

Central States Synod Daily Summaries -

CSS Day 1 - June 9, 2022

The Assembly unofficially started around 2 pm as people started arriving at the registration area. Exclamations of “Hello,” “How are you,” and “So good to finally see you” were heard throughout the afternoon. How happy we are to be together again!



After registration, attendees mingled while also visiting 20 display booths that shared information from Lutherans Restoring Creation, seminaries, and partner ministries throughout the synod, some even nationally and international!

The day concluded with an evening at Kaw Prairie Community Church. We enjoyed the beautiful weather while eating a wonderful barbecue supper under tents. The Assembly moved indoors for worship where songs, liturgy, and homily celebrated the news that our faith encompasses all of God’s creation. We are a community of believers and are *interconnected* with all of God’s creation.



As worship ended, Bishop Candea officially opened the Convention, our first official order of business. The day concluded with an ice cream social, and continued opportunities for in-person fellowship.

CSS DAY 2 - June 10, 2022

The assembly gathered for worship to begin the second day of Assembly. Liturgy and hymns from *All Creation Sings* focused on showing our love for God's creation.

Bishop's Report

The Bishop's welcomed 193 voting members and all visitors to the day's activities. She reminded us of the importance of love - even though love doesn't eliminate frustration or conflict. She recognized that the last few years have been hard, and coming out of the trauma of the pandemic may be harder than the original pause it caused. For example, the pandemic has revealed certain inequalities within our congregations and church body. We must recognize these realities, but can also be assured that the gospel of Jesus Christ provides the foundation, courage, and capacity to address them.



The CSS mission recognizes that the way of Jesus is mercy and humility, compassion, and respect. Synod activities reflect this through numerous initiatives such as:

- Focusing this convention on the theme that we are to be stewards of all of God's creation, and participating in Lutherans Restoring Creation;
- Hearing the stories of our members of color through the work of the Racial Justice Team, and working to understand how we are participating in systems that cause inequity;
- Initiating similar conversations with and about the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Supporting leadership development to help congregations and their councils define the congregation's specific purpose;
- Focusing on congregational vitality and faithful innovation to help us define what God is up to and how we might act; and
- Training lay ministers to lift up the church and supporting those seeking rostered ministry.
- These efforts acknowledge we need to hear all the voices in order to walk together in love.

Keynote Presentation (Part 1)

Dr. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda's presentation led with a verse from Romans 8: "The whole creation has been groaning together." Our purpose is to serve and preserve this garden earth and love our neighbors as ourselves. Never before has God's creation so needed us, the body of Christ, to live His love into the world.

We are beloved creatures called to creation care and justice-seeking neighbor-love. The starting point is God's love, which is a love that never diminishes and is more powerful than anything. Jesus - God made flesh among us - is at play in the world through us. We are created and called to recognize God's gracious love, to receive it and trust it. Finally, we are to love others as God loves us.

Love in the biblical sense is hard. It's not just a feeling. Biblical love means our neighbor is whoever our life touches or effects. That is now a global community. Biblical love serves the well-being of whoever is being loved. Where systems cause suffering, seeking the well-being of those who suffer includes challenging the injustice of that system. Seeking justice is love in action.

Dr. Moe-Lobeda provided numerous examples of the harm global warming is causing to God's earth. Accepting these facts may require great moral courage, but we must be honest about what's occurring. What are we, as the church, called to do in light of these facts? This afternoon's workshops and Dr. Moe-Lobeda's presentation tomorrow will help address this question.

Budget Report

Synod Treasurer Scott Schulte briefly summarized the finances for the fiscal year ending 2021. The CSS had a surplus of \$440 and, thankfully, did not use any temporarily restricted funds to meet expenses. Although there was a delay, the 2019 financial audit is complete and the 2020 audit is underway.

He explained the proposed 2023 -2024 budget as presented in the Assembly materials. That budget was subsequently accepted as proposed.

Finally, he encouraged congregations to take advantage of the Mission Endowment Fund which provides financial support for items not otherwise supported in the operating budget.

Nominating Committee Report - for Synod Council

The slate of candidates for Synod Council positions was announced, and one nomination was made from the floor. Nominations closed with voting to take place during the lunch break.

Churchwide Presentation

Mr. Nick Kiger, Director of Mission Support, highlighted the CSS's numerous contributions to ministry through the larger church body. This includes supporting partner synods in Russia and Papua New Guinea, Lutheran Disaster Relief, ELCA World Hunger, and the Eastern Europe Disaster Response (focused in and around Ukraine). Individual members of CSS Staff and member congregations also provide leadership on the ELCA Board and committees.

He noted that we don't always agree on things, but we can still engage in ministry together and accomplish amazing things. In fact, we are!

Ministry Partner Reports

The current president of the CSS WELCA noted the work being done by women in CSS congregations even though the number of contributing WELCA Units has declined since 2019.

The Board is committed to identifying those women who want to be engaged and encouraged congregations to let her know who they are. The CSS WELCA convention is July 22-24, and information is available on the CSS website.

Jennifer Prinz, the CSS Regional Representative for Portico, described its ministry to offer medical insurance, financial wellness initiatives, disability benefits, retirement plans, and related services to serve church workers so they can serve others.

ELCA Mission Investment Fund's Janice Kibler reported the Fund exists to support work of the church. The Fund exists because of contributions from congregations and individuals, and congregations can borrow from the Fund for capital improvements. The Fund supports both CSS and church-wide initiatives.

Assembly Workshops

During the afternoon, Assembly participants had the opportunity to attend two of the following workshops:

- Conversation with Dr. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Professor of Theological and Social Ethics, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and Church Divinity School of the Pacific: A continued conversation following her morning presentation.
- Lutherans Restoring Creation: A Grassroots Network Cultivating Dedicated Stewards of the Earth, led by Phoebe Morad, Executive Director, Lutherans Restoring Creation and CSS LRC Team.
- Sustainability Efforts in the ELCA, led by Dr. Ruth Ivory-Moore, ELCA Program Director Environmental & Corporate Social Responsibility (Moderated by Keith Mundy).
- Composting for the Greener Good, led by Master Gardener [NAME]
- Worship and Learning with Creation, led by Jacob Spilker, Executive Director of Camp Tomah Shinga, and Rev. Noni Strand, Chair of CSS Lutherans Restoring Creation Mission Table.
- Exploring the Earth Charter and How it Works, led by Keith Mundy, CSS Earth Charter Initiative.
- Stewards of the Soil: Rural Perspectives on Creation Care, led by Connie Dorf, Steven Johnson and Rom Heimer - Members of Assaria Lutheran, Assaria KS (Moderated by Rev. Noni Strand).
- Advocacy & Community Organizing to Address Climate Change, led by Kansas Interfaith Action and Missouri Faith Voices.
- How Caring for Creation Coaching helps Congregations Achieve Their Goals, led by Rev. Janice Hawley, ELCA Caring for Creation Coaching Coordinator.
- Outdoor Workshop at Hollis Renewal Center, led by Dave Mareske, Executive Director of Hollis Renewal Center.

Evening Celebration

The day ended with a calm banquet dinner followed by a rollicking celebration of Parish Ministry Associates and ordained clergy celebrating milestone anniversaries.



CSS DAY 3 - June 11, 2022

Bishop Candea called the Assembly to order, and we opened with prayer and song.

The bishop welcomed the 258 voting members (161 lay; 97 rostered), thanked those who volunteered to run for Synod Council positions, and declared the following individuals elected to the Council: Tulia Brown Hamilton (At-large person of color), Mindy Tiller (Deacon), Joanie Saltzman (At-large Young Adult), and Dallas Rakestraw (At-large, lay, male).

Vice-President Report

Vice-President Nancy Nagle noted how pleased she was to attend her first in-person Assembly since being elected in 2019. Synod Council acts on behalf of the Synod Assembly in between Assemblies. Ms. Nagle described the Council's responsibilities and introduced the current Council members. In its deliberations, Council considers what God is asking us to do and how a proposed action fulfills the CSS's purpose. She invited others to consider serving on Council or one of the many taskforces that support Synod activities.

Saying that we live in challenging times is an understatement. Trying to return to normal hasn't always worked well because there is really no "normal" to return to. Instead, we must return to the future God is providing for us. We're not quite sure how to respond to the cultural norms that have shifted around us, but we do know that our God is a God of action. Before we act, we listen to those whose voices have been silent and to understand. She hopes we're excited to listen to new voices and to move into the future God has planned for the Synod.

Keynote Presentation (part 2)

Dr. Moe-Lobeda built on her presentation of yesterday morning by discussing the Lutheran seeds of hope and moral-spiritual power. Luther's has a biblical understanding of who the human creature is. We are three things: beloved, broken by sin, and the body of God's justice-seeking, earth-relishing love on this earth. These are profound gifts of Lutheran theology.

We are broken by sin...including ecological sin and the impact that sin has on the global community. We are also beloved beyond measure without earning that love. Everyone, even if complicit in wrong-doing like climate change, is loved and forgiven. That saving word permits truths-telling and permits us to reform our behavior. We have a creating, helping love within us to preserve the earth.

Dr. Moe-Lobeda asked us to consider the following questions: In the midst of this sin of climate crisis, what will we do if we really believe Jesus' promise that God lives and works in us? What gets in the way? Three things get in the way: an almost unnoticed sense of powerlessness and hopelessness regarding climate change, guilt or shame about our contribution to the climate crisis, and our fear of controversy.

The cross and the resurrection defy these voices. The last word is life raised out of death - not devastation. However, we can't just sit back and let God do the work. God works through us. In addition, if there's any place where we can discuss controversial issues in love, it is the church. That's because we know we are woven together with bonds that controversy can't break.

Finally, Dr. Moe-Lobeda provided tools for practicing creation care guided by neighbor-love. She notes that, "we" are not an "I." Biblical faith teaches us we are created into community and not in isolation. Jesus himself acted in community. In baptism, we are woven into a community. There are at least the following ten forms of action we can take within that community: life-style changes; public policy advocacy and electoral advocacy; economic advocacy; community-organizing campaigns; public witness, building or supporting small scale

local and business and agriculture; education and consciousness raising, theological and biblical reflection at all levels, worship including liturgy, preaching and liturgical art, and prayer). All are widely used in the Lutheran community today even though they are not widely seen. Build on the relationship with LRC to improve these efforts.

She left us with these questions: What form of action will we take as a congregation? With what person, team, or organization will we connect? Who will we invite to hold us accountable (accountability buddies or circles)?

After prayer, we moved to Assembly business.

Compensation Guidelines

Mike Hearn, the chair of the Compensation Committee, introduced the Compensation Guidelines and described the major updates. The Guidelines' narrative document was revised to become more aligned with ELCA guidelines in the areas of pastoral sabbaticals, family and medical leave, and compensation for supply pastors. Technical updates were also made to a related calculation spreadsheet. The revisions were approved.



Resolutions

- Resolutions SA 22.01, SA 22.02, and SA 22.03 were provided for informational purposes, but they were not properly before the Assembly for vote because they were deemed unconstitutional.
- SA 22.07 was withdrawn by the individuals who submitted it so that further intentional conversation can occur within the Synod before bringing it back to the Assembly.
- SA 22.04 (A Season of Global Awareness) passed, as amended.
- SA 22.05 (Memorial Calling for the Just Transition from Greenhouse Gas Transmissions) passed, as amended.
- SA 22.06 (Developing LGBTQIA+ Education and Cultural Competency as a Synod) passed.
- SA 22.08 (Thanksgiving for Ministry) passed.

Additional Ministry Reports (as time permitted)

Adam Wutka described the differences between a PMA (Parish Ministry Associate) and a SAM (Synod-Authorized Minister).

Gary Teske gave a brief update on our companion synods in Russia and Papua New Guinea. The Assembly closed with worship.