resolutions come to the assembly from a variety of entities. They may come from individuals, a congregation, a conference within this synod, a ministry team of the synod or the synod council. There is a deadline, which is 90 days prior to the synod assembly if those resolutions are going to go through the normal processes and take their place in the assembly notebooks. Throughout the year, the synod as a whole is encouraged to be carefully crafting resolutions for the upcoming assembly. The deadlines are announced. The synod’s resolutions committee stands ready to address those that are submitted to bring them before the assembly. The reality is that it becomes the responsibility of every person, rostered leader, congregation and ministry team to give the synod challenges and encouragements in the resolution process, and, if we want our work to go before the biennial ELCA Churchwide Assemblies, then we must approve properly written memorials to be sent to them.

Resolutions submitted after the deadline may come to the floor of the assembly in two ways. If presented by the Synod Council, they are distributed as early as possible to the assembly to allow time for members of the assembly to review them. They are then presented by the synod council vice president during the assembly business session. Other last-minute resolutions that are submitted require a 2/3 vote from the assembly before they are put into the agenda for consideration.

Planning the assembly for adequate business sessions is critical. If we see a substantial number of resolutions coming before us, we adjust the schedule to give us a maximum amount of time to process those resolutions. Rules are adopted to allow many voices to be heard during the debate. Any resolution(s) that cannot be fully addressed by the assembly goes to the Synod Council and is on its agenda during its next meetings. If it appears that this synod’s people, congregations or ministry teams do not have a great deal of business for the assembly, then the planning team for the assembly will adjust the schedule with other meaningful activities and events, such as an additional session for workshops, topical presentations and roundtable discussions or even an experience or excursion that takes us away from the hotel and out into the community.

This past assembly, our first time in Hawaii as the Pacifica Synod, there were two realities that significantly affected our business sessions. The first was that our hosts, the people of the Hukilau Conference, wanted very much to have the time in the agenda to introduce the assembly to many of the ministries on the Islands. When we visit as tourists to enjoy the beauty of Hawaii, usually we

do not see this part of the church. So an afternoon of excursions was long in the planning if time allowed. From the very beginning it was part of the conversation to say “if people are coming from the mainland to Hawaii for an assembly, they are not going to want to sit in a windowless meeting room all day and debate resolutions.” So it was always the hope of the planning team from Hawaii that we would have the time to go out and experience the Islands, their beauty and wonder, and the diversity of the culture and people and ministries of the Islands. Secondly, even after the Synod Council appealed in early December for resolutions to come for specific matters before us in our society and in the church, we received NO resolutions prior to the 90-day deadline for resolutions. We received a total of three resolutions after the deadline that were reviewed by our resolution committee. One was from Jubilee USA Network. Their resolution was extremely long and broad in scope. The author was advised that it did not meet the deadline or criteria. The other two were reviewed by the Resolution Committee and, after discussion with the pastor of Emmanuel Lutheran Church in La Habra, were both withdrawn.

Without too much business before us, the planning team began to fill the agenda with other opportunities for the voting members. We heard from a variety of ecumenical and community leaders. We confirmed an afternoon that provided six workshop opportunities. We planned for an evening banquet to be a luau on the opposite end of the island, which necessitated mid-afternoon departure and travel. Had we received resolutions by the deadline, the agenda would have been adjusted to make sure there was adequate time for discussion, debate and voting. A time for forums to address the resolutions was not scheduled because there was very little on the resolution agenda.

Concerned that several critical questions or issues were not going to come before the assembly in the form of resolutions, the Synod Council went to work after the resolution deadline and crafted several resolutions for consideration, which were then presented to the assembly for preview in our opening business session. At the same time, some last-minute resolutions and substitute resolutions came in also, either from a ministry team or individuals.

Copies of all resolutions that were not in the assembly notebooks were placed on each voting table each morning at the beginning of the session to allow voting members an opportunity to view them before they came to the floor. Suddenly, we had a more significant number of agenda items before us that challenged our timing for the orders of the day. We had an ambitious schedule of events that were planned, reserved and funded, such as worship, excursions and the luau all “off campus.” A proposal to extend our last business session into Saturday afternoon failed and some of the voting members voiced concern about “running out of time” for the business of the church. Others rightfully commented that we did not have enough time or opportunity to thoroughly educate ourselves to the issues before us as we were presented with the last-minute resolutions.

What have we learned from this experience? First of all, based on the comments in the evaluations, we learned that the vast majority of the voting members were more than pleased overall with the entire assembly, and for most, the “business of the church” this year was a learning experience about the uniqueness of ministry in the part of this synod which is in Hawaii. But secondly, we learned the need to be more intentional and encouraging for this synod to more fully engage in the resolution process. We will lift up the deadlines and the challenges even more than in the past. We will schedule a time for forums regarding the resolutions and memorials prior to any voting. When possible, we will offer supporting documentation where appropriate that gives background and other helpful information to the voting members prior to the assembly.

Please remember, the annual Pacifica Assembly is the synod’s time to walk together... a time for reunions, a time for worship and Bible Study, a time to be inspired and challenged, a time to grow and become better educated, a time to elect officers and leaders of the synod, and a time to take care of business—the business of the church of which we are all a part. In order for an assembly to meet the needs of the synod, it is important that every interested individual, congregation, ministry team and conference take ownership of the assembly and contribute to the planning, support and proposal for the assemblies of the years to come. Each individual, congregation, conference and ministry team is encouraged to take a more active role in writing and submitting resolution to the synod, prior to the deadline, that you would like to see brought forward before the assembly.

Thank you again to all who participated in any way, to all who voiced your evaluations and to those who will help to craft the Pacifica Synod Assembly, May 1-3, 2008* at the Irvine Marriott.

In the Light of Christ,



Bishop Murray D. Finck[†]

*P.S. That means that the resolution deadline for the 2008 assembly is February 1, 2008.