

A Report:

The Eighteenth Synod of the Lutheran Church - International

This report is written at the invitation of the pastor of First Church, Lyons, to report on the annual synod in The Chimes, distributed to many in LC-I, in the manner formerly done for The Messenger of Christ Church, Rosedale by The Rt. Rev. Aubrey N. Bougher, STS, S.T.D., diocesan bishop. It is written not in his official capacity but as an observer at the synod.

The 18th annual synod of the Lutheran Church – International was convened at Zion Lutheran Church in West Jefferson near Montpelier, Ohio, on Wednesday, July 29th, beginning with a mass at which the host bishop, the Rt. Rev. **Jeffrey D. Bischoff**, presided and preached. The Most Rev. Dr. **Robert W. Hotes**, Archbishop of LC-I, conducted the Rite for the Opening of Synod. LDA Deaconess Helena Morris, administrator of Zion, assisted at the mass. Beginning Tuesday evening Bishop Bischoff and Deaconess Helena had arranged morning and evening prayer rites for those in attendance at synod. Bishop Bischoff led most of the prayer services, with The Rt. Rev. **Aubrey N. Bougher**, STS, bishop of the Northeastern Diocese; the Rev. **Richard W. Horn**, secretary of LC-I; and the Rt. Rev. **Juan O. Cepero**, missionary bishop for Latin America and Hispanic Ministries, leading some of the other offices with various lay delegates and Deaconess Helena assisting. Matins were sung Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday; Vespers were offered Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. The Rev. **Jack R. Whritenour**, STS, pastor of Christ Church in Rosedale, Queens, NY, was organist for the services, assisted by the Rev. **Scott Christensen**, LC-I pastor serving in the Ft. Wayne, Indiana, area, at the annual Bishops' Mass.

Prior to the opening of synod, the Executive Board met during Wednesday morning to prepare for synod business and make last-minute recommendations on various items while delegates familiarized themselves with the area. This included interviews with the two candidates to be presented to the synod. The board's business items presented to synod are noted as synod items, below. Meals at lunchtime and suppertime were provided by members of the host parish. Informal fellowship was enjoyed at times free on the agenda.

The first business session was called to order after mass by the Archbishop, who presided at all sessions, as required by the constitution. Pastor Horn fulfilled his role as Secretary of LC-I, and these two leaders were at the dais in the Zion parish hall for all synod sessions. After an introduction to all who were present, the proposed agenda was presented and approved. The previous synod's minutes were then approved. There were no guests to be introduced.

The Archbishop extended the greetings of the Anglican Orthodox Southern Episcopal Church and its presiding bishop, The Most Rev. Dr. **William Sloane**, with whom LC-I has had a longstanding relationship. Greetings by letter were also received from the Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession – Russia. Greetings had earlier been extended in a telephone conference at the executive board meeting from the Rev. Persaud in ministry in India.

The Archbishop gave his report, recounting many of his travels and work both as archbishop and administrator of the Western and Southern Dioceses. Among the items noted were:

- Presided at board meetings since last synod
- Attended NE Diocese Ministerium at Perkasie, PA, Sept., 2014
- Presided at Affirmation of Ordination for
 - Fr. Jack R. Whriteneour at Christ, Rosedale, March 1, 2015
 - Fr. **Philip E. Barber, III** at Fairfax, VA, June 25, 2015
- Attended Intl Police Chaplain Banquet honoring Pr. Horn
- Appointed Pr. Horn Denominational Rep to ICPC (above)
- Collaborated in setting up web site with Vicar Wigmore
- Attended NE Diocese Ministerium at Lyons, NY, May, 2015
- Saw Pr. **Larry Goodnough** w Pr. Horn & Bp. Bougher, May, 2015
- Attempting development of mission in Frederick, MD, area
- Attendance at worship at Mission led by Pr. **William Gies**
- Various contacts with LC-I ministers and congregations, other Lutheran leaders, and multiple administrative tasks.

The Archbishop also commented on relationships with other church bodies noting especially the CCC in Canada, the Eastern Rite Lutherans and the Russian Lutherans. Work has also reflected review of historic ILF documents and formal former relationships. He reported on his visit to the Western Diocese as its administrator and his reception of Fr. **James Townsend** as a priest of LC-I last autumn. He also noted contact with

Pastor **Gary Allan** who has moved to New Mexico (Western Diocese) from Indiana (Mid America Diocese). His work in the Southern Diocese includes meetings with Pastors **Arthur Hebbeler III** and William Gies in the Frederick area of Maryland and contact with others by telephone. The Archbishop also gave a brief report for the World Lutheran Parish of which he is serving as pastor.

Vice President **Isabelle E. Coles-Dunbar**, the chairlady of the House of Delegates for the last year, gave a report mainly describing the pastoral transition at Christ Church, Rosedale, where she is President of the Congregation.

Pastor Horn presented his report at Secretary (the minutes of the Synod and Executive Board are his chief work, approved separately). During his report the following 5-year anniversaries of ordination were recognized (a certificate will follow):

- Bishop **Richard Johnson** as a pastor – 55 years
- Deacon **Samnarain Sooppersaud** – 30 years
- Pastor **Larry J. Goodnough** as priest – 15 years
- Bishop Jeffrey D. Bischoff as bishop – 5 years

Secretary Horn reported on the reception of archival material from the former secretary, Pr. Hebbeler, and his making an inventory of it with the assistance of the Archbishop. He also announced a recommendation to review the constitution and by-laws, for which the archbishop will be asked to appoint a special committee for presentation in time for report to and action at next year's synod.

A detailed financial report was presented by the Treasurer, Reverend Deacon **William H. Wigmore, III**. His report included the checking account, including the bishops' travel fund, and the endowment fund. The title for the annual dues or offering was also discussed.

The report of the dioceses followed, the Southern and Western Dioceses having been reported by the Archbishop, noted above. Bishop Bischoff verbally reported for the Mid-America Diocese and the work of its ministers and congregation, Zion, our host. Of great importance was the presentation of Sister Helena Morris as a candidate for ordination as a deacon through the executive board, and the presentation of the Rev. **Mark Powell** of Indianapolis, Indiana, for reception by the rite of Affirmation of Ordination through the Executive Board.

Bishop Bougher gave his report in written form, and noted the following items among the communities of faith of his diocese:

- The transition of the pastorate at the cathedral church with details
- The reception of Pr. Whritenour by Affirmation of Ordination on March 1st when he was also installed as Associate Pastor
- Plans for the Installation of Pr. Whritenour on Sept. 27th
- The proposals for pastoral ordination approval for Dc Wigmore
- The oratories in Canada and Virgin Islands, mostly dormant.

The report also reviewed the status of the clergy of the diocese, with special prayer requests for the Rev. **Harvey W. Von Harten, III** and the Rev. **Arthur C. Sziemeister**. He reported also on his own retirement from the pastoral ministry at Rosedale, and welcomed Pr. Whritenour to his first LC-I synod. The diocese had two ministerial meetings since the last synod, and reports were given on both.

Bishop Cepero gave a full report on his work since last synod, of which a major part was his visit to the Lutheran ministers and synod in Nicaragua led by Bishop Immer. He reviewed his visit to and opinion of the church there and described its background. Scandals with finances in the Lutheran Church – Nicaragua caused schism, and the group with Bp. Immer is one of the results. The possibilities of future relationships with them remain open but need further development. Bishop Cepero also reported on his contacts in Puerto Rico and Peru, site of a possible future trip. He remains in contact with various groups in Latin America.

After the Episcopal and diocesan reports, congregations and pastors were invited to give reports, and most were given verbally from those present. A fully written report with informative details was presented by Sister Helena for Zion Church.

Due to his health condition, the Rev. Arthur C. Sziemester, chairman of the Pastoral Education Committee, was precluded at the last minute from his planned attendance at synod. He presented a full report of the course of study being used in the preparation of the Reverend Deacon William H. Wigmore, III, currently serving as Vicar of First Lutheran Church in Lyons, New York, for Ordination to the presbyteral (priestly, pastoral) office in the Lutheran Church. He outlined the various lectures and books used in Scripture, History, Theology, Liturgy, and Practical Theology. Due to the point reached in this study and the need to have an ordained pastor at Lyons when Pastor Sziemeister is unable to preside, as

happened at Easter last year, the committee proposed to the Executive Board that Deacon Wigmore be approved by the Board and the Synod for Ordination as a Pastor upon his reception and acceptance of a divine call, with the understanding that he will complete his course of study after such ordination. The Executive Board, absent Deacon Wigmore after ascertaining that he would accept ordination as a pastor under such circumstances, unanimously approved that recommendation and forwarded it to the synod.

No other candidates were presented to the committee this year.

A report was presented by Deacon Wigmore and the Archbishop on the establishment of an LC-I presence on a website and Facebook®. The Rev. **John R. Schilling, III**, who had been appointed to chair a committee to discuss the church's relationship to individuals in non-marital relationships, presented a synopsis of the problem of such relationships to certain teachings of the church, and then recommended that the LC-I take no position on such relationships but that they be left to the discretion of individual pastors. That recommendation was adopted by the synod. During the discussion of this item, a related discussion elicited much participation in how the church was to respond to its teaching concerning marriage (cf. Archbishop's Statement of 2009) in relationship to the recent ruling on Same Sex Marriages by the U. S. Supreme Court. This discussion was tabled until new business after it became a longer matter in the agenda than planned, especially since it was not the precise subject of the committee reporting.

Following the committee reports, the Executive Board, through the Secretary, presented its report. The first item was the recommendation of candidates to offices of ordained ministry.

Two candidates were presented for approval for ordination:

- Rev. Deacon William H. Wigmore, III, for ordination to the order of presbyter, pastor, and priest when he shall have received and accepted a divine call to such ministry, with the understanding that he will continue his studies in ministry following ordination.

- Sister Helena Morris, Deaconess, for ordination to the order of deacon, having received and accepted a call as administrator and deacon of Zion Lutheran Church, West Jefferson, Ohio.

Deacon Wigmore indicated his full agreement with the stipulations to his call, and the delegates from First Lutheran Church, Lyons, **Brenda Brendlinger** and **Alice Smith**, indicated that the congregation and council at Lyons were prepared to issue him a call as Associate Pastor. The recommendation was approved unanimously by all three houses of ministry and the house of laity. The arrangements for Deacon Wigmore's expected call and ordination to the pastorate will be dependent upon the schedule in Lyons and will be announced as available.

Sister Helena was asked if she had any desire for call to the pastoral office, not allowed by LC-I, should she be ordained a deacon --- that is whether she would view herself as a transitional deacon or a permanent deacon. She responded that she did not see herself called to the pastoral office and was only seeking the office of deacon because she is as a deaconess already preaching and leading worship, which is not the duty of the office of deaconess but is of deacon. She does not feel called to preside at the Eucharist. The synod then approved unanimously in all three houses the recommendation for her ordination as a deacon. The ordination of Sister Helena as a Deacon was set for the Bishops' Mass the next day of synod.

The Executive Board then recommended the reception of the Rev. Mark Powell of Indianapolis, Indiana, as a presbyter, pastor, and priest of LC-I. Previously ordained in the ELCA and now on the rolls of LCMC, he would be received by the Rite of Affirmation of Ordination, as Pastors Whritenour and Barber earlier had been this year. He serves as a hospice chaplain in Indianapolis and lives with his wife in Whiteland, Indiana. The recommendation was accepted unanimously in all three houses. The Affirmation Rite was set for the Bishops' Mass of this synod.

The Executive Board reported on several areas of its duties. Special prayers were requested, continuing our previous practice, for the Eastern Rite of the Lutheran Church in Europe. The Board reported on the nomination of Pastor Horn as a Bishop to serve as a Missionary Bishop. This begins a one-year period of discernment to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit so the LC-I may do God's will in the naming of a new

bishop. As per the constitution, the election of a bishop will take place at the 2016 synod. The report of the Executive Board concluded as the first session of business was scheduled to conclude.

This year the presentation to the synod was given by our host, Bishop Bischoff, on relationships in the church. (The title was not copied by this author.) He noted several ways of community organization in the church, following certain teachers and authors. Comparisons were made between a bound set, built on adherence to specific rules and dogma, and a centered set, built on varied stations of relationships or growth towards Christ. The first presentation on Wednesday afternoon centered on definitions and illustrations of those forms of organization. The second presentation offered a transformative set, containing elements of both of the first two, and showing how elements of that set were shown at various stages of church life. Scriptural illustrations of all three set arrangements were used throughout, and there was informative discussion on the way this manifests itself in parish life.

After supper, the second business session began with the separate meetings of the houses of bishop, clergy, and laity. Neither the bishops nor the clergy had much to report, but the House of Laity had discussion on various contemporary church issues, and acted upon its constitutional duties, electing Isabelle E. Coles-Dunbar, incumbent vice president, for a second year of service. This was reported to the joint business session later in the evening, with the Installation of the Vice President already scheduled for the Bishops' Mass.

A general motion to accept all of the reports previously noted was made and accepted, ending a good deal of the business of the synod.

The Old Business session in the evening again visited the question of dealing with recent government action regarding same sex marriage as well as related issues, and it was suggested that a task force be appointed by the archbishop to study the subject and report back on it at the next synod. A discussion of the LC-I logo was presented by Secretary Horn, but no action was taken because no bishop would support a change.

The Thursday morning business session began after Matins, and dealt with new business. No notes of that session were taken by this correspondent. Present for this session was the Executive Director of the

Lutheran Deaconess Association, **Lisa Polito**. She rejoiced both in the LC-I's relationship with LDA as well as in Sister Helena's upcoming ordination as deacon. She also updated the synod on activities of LDA.

Other new business items were discussed. The 19th annual synod was set in 2016 for First Lutheran Church in Lyons, New York, tentatively from Tuesday – Thursday, July 26 – 28. Resolutions of thanksgiving to Zion Church and others who served the synod were adopted near the end of the business session. Inasmuch as all business was concluded by Thursday morning, it was agreed to cancel the Friday business session and to have synod close officially after Matins on Friday morning for those who remained. The business meetings adjourned Thursday morning, followed by the second presentation, already described above.

After Thursday dinner a special treat for many of those in attendance at synod was a trip to the Spangler Candy Company in Bryant for a tour of its facilities. A rather large building and a mainstay of local business, it proved an interesting tour through its facilities. All of the participants had to wear netting over their hair, both on top of the head and on the face. Of course, items were for sale in the company store at the end of the tour. A special thank-you was offered Sister Helena for this treat.

The synod celebrated the Bishops' Mass at 4:00 P.M. Thursday. Bishop Bougher presided, Archbishop Hotes preached and concelebrated, with Bishops Bischoff and Cepero concelebrating. Deacons Wigmore and **Norbert Mayer** assisted. Archbishop Hotes presided at the Ordination to the Diaconate of Sister Helena, assisted by both deacons and the other bishops. Several guest deaconesses and pastors attended the celebration in honor of Deacon Helena. After the Post-Communion, the Archbishop conducted the Rite of Affirmation of Ordination for Pastor Powell, with all bishops and pastors joining in the laying on of hands. At the conclusion of that rite the Installation of Vice President Coles-Dunbar also took place, followed by the Benediction.

After the mass, a festal dinner reception was held in the parish hall, with an early Vespers concluding the evening. We thank God for the ministry of all those in the Lutheran Church – International, and invite all to join us at the 2016 Synod in Lyons, New York.