

MONDAY, AUG. 17, 2009 (2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly)

1) Stephen Converse, Synod Secretary, Shepherd of the Valley, Groton, Mass. --



Steve Converse

Like ants marching toward a drop of honey, or metal filings migrating toward a strong magnet, more than a thousand Lutherans descended on downtown Minneapolis today to join in the 11th ELCA Churchwide Assembly. As I walked into the lobby of the Hilton Hotel, Lutherans were everywhere. We all smiled and nodded, but "the question" hung unspoken in the air like stale sweat in a locker room: "Where does he stand on the sexuality issue?" "Is she on my side or the other side?" I walked the three or four blocks to the convention center and noticed with mild surprise that none of the rabid, foaming-at-the-mouth protesters had shown up yet. Then, I was in the building, ran into a friend from New England recently transplanted to the Twin Cities, and sat through the voting member orientation. So far, so good. Then it was time for worship, an amazing and unifying experience rivaled only by the festive eucharists at synod assembly. Then I met some truly amazing pastors from South Dakota and Oregon at dinner, and my delightful hotel roommate from Maryland after a spirited, yet, respectful plenary session. Suddenly, I realized what this was all about -- no matter where we stand on a particular issue, no matter how important, we Lutherans truly are all one in Christ. I go to sleep tonight tired, yet exhilarated by the prospect of working together with this diverse crew to do God's work with our human hands.

2) Brad Cook, Gethsemane, Manchester, N.H. --



Brad Cook

Prior to the first plenary session of the Churchwide Assembly was dinner and a spirited worship service. At the session, the bishops of the Minneapolis and St. Paul Area Synods welcomed the voting members to the assembly, a new wireless electronic voting system was explained and demonstrated, and the Credentials Committee report was given and indicated attendance well over a needed quorum. The main order of business in the first plenary session was the adoption of the Rules of Organization and Procedure for the assembly. Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson explained the process and key rules and procedures carefully and in detail. The issue of the percentage of vote needed to adopt ministry policies was debated for almost two hours. After a somewhat complex procedure, it was decided that the adoption of ministry policy changes would require a majority vote. The Social Statement on Human Sexuality needs a two-thirds vote, as required by the ELCA Constitution.

3) Quote of the Day --

During debate on a motion to decrease the time allowed for speeches at the microphones from three minutes to two minutes, one speaker declared (with a mischievous grin) that he opposed the motion because it would be "discriminatory against clergy." (Much laughter followed)