

Don't squeeze God in

Don't you realize that 100% of your time belongs to God? If so, it's merely a question of how you will spend it. Use the tools God has given you –so that you will be refreshed and rested in your time with Him, and so that you can be a blessing to others. Those were the inspirational words in Pastor Lucille Mills' sermon for the Assembly on Saturday morning. The St. Peter's Celebration Band, Stafford, led the Assembly in gathering songs, liturgies and hymns of praise with rich voices and a variety of instruments.

Quiet talk on a big issue

We engaged in 40 small group conversations on the draft copy of Human Sexuality, a churchwide Social Statement that the ELCA is developing. This social statement addresses the question: What does it mean for us as sexual creatures to love our neighbors as ourselves and thus fulfill God's law of love in this time and society? Individuals in all congregations are encouraged to respond with suggestions to the task group. Ask your pastor how to obtain a copy of the draft. www.elca.org/faithfuljourney

Additionally, 17 workshops offered a variety of subjects from greening your congregation, financial stewardship, and written communication to children's ministry helps and ELCA resources on the web.

Leave a legacy for ministry

Leaders must model stewardship" said David Swartling. "We need to improve our stewardship education and talk about tithing and leaving a legacy." Basing his comments on the Parable of the Talents, he said, "Everyone has received something valuable from God. You have to use what you are given because it isn't yours to keep." With that in mind, the Assembly passed a resolution encouraging Virginia Lutherans to have a will and invite the Mission Office for Planned Giving to their congregation –to help educate and assist people with planning their estates to strengthen the ministries of the whole church. Further, the resolution encourages local congregations to "tith" part of any gifts or bequests to the wider church.

You are blessed!

Get out there and be a blessing to others!

Report of the Virginia Synod Assembly

June 6-8, 2008

Roanoke College

Together we are blessed to be a blessing

"**Thank you for being the church**", declared Bishop James F. Mauney to the 544 delegates and guests at the 21st Annual Assembly of the Virginia Synod, held at Roanoke College.

"Together each Sunday –in 160 different places-- we proclaim The Word in our preaching; and receive The Word in Sacraments and the announcing of our Lord's forgiveness. This is the heart of our life together. Together, we daily seek to be ambassadors for Christ, using the gifts and blessings God has given us in order to be a blessing to our family, neighborhood and the world."

"I've been blown away by the faith, leadership, and commitment of the core of this church, and I thank God for you for being the church. We don't always shine brightly, we are not always right, we don't always see clearly or act saintly, but we seek to proclaim Jesus Christ in Word and Sacrament and to bring the name of Jesus to one another and to our children, our colleagues, our neighbors --even to strangers." "I thank my God for the Christ I see in you and for the partnership we have together. It is GRACE that allows us to live in community with other Christian sisters and brothers," rejoiced Bishop Mauney.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has 4.8 million members, 10,470 congregations, 28 colleges, 8 seminaries and 145 camps.
The Virginia Synod has 43,000 baptized members in 166 congregations. We have nearly 250 rostered leaders (Pastors and Associates in Ministry)

God's Work Our Hands

- ❖ All over our Synod, various congregations are talking together about ways they can share leadership or clergy, build joint ministries or facilities, or consolidate into larger congregations. This shows a real effort to create dynamic ministry with limited resources.
- ❖ This year the Candidacy Committee gave positive entrance decisions for 13 candidates to enter seminary this fall. Project Connect asks every person to be on the lookout for candidates for seminary. Talk to that person and encourage him or her to think about it.
- ❖ You can join with the Bishop's Bible Study online by contacting: Worley@vasynod. Once you're on the mailing list, you will be e-mailed material three times a week.
- ❖ Saturday evening's Festival Service was spectacular. Over 500 people filled St. Andrew Roman Catholic Church. The procession had 90 participants. Music was rich, joyful and loud. **Kim Triplett**, a graduate of Gettysburg Seminary, was ordained. She has accepted a call to Faith, Staunton/St. Peter's, Churchville. **Lindsay Barr**, a graduate of Southern Seminary, was commissioned and will serve as Associate in Ministry at Bethel, Winchester.
- ❖ Cary Mangus, Stewardship Coordinator for the Synod, led the gathering in a Bible study. He reviewed how Abraham built a life of faith with God so that he could be a blessing to others. "Churches and people who give themselves away are churches and people who are healthy!"
- ❖ KYAC (Keeping Young Adults Connected) is an organization for 18-25 year olds. They implore congregations to reach out to them so that they can share their numerous gifts with their church.

To be or not to be?

This was the question the Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO) presented to themselves as they met concurrently with the Synod Assembly. This is the largest youth assembly in the ELCA. They met for large presentations, Bible study and in small chat rooms –as well as joining the adult assembly from time to time. They decided TO BE a blessing!

This year more than 1750 youth and adult leaders participated in Synod-wide retreats, from *Lost & Found* to *Kairos*. Youth were in 5th grade through high school. Lucas Hakkenberg serves as youth representative on the Synodical Council.

Let the Word of God dwell in us richly

The Book of Faith Initiative is a fancy way to say: let's get into God's Word. This is a bold undertaking led by the national church to help every person of every congregation get more out of their Bible reading. Over the next several months, each congregation will be invited to read The Book of Faith as a launching pad to reading and better understanding scripture. The Lutheran principles of approaching and interpreting scripture are presented in the book.

There will be many follow-up courses, programs and Bible studies for adults and children, making ELCA members fluent in our *first language of faith*. elca.org/bookoffaith

It's not just money It's ministry

The Assembly passed the Financial Plan for 2009, including a bold act of faith: to increase the amount we send to the ELCA by 0.6%, bringing our contribution to 50.6% from received undesignated gifts. Last year we sent \$1,140,251 to our national church's ministries. Our Synod is currently operating in the black, but is totally dependent on the local congregations to continue to give generously so we will be able to finish the year in the black, too.

Leadership & Legacy challenges us

"Success occurs when dynamic and inspired and inspiring clergy and laity work together. If we are to thrive we need to share leadership and pursue EXCELLENCE not mediocrity," stated keynote speaker David Swartling, the newly elected Secretary of the national church. His office is "the oil in the cylinder of the ELCA". He is responsible for records management, archives, library, logistics of the Churchwide Assemblies, interpreting the constitution and running the travel office.

"Each of us is a member of (1) our congregation, (2) our Virginia Synod, and (3) the churchwide organization (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). We can multiply the effects of ministry when we work together. We can do God's work with our hands and our dollars.