

"This was fun!" I heard a number of variations on that evaluation last Saturday afternoon as we wrapped up the Synod Assembly at Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas.

Our focus was evangelism as we gathered under the theme "God's Story, Our Voices." In sermons, workshops, keynote, and music we explored the intersection of God's story and our own stories and how we might as individual Christians give voice to our faith. We even factored in some practice in sharing our faith with another person as we reflected on the questions "How has your faith remained constant through the years and how has it changed you?" and "Where have you seen God active recently?" The goal is to make faith talk an increasingly normal part of our everyday speech.

Every year our Assembly is blessed by the participation of a representative of the churchwide expression of the ELCA. This year we heard from Ruben Duran, director of the Congregational Vitality Team. Ruben also oversees new ministry initiatives, several of which are under way right here in the Central States Synod.

This was a challenging Assembly as well, since voting members decided to increase by \$20,000 the spending for campus ministry and seminary support. Since we pass half our revenue on to our churchwide expression so it can continue our ministry throughout the country and beyond our borders, the amount of the approved increase is actually \$40,000.

A team of Global Musician Educators got us on our feet and clapping as they drew us in with music from all over the globe. They take the term "educators" seriously – it didn't take them long to teach us lyrics in a number of languages which for most of us were foreign.

Bethany College, the venue for this Assembly, truly rose to the occasion. The faculty and staff hosted us with genuine hospitality; and in his warm welcome to us President Will Jones made it clear that he highly values a solid working relationship between the college and our synod.

All in all it was an excellent several days that combined the business of the synod, inspiration, and learning – all designed to equip us for the simple but deeply faithful practice of giving voice to the gift of faith that is in us. This is, after all, how God changes the world.

--- Bishop Roger