

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Catherine F. Fink, Director of Communications & Resources

North Carolina Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

704-680-9574

cfink@nclutheran.org

Lutherans Re-elect Bishop Tim Smith on First Ballot

SALISBURY—Almost 500 members of congregations of the North Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) gathered for the June 3-5, 2021 assembly, happening primarily online. The assembly, which serves as the primary legislative body of the NC Synod, had an added task this year in the election of a bishop which happens every six years. In a resounding affirmation of his leadership, the Rev. Dr. Timothy M. Smith was re-elected as bishop on the first ballot. Addressing the assembly, Bishop Smith said, “Thank you for the confidence that you place in me and the Holy Spirit for our moving together into the future.”

With a focus on Collaboration, the three days centered on the theme of Strength for the Journey using the story of Jesus’ healing of the paralytic let down through the roof (Mark 2:1-12). Daily devotions were offered on the theme by lay leaders who brought poignant and personal stories to lend insight to the text. A painted icon created specifically for this synod assembly was prominently displayed on the stage, easily seen by in-person attendees as well as those joining by Zoom.

Three keynote speakers spoke passionately about the ways the NC Synod works collaboratively: The Rev. David Guthrie, President of the Moravian Church, Southern Province; Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, The Episcopal Church; and Bill Horne, Vice President of the ELCA Church Council. All three guests confirmed a commitment to ecumenical partnership and collaboration which will only lead to ministries that will continue to flourish.

While the approval of a budget is not usually an exciting effort, this year was different. Through a long process and hard, holy conversations with the synod’s African Descent Strategy Team, Synod Council, and other synodical leaders, the dream of All Races One Church was born. The All Races One Church (AROC) Fund will strive to celebrate siblings of color and provide a vibrant future for them as whole and healthy leaders, in addition to ensuring that the synod has vital and diverse congregations. With the approval of the budget, the AROC Fund is established.

The additional business included the election of members to Synod Council—a group of laypeople and pastors who serve as the legislative body for the synod between Synod

Assemblies—as well as the election of 13 laypeople and pastors who will be voting members to the upcoming 2022 triennial ELCA Churchwide Assembly. One of the synod's agencies, Lutheran Services Carolinas, announced the launch of their congregational *Be the Light* campaign which will continue through December 2023. Funds raised will support LSC programs such as foster care and adult care, but also will create an endowment, *For the Children*, to support the needs of children in NC.

Assembly worship is always a highlight, and this year was no different, except perhaps its delivery via Facebook Live or YouTube. Opening worship focused heavily on the theme of Strength for the Journey and included a time of remembrance for all the pastors whose lives were lost since our last gathering—which, due to the pandemic, was June 2019. Deacon Tammy Jones West, an assistant to the bishop, preached boldly on Mark 3:20-35. Despite our efforts to the contrary, she warned, “Jesus cannot and will not be restrained.” We must go to Jesus, embracing and caring for others along the way. A Moravian Love Feast was also shared with hymns led by musicians from The Dwelling, a mission congregation in Winston-Salem serving people who are currently experiencing homelessness. Pastor Russ May of Anthony's Plot (a Moravian community) challenged everyone with his sermon.

Bishop Smith's reflections, while they included his thankfulness for being re-elected and his memories of being elected in 2015, focused on the past two years. Ministry has been extremely difficult amid COVID-19, political, racial, and economic tensions, and with the ever-changing nature of the church. Through it all, he said, the core commitments of the NC Synod have not changed: Christ-centered, Generosity, Relationship, Reconciliation. Building on those, the role of the synod is to build healthy leaders and healthy congregations by supporting and equipping them. While the pandemic presented many challenges, rostered ministers and congregations—and the synod staff—rose to meet them. Bishop Tim closed his remarks reminding us that moving forward with hope, we will do our best to be the church together; to be about the way of Jesus.

In her concluding reflections, Vice President Diana Haywood encouraged the assembly to consider the ministry reports received through the lens of the centering Scripture text. Diana remarked, “During this past year, we were all on the mat. But what we have heard here during the past three days is how we helped to carry. And how we dug some holes in the roof.”

Additional stories detailing the work, worship, and ministry reports of the 2021 NC Synod Assembly can be found at www.nclutheran.org/event/synod-assembly-2021/.

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The North Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America includes 190 congregations across the state. It is one of 65 synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which includes over 9,300 congregations. Visit www.nclutheran.org or www.elca.org to learn more.