



# 2009 NC Synod Assembly

## Thursday Highlights

### DEFINED BY THE WORD

By Ann Thompson

The Reverend Dr. Foster McCurley, in his keynote address, challenged assembly participants to be defined by the Word of God. He challenged, "Get Biblical about your life!"

Dr. McCurley noted that often we define ourselves by what we do. He urges a paradigm shift, asking us to consider that who we are defines what we do. Consider changing the question, "Who am I?" to "Whose am I?"

Through baptism we are claimed by God through pure grace, not by merit. As adopted children of God it is vitally important for us to learn who adopted us and what that means. We learn through Bible study.

Luther urged students of the Bible to hear the word, to discover what the word of God is saying in context. Dr. McCurley offers two questions to use in analysis:

- What is God doing here?
- What is the situation in which God is doing it?

In a quest for learning more about God, Dr. McCurley suggests that we focus on the "I am" passages in the Bible. For example, God says in Ezekiel, "I am your shield." To understand what He is revealing, find other passages about shields to see how they were used.

Dr. McCurley encourages us to claim our identity as children of God, to open the Book of Faith, to study and learn who God is and who we are as his children, to define ourselves by the word of God.

### FORWARD IN FAITH

By Tammy Jones West

"Glory to God in the highest and peace to God's people on Earth."

The first words of song for the 2009 NC Synod Assembly as we gathered in worship this 4<sup>th</sup> day of June. Beautiful voices were raised in song and united in praise of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We are people of the Story – the Story of God's Promises in the Book of Faith. The text from Exodus reminds us of God's fulfilling promises for the children of Israel.

Pastor Jennifer Ginn from Cross and Crown in Matthews reminded us that being on the right side or the wrong side isn't always so easy to identify. She reminded us that those on the right side were at many times so very, very wrong.

Pastor Ginn called us to remember that all of those perishing in the parting of the Red Sea were God's children. We face muddy waters. God calls us to move forward in faith. To walk together regardless of the issues that confront us as God's people. We move forward in faith one step at a time, together.

"Then may all the living, with praise and thanksgiving, give honor to Christ and his name that we bear." What an appropriate way to close in song. His name we bear – Walking Together, Sharing Christ.

Thursday, June 4, 2009

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### QUOTES TO NOTE

"Guide us as we live, guide us as we vote."  
– Pr. Reggie Hansome, Jr.

"We are a church plagued with Biblical illiteracy." – Rev. Bill Mims, Book of Faith Advocate

"The Bible is a powerful, revolutionary book that changes people," Pastor Frank Perry

"Who am I?"; "Whose am I?" – The Rev. Dr. Foster McCurley

"I can always use a helpful hint from God." – Grace Madsen

## DWELLING IN THE WORD MOMENTS

### Frank Perry

*By Ann Thompson*

Pastor Frank Perry was inspired by his father to read the Bible from an early age. Each day, his father read the Bible, and memorized scripture, especially the Sermon on the Mount.

That passage had a profound influence on his father's life. His father recited it every morning . It resonated with him, shaped him and eventually began to change him. His life changed as a result of the influence of the scripture.

Watching his father drew Pastor Perry to the Bible. He began reading the context of the Bible, and not just the pages.

"The Bible is a powerful, revolutionary book that changes people," declares Pastor Perry.

To illustrate, he told the story of a pastor who offered a man a Bible. The man was thrilled to get the book. He planned to use its pages to roll cigarettes. Instead of rebuking the man, the pastor made him promise to read each page before he rolled the cigarettes. After smoking his way through Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the man began to hear the Gospel in the book of John, and he accepted Christ as his Savior!

Pastor Perry encourages us to become regular readers of the Bible; to know how to interpret it. Faithful followers trust God's word given to us.

### Grace Madsen

*By Andrew Miller*

"Do you love me?"

Hearing the words and calling of Christ in John 21, Grace Madsen shared with the assembly the story of her powerful interaction with God's Word. Like many young girls, her career aspirations changed quite often. At the age of 9, she wanted to be a ballerina. Later, she decided she would become a marine biologist, and even later, she wanted to be a photographer. At the age of 12, what she wanted to be changed once again. She was being called to be a pastor. Still, four years later, that has not changed.

Grace heard her call as she was focused on hanging out and having fun with her friends. The journey to her call to become a pastor started with her participation in Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO) meetings. Grace was not attending meetings because she wanted to develop a relationship with God, but because she liked hanging out with her friends and eating pizza.

So, when she had the opportunity to go to an LYO retreat with her friends, she jumped on the opportunity. A whole weekend with friends was right up her alley. During worship at the retreat, God's began calling Grace to her new direction in life. As she heard Christ's words, "Do you love me more than these?", she felt that tug.

For Grace, God's Word persists in nourishing her faith and guiding her life as she eagerly serves Him now and anticipates her calling in ministry.

## **AN EPIDEMIC OF BIBLICAL ILLITERACY**

*By Glenn Mays*

The Rev. Dr. Bill Mims, Book of Faith advocate, has witnessed the Biblical illiteracy that plagues the church and our synod. He sees it in his introductory to religion classroom at Lenoir-Rhyne University, where many of the students do not own a Bible, nor have they ever read one. It is evident in Confirmation classes full of young teenagers and adult Sunday school classes filled with people who do not know the basic Bible stories.

Dr. Mims outlined a two-pronged approach for the synod to address this plaguing illiteracy. The first is to get every member of each congregation reading and studying the Bible. "We are asking each congregation to carry out at least one new thing that is aimed toward that end," Dr. Mims said.

The second aspect of the initiative is to teach people how to teach the Bible. Currently, four task groups are planning ways to implement this aspect. Additionally, a Book of Faith advocate has been named for each conference to facilitate the program.

"The Book of Faith Initiative is the response of our church to a situation that is not in the least bit funny," he said.

He added that the ELCA has recognized the problem and at the urging of the NC Synod has initiated a five-year emphasis on Bible study and interpretation.

Dr. Mims concluded, "The ultimate goal is to renew the church, and I believe that the Holy Spirit is already doing that through this initiative."

## **ELCA REPRESENTATIVE REPORT**

*By Ann Thompson*

The Rev. Rafael Malpica Padilla, executive director for Global Mission for the ELCA, brought greetings from the churchwide organization. "We are one church with interdependent expressions working together to accomplish ministry. In fact, we can leverage ministry and do things together that we cannot do separately. And, when the church is working at its best, we can learn from each other so that our work together will have a multiplier effect."

Padilla brought greetings from Bishop Mark Hanson who said, "I am convinced that we are to bear witness at the intersections of fear and hope." He encourages Lutherans to live as messengers of God trusting in the hope of Jesus, to live and serve compassionately, confidently, and courageously.

"When we reflect on all that we do together in ministry, I think that we gain an expanded appreciation for the Apostle Paul's description of the body of Christ." He thanked the North Carolina Synod for all that we do to support the ministries of the ELCA through mission-support contributions that help fund missionaries, new congregational starts, seminaries, colleges and universities, Lutheran campus ministries, social ministry organizations, Lutheran Disaster Response, and many, many more.

ELCA Lutherans will gather in August for the Churchwide Assembly. As it approaches, Padilla invites us to read about it at [www.elca.org/assembly](http://www.elca.org/assembly) and in August to watch it streamed live.

Padilla closed with a mission story based on the story of Jonah, an early, though reluctant, missionary. He stated that the church of Jesus Christ has a mission, then rephrased the statement to say, "The mission of Jesus Christ has a church." Padilla closed with a blessing, "May God empower you to go on many mission trips proclaiming Jesus Christ."

## REPORTS FROM AGENCIES AND INSTITUTIONS

By Stephanie Grantham

The current economic climate was the underlying theme of greetings received at the NC Synod Assembly from partnering agencies and institutions. With optimism, representatives shared their stories.

Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary shared that though times are tough and belts are being tightened, its board decided to not raise tuition next year! Seminary President Marcus Miller said, "The times of balancing the budget on the backs of seminarians has got to end."

Other agencies are looking to the future with open and prayerful hearts. Lutheran Theological Center of Atlanta is looking at its mission and leadership, while Lutheran Family Services announced it has created a more localized focus to better meet the needs of the communities it serves and development more fruitful and long-lasting partnerships with other agencies and congregations in those communities.

Lutheridge+Lutherock Ministries has asked how the church can stay relevant during these challenging times. It's answer? The Faith Formation Stimulus Package which will help kids whose families are unemployed or underemployed attend camp.

Lutheran Services for the Aging is continuing to express God's love in all the ways it serves. Though economic situations are stressing the agency and the environment, LSA continues to advocate for Medicaid and renovate current facilities to meet the needs of both current and future residents.

Lutheran Retirement Ministries of Alamance County is also continuing to grow and build despite economic challenges. In addition to opening a memory care facility, and completing a \$2.5 million campaign, it also celebrated its 25 year anniversary in 2008.

The agencies and institutions of this synod continue to do God's Work with Our Hands regardless of the economic times. They show that sharing God's love does not stop, does not falter and knows no limits.

## SPECIAL THANKS

A special word of thanks to:

**Thrivent Financial for Lutherans** whose generous gifts made possible the name badge wallets and the refreshment tent for the assembly.

The following congregations which provided valuable support and resources: Zion, Hickory, Friendship, Taylorsville, Philadelphia, Granite Falls, St. Johns, Hudson, Our Saviour, Southern Pines

## Book of Faith Conference Advocates

Blue Ridge Mountain: **Pastor Tony Bradshaw**

Cabarrus: **Pastor James White**

East Catawba: **Pastor Roger Beaver**

East Rowan: **Pastor Tom Cogan**

Gaston: **Pastor Libby Toler**

Mecklenburg/Union: **Pastor Ed Thomas**

Northeast: **Pastor Charlie Hoyle**

Northern Piedmont: **Pastor Nathan Hooks**

Northwestern: **Pastor Sherri Knutson'**

Salem: **Pastor John Beeg**

Sandhills/S. Piedmont: **Pastor Scott Homesley**

South Coastal: **Ms. Tammi Gates**

Southwestern: **Pastor Ron Fink**

Smoky Mountain: **Pastor Jim White**

Triangle: **Pastor Frank Perry**

West Catawba: **Pastor Dennis Hacker**

West Central: **Pastor Susan Bame**

West Rowan: **Pastor Michael Comer**