

The Pink Link

Friday, June 8, 2007

2007 New England Synod Assembly

Munib Younan: The negotiator

Editor's note: The Rt. Rev. Munib Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, is our keynote speaker today at 1:15 p.m. This article was written shortly after his arrival in Worcester on Wednesday.

*By Pr. Paul Sinnott
Synod Ministry Specialist
for Justice and Peace*

Whether it's a busy street, a visa application or between Lutheran colleagues from China, India and Pakistan gathered for a meeting, Bishop Munib Younan seems always to be negotiating.

Over trout from Idaho prepared in a Worcester eatery, Younan shows no signs of jetlag from his 12-hour flight from Tel Aviv.

"I always try to enjoy something different when I travel. I've never had trout from Idaho." Another negotiation? "They're not all the same," he says with a smile. "You have to know when to

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Resolutions

►07-03 (A Memorial to Amend Vision and Expectations and Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline) **ADOPTED** after a paper ballot vote: 278 Yes / 99 No for a total of 377 votes cast.

►07-07 (Resolution on the New England Synod Council's Statement of December 1, 2006, "Guidance for Pastors and Congregations of the New England Synod, ELCA, Regarding the Blessing of Unions of Same Sex Couples") **DEFEATED**.

►07-08 (Resolution on the Distribution of Holy Communion) **DEFEATED**.



*Living in God's amazing grace:
Thanks be to God!*



The husband and wife team of the Rev. Chris Eldredge (left) and the Rev. Dr. Nancy Eldredge Hess lead opening worship Thursday at the 20th Annual Assembly of the New England Synod, ELCA. Eldredge, who presided, is vice president for advancement and church relations for Lutheran Social Services of New England. Hess, who preached, is CEO of Calumet Lutheran Ministries. See story p. 3. (Photo by Lisa Teichmann)

Assembly celebrates 100th anniversary of campus ministry

Campus ministry, which celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2007, received high marks during the opening day of the 20th Annual Assembly of the New England Synod at the DCU Center in downtown Worcester.

"Campus ministry broadened my worldview tremendously," the Rev. Richard A. Magnus, ELCA representative, told the nearly 550 people at the assembly.



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Bishop honors commitment of Edie Lohr, LSS president

Bishop Margaret G. Payne Thursday paid special tribute to Edie Lohr, who has led Lutheran Social Services of New England (LSS) for 17 years. This is Lohr's last synod assembly before she retires at the end of 2007.

After Lohr had presented the annual *Hands of LSS* award to First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Brockton, Mass., the Bishop, in turn, honored her for a remarkable career of service to the church through its only agency of human care in the region.

On Edie Lohr's watch, LSS, which is observing its 135th anniversary, has experienced extraordinary growth, more than tripling the number of programs and individuals served. But perhaps her most significant contribution, as Bishop Payne pointed out, has been the nurturing and growing of the partnership between LSS and the ELCA and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod congregations in New England.

LSS, under Lohr's leadership, launched the Social Ministry Outreach Project that gave birth to Good News Garage, now a nationally known "welfare to work" model. As the result of Edie Lohr's tireless efforts to inspire congregations to play an active role in social ministry with LSS, more than 100 hundred churches and church-related organizations now support LSS with their gifts of volunteer time, in-kind donations and resources.

Bishop Payne praised Lohr for her "endless days of commitment, an infinite number of ideas for new initiatives to help people in need, and your omnipresence." Quipped the bishop, "I have never, in my entire life, known anyone who attends as many board meetings (as Edie does)."

Lohr, in response, defined what it means to her to be a Lutheran: "We are to be God's people in the world and serve one another." She received a standing ovation.



Edie Lohr



Djoni Sembel signs the charter for Imanuel Indonesian Lutheran Church, Newington, N.H., on May 6 as, his wife Debby and their son Daniel, 21 months, wait their turn to sign.

Welcome, Imanuel Indonesian

Today, we officially welcome Imanuel Indonesian Lutheran Church, Newington, N.H., the ELCA's first Indonesian ministry to organize as a congregation with a pastor from Indonesia who is rostered in the ELCA. Imanuel is also the New England Synod's first start in five years.

Be sure to be in the assembly hall at 10:45 a.m. to hear the powerful story of this faith community, now 100 persons strong, all of whom came to the United States to escape religious persecution in their homeland of Indonesia. Almost half of them still have spouses and, in some cases, children, unable to leave Indonesia.

Pastor Robert Waworuntu describes his flock's discovery of a new home in New Hampshire as grace. Sounds like a good Lutheran, right?

Last July, during the 2006 ELCA Global Mission Event in Amherst, Mass., more than 40 members of Imanuel performed their music and dance.

Today, through the generous support of their mission partner, Holy Trinity, Newington, more than 30 members of Imanuel Indonesian are traveling by bus to Worcester to be received as the synod's newest congregation. Four other Indonesian faith communities, most on the west coast, are in various stages of development. An indication of how promising a future we have, the ELCA now publishes the booklet, "What It Means to Be Lutheran" in the Indonesian language.

On May 6, members signed the charter. Even infants were brought up so that their thumb print could be added. On May 20, Bishop Margaret G. Payne preached at the congregation's recognition service, which was followed by a festival of Indonesian food, music and dance.

IN-KIND DONATIONS TO LSS OVERFLOW

Congregations affirmed the ministries of Lutheran Social Services of New England (LSS) Thursday with an outpouring of gifts for the agency's clients. By the end of the day, two dozen boxes overflowed with personal care items, such as shampoo and toothpaste. And two Connecticut churches had "too much to unload" and will transport their donations directly to the LSS teen living and refugee programs in Worcester. Such generosity overwhelms! Thanks be to God.

'In the beginning ...' (a reflection on opening worship)

By Sandy Talbot
Our Savior, Thomaston, Conn.

On most Tuesday evenings from mid-September to mid-May, Our Savior, Thomaston, Conn., gathers to “share the sacred stories.” Sharing God’s stories is at the center of our Tuesday Night Sunday School experience (ask us about it – we’d love to share our TNSS story!).

So, I found the theme of this year’s assembly, *Stories to Tell*, especially meaningful. Then it got even better; I was asked to read the creation story from Genesis at opening worship. I got to repeat those special words – “God said” – 10 times. What a coincidence, I thought, since our TNSS theme for 2006-2007 was “Then God Said”. When I was asked to write about our opening worship, I realized that this was no coincidence; it was another one of God’s wonderful surprises!

We were inspired in our opening worship by an exceptional husband and wife team – Pastor Chris Eldredge, vice president for advancement and church relations for Lutheran Social Services of New England (LSS), our worship leader, and Dr. Nancy Eldredge Hess, CEO of Calumet Lutheran Ministries, West Ossipee, N.H., who shared her insights into the creation story from Genesis.

Dr. Hess suggested that we view the creation story with the enthusiasm and curiosity of a child; that we “turn our heads upside down and nearly fall over as we let our curiosity loose on this story.” Her energy and enthusiasm opened up the meaning of the text to us as she explored its relevance to the Israelites for whom it was originally written and to “post-modern Christians.”

The creation story in Genesis shows us a “God of grace and blessing,” a God who “wants wholeness and abundant life for all of creation.” In Dr. Hess’ words, “We need the God of Genesis 1” in today’s world. ... “Just the word ‘bless’ heard over and over in this text should be a guiding principle for us. ... This text constantly reminds us that God wants health, wholeness and abundant life for all of creation ...”

Finally, Dr. Hess shared that, if she were given the power to rewrite the Bible, she would have the creation story of Genesis 1 at the beginning and then repeated at the end “because it is God’s final word for creation. ‘And God saw everything that God had made and, indeed, it was very good!’”

545 attend opening day of Assembly

A total of 545 people, including 485 voting members, attended the opening day of the 20th Annual Assembly of the New England Synod, ELCA, according to the Rev. Edward Voosen, synod secretary. Of the voting members, 270 were laity and 215 were rostered leaders.



SOLI DEO GLORIA AWARD – The assembly theme of telling stories is embedded in the lives of both Wendell Beckman (left), Good Shepherd, Rutland, Vt., and Bob Hill, Trinity, Worcester, Mass., who were honored Thursday with the Soli Deo Gloria Award, the synod’s highest honor given to a lay person. The award honors those who have “proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ and magnified the ministry of Christ’s Church by distinguished service through the synod.”

Address from ELCA representative

By Michael Coon
Immanuel, Meriden, Conn.

The Rev. Richard A. Magnus, director of the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission unit of the ELCA, began his presentation Thursday with a stirring video from the Rev. Mark Hanson, presiding bishop of the ELCA. It reviewed all the wonderful blessings God has bestowed on the ELCA and detailed how God is making a difference through the many resources represented within.

Pr. Magnus elaborated upon Bishop Hanson’s theme and the theme of the 2007 New England Synod Assembly with *Stories to Tell* of Christ’s mission in the world. He detailed the role of campus ministry including the impact it had on his own life. Pr. Magnus highlighted the strength of resources within the ELCA, including the 28 colleges and eight seminaries, as well as social ministry organizations.

Among the many examples of mission work in the New England Synod, Pr. Magnus lifted up Immanuel Indonesian, Newington, N.H., as a new congregation being received into the synod, and Gloria Dei, Providence, R.I., for its work in the *Healing the Wounds of Racism* process.

The assembly was asked to imagine: “What could happen throughout our church if all of us reclaimed daily bible reading and study that continually asks, how would God’s Word move me this day personally to witness to God’s love?”

Pr. Magnus concluded affirming that we are “about powerful mission in this place, Spirit-led change that is appropriate to who and where you are. Thanks be to God for you and your partnership.”

take a negotiation to the next level, to be firm.”

Bishop Younan should know; he’s been a self-defined refugee for as long as he’s been a Palestinian Arab Lutheran Christian, and his self-description is something of a negotiation all by itself. “Most people think if you’re an Arab, you’re Muslim. We know this is not the case.”

Here in the United States to address the roughly 550 ELCA Lutherans gathered at this assembly, Younan will present a prepared speech, one it has taken a lifetime of leadership to prepare. He will bring greetings from the New England Synod’s companion synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, as well as the Lutheran World Federation, where he represents all of Asia. Then will come time for questions and answers, a time the bishop enjoys particularly. “Do I sound too hard?” he admits thinking. “I do get upset by how my people suffer under the occupation. How can people think there is anything fair about this? How can people think violence will lead to anything but more violence? It only takes a hot-blooded kid ...” he trails off, negotiating his words carefully, thoughtfully. “It’s a scary time.”

In addition, Younan will present a workshop later today at 2:45 p.m. at the DCU Center and host a breakfast tomorrow at 7 a.m. at the Crowne Plaza Hotel.

He summarizes his mission carefully: “Our joint mission of bringing grace and reconciliation in a very violent and broken world is vital ... (but) it is time for both Palestinians and Israelis to come home and live together in freedom with justice, security and prosperity for all. For the sake of the whole Middle East, the occupation must end.”

Soon after his return from Worcester, he’ll be the father-of-the- bride when his older daughter Annaliza is married,



THE YOUNANS – Annaliza (left), the bride-to-be; Bishop Munib, Marta and Suad. Missing from this photo is their son Andria, who was then a student at Valparaiso (Ind.) University. (Photo taken in 2003)

much to the delight of his wife, Suad, whose volunteer work in Jerusalem is legendary. Much of her time is spent with the YWCA, which Younan quips, “means Your Wife Constantly Away.”

“I can’t complain, however. I’m away a lot, too.”

When not volunteering, Suad is the principal of The Helen Keller School for the Deaf. The couple share a love and enthusiasm for education that is deep and uncompromisingly passionate. Much of their work together or apart involves bringing up the next generation of Christians in a world that is hostile to them and to their culture.

“The number of Christians left in the place where Christ was born is dwindling,” says Younan. “Our schools are a great asset to the communities they serve.”

After the wedding, Younan plans to return to the United States to address the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August in Chicago. His message will be: “A mission for tolerance and against extremism.” And his summer will be filled with chances to speak in other forums where he hopes to empower the groups to take positive steps toward ending the crisis: “Learn, pray, support and advocate. May God continue to use us all as peacemakers, instruments of healing, ministers of reconciliation and brokers of justice.

“That’s my prayer.”

40 Years of Occupation

As the Palestinian people face the anniversary of 40 years of life under occupation, organizations in the Holy Land and around the world are planning commemorative events and advocacy efforts. The World Council of Churches has designated this week, June 3-9, as a week of “International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel (<http://www.icappi.org.au/ME111E06.pdf>)

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“It connected me with Lutherans throughout the country. It introduced me to ecumenism. Campus ministry gave me a purpose, a direction, and helped me realize a call to ordained ministry.”

After his involvement as a student, Magnus, now executive director of the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission unit of the ELCA, himself served as an urban campus pastor in Colorado during his first call.

“Thanks be to God for the gift of 100 years of campus ministry and for all those who serve in campus ministry today – students and staff alike,” he said.

Magnus reminded those in assembly that we all are campus ministers. “We would not have campus ministry in (the ELCA) were it not for the fact that we do it together,” he said. “God is making a difference for the sake of the world through our work together in campus ministry. Thanks be to God.”

At the close of the day, the Rev. Ted Asta, an associate to Bishop Margaret G. Payne, added his own praise of campus ministry, which included a special 100th birthday cake.

Asta named the various campus ministry locations in the New England Synod and called their chaplains up on stage.

Happy 100th birthday, campus ministry – and many more!

See the centerfold in the May 2007 issue of “The Link” for more of the story on campus ministry.