

**Addendum: Report of the Synod Bishop
Shared by Bishop Graham during Plenary Session
Metro D.C. Synod Assembly • Saturday, June 18, 2016**

Friends, I am often in the position at the Synod Assembly of having not much to say and a lot of time to say it in. I mostly have no need to use all my space on the agenda. And this is fine with me. I have been bishop in the synod now for almost nine years and though I have enjoyed much of my experience during this time, I can tell you I have gotten pretty tired of the sound of my own voice. I am generally content to offer a very short bishop's report.

But this year I have a lot I would like to say, and I have only a few minutes. So I apologize ahead of time for compressing my remarks, and I hope that if you have questions about things I've said which aren't answered at other points during the Assembly you will ask me. My email is rgraham@metrocelca.org. I will be glad to hear from you.

NEW MISSION STATEMENT

Anyway, first of all this year I want to point you to our synod's new mission statement. This statement is something I began writing at a meeting where the future shape of our ELCA was discussed. I found myself thinking about the shape our synod could take in response to Jesus's commissioning of the Church in Matthew's gospel: to go and make disciples and baptize and teach and trust in his presence always, to the end of time. I found myself thinking about how we could do this faithfully in our immediate context, and I wrote a draft of a statement. Then people on the synod staff offered revisions, and the Synod Council offered revisions, and several people, including the Rev. Sarah Lewis who edited such documents for a living, offered suggestions. And the Synod Council approved the statement to guide our common life for the next few years.

In fact, you know, congregations and synods and church bodies aren't required to have mission statements, because they don't actually have missions. The Holy Spirit has a mission: to bring the human race together in Jesus Christ and present us all to the Father. We are blessed to be some of the means of that mission. But it's good for us to have ideas about ways we think we can help the mission go forward and align our resources with the Holy Spirit's work. So the mission statement of the synod will be a tool for us, a way to keep us focused on what we are bold enough to say we believe is God's will for us. Like all such statements, it is fallible and temporary. Thinking it through was helpful for us. I hope that those who read it find it honest about what we want to be together.

COMPENSATION GUIDELINES

Part of the mission statement refers to the raising up of leaders in our synod, and this reminds me that we continue our conversation about the synod's compensation guidelines. These

guidelines directly affect all of us, because although on the one hand they only help establish pay and benefit packages for rostered leaders - pastors and diaconal ministers and associates in ministry - in fact on the other hand they require lay leaders to make budget decisions and presentations to congregations. Lots of different people are interested in the synod compensation guidelines.

This year later at the Assembly you will be asked to vote on approving a small increase in the unadjusted minimum salary figure in the guidelines. This will return the system to where it started, in a relationship with the General Services Administration (GSA) schedule for new federal master degree level hires in the Washington, D.C. area. All the rest of the salary guidelines are still being thought through. It seems clear now that the guidelines should encourage goal-setting for rostered leaders and church councils and congregations. We have to continue to find some way to acknowledge that benefit costs are now often a larger concern for congregations than anything else. We especially have to find ways for pastors and congregational councils to learn negotiating skills so that conversations about compensation can proceed fairly, out in the open, and with as little painful emotion as possible. We have proposals that will be rolled out in the coming year. I am grateful to Gene Bain, who continues to work on this, and to the Rev. Amy Thompson Sevimli in the synod office who has been the chief organizer of our efforts.

PR. SEVIMLI'S SERVICE

And this leads me to say, as I believe most of you have heard, that Pr. Sevimli will be leaving her call in the synod office by the end of next month. Pr. Sevimli is going with her family to Georgia, and not the Georgia with peaches and houses with big verandas, but the Georgia you get to by flying through Istanbul or Moscow, where her husband Ozan will continue working for the World Bank. Amy Sevimli is a wonderful Christian person, smart and funny and kind, with a very helpfully realistic turn-of-mind and a determined preference for the underdog. On the very few occasions when I have not followed her advice, I have regretted it almost instantly. Many people all across our church have been grateful for her ministry. We are blessed to say around here that we are grateful for her friendship, too. We will miss her, and we'll find ways to tell her that, and we'll be glad when she comes back to Washington.

TRAGEDY IN ORLANDO

Of course, what hangs over our assembly this year is the grief we feel after the night club murders in Orlando. Last year our work together was changed by news of the shootings at Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, with the heart-breaking revelation that the accused shooter there was one of ours, a member of a congregation of the ELCA. Now there is this from Orlando, and the question of what to say in a country where violence like this begins to seem ordinary and where much of the predictable outrage only reminds us how divided we are. It seems to me, at the very least, that people like us who claim to follow Jesus have to be willing to show (and not just to say) that we know that all human divisions are trivial compared to our common sinfulness and

our common status as God's beloved children. We have to be able to show (and not just to say) that we are prepared to sacrifice for what we believe is better than what we see now. Our ELCA is overwhelming white and middle-class and suburban. It takes enormous arrogance to think that people like us have a useful word to speak into our diverse, churned-up culture today. Or else it takes enormous hope and crazy faithful confidence.

HOPE AND CONFIDENCE

About this enormous hope and crazy faithful confidence you will be hearing more later. We will be announcing a campaign called New Connections early this afternoon. You won't want to be late coming back from lunch.

Let me just close now by saying thank-you for the opportunity to be your bishop. Thank you for your prayers and your support and advice and admonition and encouragement. I work with the best people in the world in your synod office. And I have my wife's love and her reminder that I wasn't always the bishop, and I won't always be the bishop, so I shouldn't let this bishop thing go to my head.

May God bless us all and find uses for us all in God's mission of peace and healing and love. And thank you for being here today.