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**FROM THE PRESIDENT,
KATHERINE HELLIER**

Dear Friends in Christ,

In the midst of terrorist threats, rumors of a war many call inevitable, economic woes, the continuing influence of right-wing and fundamentalist groups, and whatever you can add to the list, I am hearing from some in the church (even in my congregation) that they consider the ELCA Sexuality Study a waste of time and money. For them there are more important issues to consider.

We have heard such arguments before. They continue to be excuses not to talk about sex at all. They deny that our church is unjust to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered brothers and sisters in our midst and unwelcoming, not only to them, but also to other minorities in our society. We should not allow these sometimes strident voices to call us away from our purpose. We should encourage the ELCA Sexuality Study Task Force members to continue their deliberations and discernment.

The Alliance, a coalition of The Network For Inclusive Vision, Lutherans Concerned, Wingspan, the Extraordinary Candidacy Project, and Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries, met with this ELCA Task Force on February 8, in Chicago. George Watson and I attended on behalf of The Network.

My first day back after attending this meeting, I joined in a text study, looking at the account of Jesus' healing of the man with leprosy in Mark's gospel. One of the pastors pointed out that Jesus did more than cross the line between categories of clean and unclean.

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REPENTING WITH THE CHURCH

by Norman Theiss

The repentance to which the church calls us in Lent requires a perception of the causes of our sin. Lenten texts and my own experience show me that I sin in collaboration with the culture in which I live. I need to repent as an individual and also as a participant in the sin of my culture.

My culture taught me that people not my color were inferior, that women did not belong in male careers, and that persons with a homosexual orientation were not acceptable. One of the most dominant expressions of my culture was the church, in my case, the Lutheran Church. I sinned with my church against people not my color or gender or sexual orientation. My personal sin was that I participated willingly and uncritically in the culture of this church, and with great benefit. If we are talking about upholding the traditions of the church in regard to gays and lesbians, then we should notice that some of these traditions have caused us to sin.

The church itself needs to undergo the Lenten discipline it espouses and my Lenten discipline requires that I take an appropriate role in the church's repentance and renewal. On Ash Wednesday, the prophet Joel called us to corporate repentance:

Call a solemn assembly; gather the people. . .
Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep.
Let them say, "Spare your people, O Lord, and do not make a your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'" (Joel 2:15b-17)

A public repentance for the sins of its tradition would be a public witness to the church's hope for new life in Christ. Because I participate in this hope, I need to repent, not only in, but with the church.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

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Jesus erased those boundaries. What I had experienced in Chicago spoke to the text and the text--Jesus' words and actions--clarified why the study and the Task Force need to continue. Isn't that what we are to be about, erasing boundaries for Jesus' sake? I was elated to discover this in the Gospel, but I also found myself feeling off-center, even claustrophobic, as I did my daily, routine pastoral tasks.

The next morning, as I reviewed my notes from the text study, I realized that my sense of unease, my feeling that the world was closing in, was coming from my self-imposed silence regarding my membership in The Network and my participation in the meeting of the Alliance and the Task Force. I have let only a few congregation members know about that meeting.

My dilemma became clear to me in Chicago, as I listened to Pastors Anita Hill and Paul Tidemann, of St. Paul Reformation Lutheran Church, speak to the Task Force. How freeing it must be for them to be "out" as pastors and as a congregation and to know that they have the public support of their bishop and synod council. The pastors in my synod who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered are not the only ones in the closet. So are many who support them; so is our bishop; so am I.

In the next few years we shall hear more calls for the ELCA to stop the sexuality study. More individuals and congregations will threaten to leave the church if the ELCA approves the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of candidates in such unions. People may leave. The ELCA may lose both members and money. But if the ELCA does not take this step in becoming a place of God's lovingkindness and righteousness, people may be lost. I believe that brothers and sisters who have waited in hope will finally give up on the ELCA. If we say no to them again, will they stay in this church? If they give up on us, will they find another, more welcoming community of faith? Or will they perhaps give up on the Church itself--or even on

God?

The Task Force is made up of dedicated and faithful fellow believers. They seem to suffer the well-know Lutheran affliction of niceness. They hide their passion behind politeness and talk of balance. I came away from the meeting hopeful that most of the Task Force members would like to recommend that the ELCA go forward with approving the blessing of same-gender unions and the ordination of pastors in such unions. They are, however, trying to discern God's voice in the midst of mostly negative communications from ELCA pastors and congregation members.

I call on you, my brothers and sisters on The Network roster, to speak out passionately to your fellow congregation members and pastors and bishops. Write the Task Force and Presiding Bishop Hanson. Pray for them and tell them you are praying for them. Remind them that this is a justice issue. Assure them that it is God and not policy that holds the church together. We need not fear doing the right and good thing, because God goes with us.



OPENNESS IS OUTREACH AT ST. PAUL

by Jan Miller

When students from our neighborhood high school studying "World Religions in America," came to St. Paul Church recently to learn about the Lutheran tradition, they were surprised to find that we are a Reconciling in Christ congregation with an openly gay pastor. As their thank you notes reveal, not only were they paying attention to the discussion with Pastor Maly, but they were surprised and pleased that Lutherans were such an "accepting branch of Christianity." They "liked how diverse" and "open-minded" our church is. "The world would be a better place if there were more churches like yours." "Hopefully in the future all churches will follow your auspicious pathway!" "I can relate to your Christianity a lot more than any other." "Your efforts are helping to make this world a more accepting place that is safe for everyone." What greater affirmation of the mission and ministry of our congregation and its pastor could we look for?

We did not set out to become a Reconciling in Christ congregation or to call an openly gay pastor. For the last 118 years, the saints who have gone before us have simply been opening the doors on this corner, just three blocks from the central business district, the city bus terminal, and the Colorado State Capitol. Calling Pastor Maly was simply the next step in our pilgrimage, that has included setting up a coffee house for flower children, creating a senior lunch program, preparing holiday meals for chronically mentally ill neighbors, and housing an office for the Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry. It's hard to ignore the voice of God in this neighborhood.

For thirty years, Pastor Bob West led us with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. A city-grown New Yorker with a passion for justice, he led us through discussions of tough social issues – abortion, economic justice, sexuality, war, and peace. He took our quest for justice down the block to the State Capitol, where he testified in support of women's right to choice, improvement of mental health care, and correctional reform. He also supported our gay members, recognizing and honoring their relationships and their lifelong commitments, especially in times of illness and death. This set the tone for the parish.

When Pastor Steve Swanson accepted our call in 1996, he challenged us to move one step closer to full acceptance of lesbian and gay Christians. He wanted us to approve his blessing of gay and lesbian couples. This was a leap; it was the first time we would take a vote on a social justice issue. But his passion and conviction helped us see that our actions could be more welcoming than mere words. We wrote a commitment liturgy for gay couples. Although not everyone fully supported the blessings---a few left the congregation---most were willing to give the pastor space to follow this prayerfully considered path. The blessings of faithful, committed relationships are a source of joy and hope for many people who visit. Many say they joined St. Paul because they saw our diversity as a message of good news to our community.

When Pastor Swanson left, our Call Committee searched for a pastor with urban experience, a love of diversity, a passion for teaching, and inspirational, gospel-centered preaching. It's what we were accustomed to. When members were asked to suggest names of possible candidates, one of the names on the list was Kevin Maly, a member of the congregation.

We called Pastor Maly, not because he was gay, but because he was a pastor who shared our sense of mission and our commitment to ministry in this place. He was no longer on the roster of the ELCA, because his teaching appointment at a Catholic university did not qualify him for the roster. But he was continuing to use his pastoral gifts and calling, as he taught his university students, as he helped congregations discuss human rights for people of all sexual orientations, and as he offered his preaching and teaching skills in our congregation. Members suggested him for the call because they had already experienced him as a pastor, carrying out his call among us.

In order to accept our call, Pastor Maly had to apply for reinstatement to the ELCA roster. This required that he conform to "Vision and Expectations," the ELCA document that outlines expected conduct for pastors. This includes the unique expectation that lesbian and gay pastors remain perpetually celibate. He and our congregation chose to work within this policy of the ELCA, not because we support it, but because we want to work to change this discriminatory policy in the church.

When the discernment of a congregation and a pastoral candidate match, it is a gift. Our congregation has found great joy in the congruity between our call to mission and Pastor Maly's personal call to the ministry.

What we did not fully appreciate at the beginning is that our choice comes with a cost -- for the congregation, the distressing knowledge that our call denies our pastor the personal companionship and love that we presume for ourselves; for our pastor, the enforced celibacy, the loneliness of living without a partner to share the joys, sorrows, and challenges of life. More significantly for all of us, the cost is the disturbing contradiction of living under celibacy in a church that 500 years ago followed a reforming pastor who rejected enforced celibacy for priests. In one sense, our congregation and our pastor chose celibacy. But the real choice was between following a prayerfully discerned call and denying that call because of a church policy we see as inconsistent with the gospel.

Living in the disconnection between our vision of the gospel and the ELCA's enforced celibacy for gay pastors drains our energy. We live daily with the contradiction between our equal baptism into the community of faith and our unequal treatment of lesbian and gay sisters and brothers who are called to pastoral ministry. But despite the tension, this call has not been a sign of despair. It has become a sign of hope for our congregation and our community. It is a proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. If it saps our energy, it also gives us life.

Just as John "came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him" (John 1:7), so we are compelled by the power of the Spirit to give testimony to the places, people, and institutions where we see the light of God breaking in on our world. We do see God powerfully at work, breaking in, at St. Paul. We hear the good news each Sunday as we gather for worship, not only from the lectern and the pulpit, but in the voices of the ragtag group that gathers around us in the community of faith---members of the congregation, first-time worshippers, worship leaders, the unemployed, the committee chairs, the homeless, the wise elders, the broken looking for healing, those who come looking for a God with whom they have lost touch.

This is the good news we proclaim:

- Here at St. Paul, heterosexual young adults, trained in the church's Sunday Schools, who were ready to give up on organized religion, see in this assembly a tiny glimpse of how the kingdom of God might look. They join St. Paul, but cannot imagine being part of a congregation that is not visibly inclusive.
- Here at St. Paul, our elders remind us that we probably do not know all there is to know about sexuality or relationships or the needs of the church or the will of God. But they are good at reminding us of the message of love and acceptance that Jesus had for the outcasts and despised and of Jesus' message of judgment for religious leaders who reject those on the margins.
- Here at St. Paul, our gay and lesbian members rejoice that they can express their love for God in a place that loves and supports them in their daily lives and relationships.

We celebrate our diversity, not because of what we have *done*, but because of who we *are*. Diversity is our gift. It is the way we live out our baptism in this community. It is a message of hope to the thirty to forty visitors who worship with us each week. It is a message of hope to the gay and lesbian members of other congregations and their families in our synod, who encourage us because they cannot speak about their lives in those communities. It is a message of hope to all of us that, in this bounteous diversity, we can be loved and valued for whoever we are.

In the meantime, however, we live in a paradox. The good news we proclaim is not good news for a church structure that cannot fully accept everyone it baptizes and a candidacy process that has created a special purgatory for gay and lesbian pastors called by God and by congregations, but not by the church.

I mourn the loss of my own children and many others I know, who are not now in the church precisely because of the gospel message they heard too well in Sunday School and Confirmation classes. They have been driven away because they don't see the Lutheran church as an expression of *continues on page 4*

OPENNESS

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that gospel. They are impatient with a religious organization that, after a quarter-century of study, cannot fully embrace the gifts of all its members. Worse for us than controversy and conflict, the ELCA has become irrelevant to many of our sons and daughters. Our church is de-evangelizing.

At St. Paul our joy and struggle continue as we support our pastor, who now serves on the ELCA Studies on Sexuality Task Force. Although we have chosen to live within the ELCA guidelines, we live in the hope and the expectation that it will not always be thus. It is at the same time blessing and burden, exhausting and energizing...and we would not have it any other way!

Jan Miller, the Parish Associate at St. Paul, Denver, has been a member there for twenty-nine years. She has served on its staff since 1984, working in education, communication, and social ministry. In the Rocky Mountain Synod, she served as the chair of the Board for Church in Society. She has been elected by the synod to be a delegate to the 2003 ELCA Churchwide Assembly and will serve at that Assembly on The Committee of Reference and Counsel.

OWNING YOUR SYNOD ASSEMBLY

by Audrey Mortensen

Synod assemblies will soon be underway. Elected Voting Member or not, you belong to your synod and can advocate for your convictions at its assembly. ELCA Studies on Sexuality are in progress. Expectations are high. You can help to set the tone for your synod's discussion. Need some ideas?

- 1) Propose a synod workshop on the ELCA Sexuality Studies. Attend any workshop or forum on sexuality issues and speak up for ELCA approval of the blessing of same-gender unions and the ordination of pastors in such unions.
- 2) Make copies of the Network For Inclusive Vision brochure (found in this newsletter) and find a table in the Display Area where you can place

them. (Most campus ministry staff will allow table space for Lutherans Concerned, The Network, Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries, Extraordinary Candidacy Project materials.)

- 3) Stand at that table during break times and hand the brochures to people. Ask them to add their names to the Network roster. (If they cannot donate funds at that time, get their names and addresses for our mailing list. Send these to our treasurer, at the address on the brochure. He will contact them later.) Tell them about The Network Newsletter and provide copies (or at least a sample) on the table.
- 4) Cut Rainbow Stripe stickers in inches and place them next to the brochures. Ask people to put them on their nametags. (The Youth Convo group really likes these). Put one on your nametag. Carry ribbons and brochures with you for people you run into in other areas of the assembly.
- 5) Pay attention to the proposed resolutions and floor discussion. If you have voice, speak to any issues concerning the Sexuality Studies.
- 6) Encourage people to send letters to the ELCA Task Force on Sexuality. Its address is in *The Network Newsletter*.
- 7) Support any gay/lesbian/bi-sexual/trans gendered persons who might be at the assembly and introduce them to people.
- 8) Ask persons who have been elected as Voting Members for Churchwide Assembly to support changes in these ELCA policies.
- 9) Consider attending the Churchwide Assembly, August 11-17, 2003, in Milwaukee, and support The Network, Lutherans Concerned, Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries, and the Extraordinary Candidacy Project in making their voice heard. If you are going, send a note to our president, The Rev. Katherine Hellier (revkate@earthlink.net) so that we can work together. Your ownership of your synod assembly will make you a voice for opening our church to its gay and lesbian members.

STOLES GO TO THE KNUTSON CONFERENCE

by Arnold Keller

The Stoles Project will travel to St. Olaf College for the annual Knutson Conference, April 4-6, 2003. The theme for the Conference is "Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Church."

The Stoles Project, sponsored by the Network for Inclusive Vision and directed by Rebecca Hostetler, is a collection of more than fifty stoles. Each one represents a faithful pastor who has been barred from serving in our Church because of her/his sexual orientation. Most important to the display is a companion booklet which describes in some detail the journey of those pastors honored with these stoles.

Network members can lend a hand to Rebecca in setting up this display:

- Someone is needed immediately to photograph the stoles for the Stoles Project website and other PR purposes.
- Volunteers are needed to get the material ready for display at the conference.
- Volunteers are needed to assist in shipping the collection to future events.
- On the Saturday of the Knutson Conference, volunteers are needed to tend a table, where the booklet, telling the stories of the pastors recognized by these stoles, will be sold for \$10.
- A donation to cover the \$50 cost of setting up this display would help. A donor may send a check, payable to "The Network," to the treasurer, Arnold Keller, Beach Station, P.O. Box 4464, Vero Beach FL 32964-4464

Since the Knutson Conference is coming up very soon, help is needed now. Someone living in the Twin Cities area or planning to attend the Knutson Conference could conveniently do some of these tasks.

This collection is available for display in any congregation or community. To make arrangements for having it sent, contact Rebecca Hostetler. The cost for such a program is only the cost of shipping.

For a welcome response to your inquiries and offers of help, contact Rebecca Hostetler, by telephone, 651/221-1939, or by email, GAYSTOLES@aol.com.

TURNING LETTERS INTO LAWS

by Barbara K. Lundblad

During the season of Epiphany, we received a letter---Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. The lectionary brought the letter to us, but we did not start at the beginning. We jumped right into the middle of the sixth chapter. It was on the Second Sunday after the Epiphany, after reading about food and fornication, that the lector at Advent Lutheran Church in Manhattan looked up and said, "May God give us some understanding of *that* word." People seemed uncertain whether they should say, "Thanks be to God!"

The next Sunday the lectionary dropped us once again right into the middle of the seventh chapter of I Corinthians without much background: "...from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none" (I Cor. 7:29-31). Well that was startling news to the people at Advent, especially the newly weds. What does it mean for husbands to live as though they have no wives? How should they act and what should they do? Note that Paul didn't say, "Let even those who have husbands be as though they had none." This seems to set up a perplexing situation: the wives still think they have husbands but the husbands will be living as though they have no wives! (Well, you have to understand Paul's context.)

Or consider Paul's words earlier in this same chapter: "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am." So if you are coming to church hoping to find an eligible partner, forget it! Stay single -- like Paul. Of course he does add, "It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion." (But again, we have to understand Paul's context.)

In recent publications, in meetings organized to oppose the work of the ELCA Taskforce for Studies on Sexuality, and in letters to The Lutheran, someone almost always says, "We don't need this study. The Bible is completely clear about sex and marriage. We dare not overturn what the Church has taught for over 2000 years." Are they thinking about I Corinthians 7 when they say such things? If so, perhaps Paul's advice to the Corinthian church will become part of the document adopted by the ELCA assembly in 2005: "As St. Paul writes, 'From now on, let even those who have wives be as

though they had none.'" (Of course this is silly -- I am taking Paul out of context.)

Some hear I Corinthians 7 as one more reason to stop reading Paul all together. Others say, "It's confusing, but it's in the Bible and that's all I need to know." Both positions fail to listen closely enough to what Paul is saying in this letter. It is clear there are problems in Corinth. In the first chapter, Paul says he has received word about quarrels within the young church -- some say, "I belong to Paul," others, "I belong to Apollos or Peter," or, "I belong to Christ." (This was long before people said "I belong to The Network," or, "I belong to Word Alone.") Paul cares about these people. He is concerned about this young church in this bustling harbor city. "I'm not writing this to make you ashamed," he says, "but to admonish you as my beloved children."

When we get to chapter seven, Paul begins to respond not to verbal reports brought by Chloe's people, but to specific questions that had come to him in a letter: "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote," he begins...and the whole chapter is about sex. He quotes from their letter: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman." Paul won't let that stand. Though he is not too positive about either sex or marriage, he argues with those who claimed that Christians had become completely spiritual people, that they were now living Christ's resurrection.¹ Paul answers by making it clear that he has heard such teachings, but... "because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband." Paul seems to be saying that the only good thing about marriage is to keep a man or woman from sinning; that is, there's nothing good in marriage itself. However, to those who taught that a man should never touch a woman under any circumstances, Paul affirms, or at least allows for, sexual expression within marriage:

The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband...Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (I Cor. 7:3, 5).

Now we might want to say more positive things about sexuality and marriage besides curbing temptation, but Paul was respond-

ing to the Corinthians' letter -- not ours.

This is a very important distinction. Paul was not trying to answer our questions. He was not writing systematic theology or a social statement on Christian sexual ethics. He was writing a letter, a letter addressed to particular concerns of Corinthian believers, who were struggling to live their lives in light of the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul admits that he doesn't have all the answers. That is what is so disarming about Paul in this chapter.

We can hear his struggle in the verses that come just before today's reading. He turns to another question they have asked him. "Now concerning virgins," he says, "I have no command from the Lord, but I give my opinion..." I have no command from the Lord, but I give my opinion. Bishop Krister Stendahl once said, "I think Paul was the last preacher in Christendom who had the guts to say that."² We often confuse our opinions with divine authority. It may be far more honest to say, with Paul, "I have no command from the Lord, but I give my opinion..." -- "The thought of two men in bed together makes me sick." "Why would a woman want to make love with another woman? What do they do?" "I don't even want to talk about sex -- it's too embarrassing." "Other boys in school call me a fag and I'll do anything to prove them wrong." "If our church approves same-sex blessings that demeans my marriage." -- It would be wonderful if people could say, "These are my opinions." That could be a healthy place to begin.

It is clear that Paul's opinions were shaped by his sense of urgency. He fully expected Jesus to return within his lifetime. His answers to the Corinthians' questions about sex and marriage were shaped by his sense that the time was short: "Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that" (I Cor. 7:27-28). This sense of urgency continues in the next verse: "I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none." He goes on to say the same about those who mourn, those who rejoice, those who have possessions. Live as though this present age is passing away.

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TURNING

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It is impossible to know what Paul would say in answer to *our* questions 2000 years later. He was not answering our questions, but the questions and concerns of particular churches in the century after Jesus' resurrection. If we take Paul's letters as definitive statements on sex and marriage, we misuse the particularity of his letters by turning them into universal, timeless propositions. If we dismiss Paul all together, we miss his concern for the real-life dilemmas faced by Christians in a culture that offered myriad competing claims and values. If we can read his letters as letters, we can learn a great deal about what it means to be Christ's church in each particular time and place, including our own. The problem comes when we turn letters into laws.

That same week of Epiphany, I received a copy of another letter, this one to Lutheran Christians *in* St. Paul--but not *by* St. Paul. That letter came from Peter Rogness, bishop of the St. Paul Area Synod. He wrote to tell people that he was removing the sanctions against two congregations in the synod. St. Paul Reformation and Hosanna Lutheran Churches had been censured for failing to follow church policies in ordaining pastors.

Hosanna, a suburban congregation, had called and ordained people on its staff as pastors without the approval of the ELCA. St. Paul Reformation, an urban congregation, had called and ordained Anita Hill as their pastor after she had served as their "pastoral minister" for several years. While fully qualified for ordination, Pastor Hill is not endorsed by the ELCA because she is living in a committed relationship with another woman. Sanctions were imposed on both congregations. These sanctions precluded members from serving on synod council or boards, as officers, or on any task forces of the synod.

Yet, both congregations continued to be actively involved in the synod, giving generously to the larger church and reaching out to their communities. Nothing had changed in official church policy, but Bishop Rogness believed that sanctions

against these congregations had become only punitive, without any larger purpose. Like the apostle Paul centuries before him, Bishop Rogness was responding to particular situations within the Christian community:

I believe we need to recognize that the occasional church which steps out of the box may, in the long run, be contributing to the life of the church in ways more constructive than destructive...Flexibility and diversity are needed for effectiveness in mission in a changing world.

I believe it is time to recognize anew that what binds us together as Christ's church is far more central...than are the constitutional infractions of past actions...It is time to make clear that our relationship with these congregations is a relationship focused on mission and ministry and not on rules...With affirmation of the life we share and the faithfulness of the God who continues to call us into life together in this church, we pray for the continued guidance of the Spirit as we move confidently into the future.

I think Paul would understand. Bishop Rogness was responding to questions and concerns raised in this time and place. Of course some will surely remind him -- and me -- that Paul wrote other words that seem to argue against any decision that allows a lesbian woman to serve as pastor. Paul's words in Romans 1 are often lifted up as the definitive word regarding homosexual relationships, though Paul had never heard of the word "homosexual." When people speak about the Bible and homosexuality, the argument often goes something like this: Even if we set aside passages in Leviticus and other parts of the holiness codes, we must take Romans 1:26-27 as authoritative teaching on sexuality for all time.

But what happened to context and particularity? Well, it is possible to see context as important or irrelevant depending on our "opinions." I think this is true for all of us. Those who affirm Paul's prohibitions of homosexuality will acknowledge that his strange teachings in I Corinthians 7 need to be taken "in context," but that Romans 1:26-27 is true for all time. Those who read Paul's teachings in I Corinthians 7 as demeaning or absurd advice for single and married people alike will read that chapter as confirmation that everything Paul said about sexual ethics has to be taken "in context," including Romans 1:26-27.

Of course, Paul did more than give his opinions in I Corinthians 7: "To the married I give this command -- *not I but the Lord* -- that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife" (I Cor. 7:10-11, italics added). Paul is very clear here, as clear as Jesus was when he talked about divorce and remarriage in the gospels. Yet, as a church, we do not prohibit divorced women and men from being ordained, nor do we "remove them from the roster" if they divorce following ordination. Taking Paul and Jesus seriously, should we then amend ELCA documents concerning ordination? -- Resolved: To amend Vision and Expectations by addition before the last sentence in Section III: "Persons who are divorced and remarried are prohibited from ordination in this church."

I don't plan to introduce such a memorial at the next ELCA Assembly; however, such a resolution would be consistent with scripture and with the teachings of the church for 2000 years. I don't know whether Paul would draft such a resolution. He would probably be surprised that Christians were still waiting for Christ's return. My guess is that he would get more than a little impatient with parliamentary procedures. I think he would opt for writing a few more letters to congregations struggling to be faithful in confusing times. He would, no doubt, have some opinions about the issues before us, but he might be shocked to find that we had turned his letters into laws. Most of all, I think Paul would assure Bishop Rogness and those who belong to The Network and those who belong to Word Alone and those who belong to congregations throughout the ELCA, that we all belong to Christ. He would remind us of what he said long ago to a church he had never even visited:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39).

1 Wayne Meeks, ed., *The Writings of St. Paul* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972) 24
2 Krister Stendahl, "What Does It Mean To Be a Reforming Church?" in Charles Lutz, ed., *A Reforming Church...Gift and Task* (Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers, 1995) 32
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TURNING

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Barbara Lundblad, vice president of The Network Board and an ordained pastor in the ELCA, is the Joe R. Engle Associate Professor of Preaching at Union Theological Seminary. She has taught preaching at Yale Divinity School, Princeton Theological Seminary, Hebrew Union College, and the Doctor of Ministry program in preaching at the Association of Chicago Theological Schools. She has been one of the Lutheran preachers on The Protestant Hour radio program. She is the author of Transforming the Stone: Preaching through Resistance to Change.

THE COMPANY OF SAINTS

Gatherings where you can find understanding, renewal, and an invitation to participate:

next month:

St. Olaf College Knutson Conference
April 4-6, 2003

*“Sexuality, Spirituality,
and the Church”*



Speakers:

- Dr. James Childs
- Bishop Herbert Chilstrom
- Bishop Lowell Erdahl
- The Rev. David Fredrickson
- The Rev. Anita Hill
- The Rev. Barbara Lundblad
- The Rev. Dan Spencer

Information and registration at
www.stolaf.edu/services/conferences
or call 800 726 6523.

next year:

North American Reconciling in Christ Conference and Biennial Assembly of Lutherans Concerned/North America
July 22-25, 2004 at Augsburg College,
Minneapolis, MN

*“Gather Us In:
Receiving—Inviting—
Calling”*



Speakers:

- Bishop Bob Rimbo—Southeast Michigan Synod
- The Rev. Heidi Neumark—RIC Pastor of Transfiguration Lutheran, Bronx, NY

- The Rev. Erin Swenson -- Transgender Presbyterian Minister and Psychotherapist
- Panel of GLBTQ Youth and Young Adults

Bible Study:

The Rev. Barbara Lundblad –Union Seminary, New York

Themes:

Reconciling in Christ, Bisexual and Transgender, Youth, including Queer Youth

Has your church newsletter asked members to write the ELCA Taskforce for Studies in Sexuality? We offer the article below for Network members to submit to the editors of their parish newsletters.

THE TIME TO WRITE ELCA

Since ----- Lutheran Church is a Reconciling in Christ congregation (*if you are not a Reconciling In Christ congregation, delete this first clause*), you likely have serious and thoughtful convictions about the acceptance of gay and lesbian people in the church. You would likely want to know that this is a critical time to make your convictions known to the Taskforce of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) for Studies in Sexuality.

This Taskforce was established by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 2001, in response to resolutions of several synods that the ELCA provide support to pastors who perform blessings of same-gender unions. The two most difficult issues assigned to it are the ELCA's acceptance of the blessing of same-gender unions and the ordination of pastors in such unions. At this point in the ELCA's history, neither is officially allowed. In a genuine effort to listen to the people of the church, this Taskforce has invited members of the ELCA to write letters expressing their convictions about these issues.

The time for writing these letters is now. The Taskforce must present its report to the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA in 2005. That is not far off, since it has committed itself to the enormous task of conducting a discussion within the whole church. Its invitation to receive letters of opinion went out several months ago. The

Taskforce must read these letters and formulate its conclusions with them in mind.

Your private convictions will not help to change ELCA policy. Your public expression of your convictions will. You may be skeptical about the influence your little letter could have on this big church body, but the Taskforce is reading its mail. You can be sure they are noting how many ELCA people want a change in its policies.

Send your letter to the director of the Taskforce at this address:

The Rev. James M. Childs, Jr.
ELCA Studies on Sexuality
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, Illinois 60631

Email him at faithfuljourney@elca.org.

A few suggestions might make writing such a letter seem easier:

- 1) Introduce yourself, giving your place in your family, your age, your church connections.
- 2) State up front what your convictions are on the issues of the blessing of same-gender unions and the ordination of pastors in such unions to ELCA's ministry.
- 3) Tell about those experiences with gay and lesbian people that have been most formative in your thinking.
- 4) Give, first, the one most important reason for your conviction, adding perhaps two or three other reasons. You are not expected to be a Bible scholar, but you no doubt are aware of some Bible passages that have helped you form your convictions. Quote them. The Bible is our greatest historic witness to God's grace.

Be genuine, but brief. Finally, believe the Spirit's promise to be at work in the church. You won't write if you don't believe that.

FINANCIAL REALITY

To All Network Members:

Your response to our appeal in the Spring of 2002 was most encouraging. We received more than \$7200. Along with your contributions, a number of you suggested that we should request an annual gift from each member. The Network Board, meeting on November 18, 2002, approved this change in policy and asked the officers to implement it, beginning in 2003.

Some have not made a contribution since first joining the Network. Others are already giving on a regular basis (e.g., monthly/annually). With your assistance regular giving will become a growing practice all across our membership.

The struggle in our ELCA on behalf of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered persons is by no means over. Keep alert to this struggle by reading The Network Newsletter. Lend your tangible aid by making your 2003 gift now.

Please detach the form below. Fill it in; enclose your check, payable to, "*The Network*"; mail it to our Treasurer, Arnold F. Keller, Beach Station, P.O. Box 4464, Vero Beach, FL 32964-4464.

Sincerely yours,

Katherine W. Hellier, President
Arnold F. Keller, Treasurer

name _____

address _____

email _____

phone - home: _____ work: _____

Enclosed is my 2003 contribution of \$ _____

I am presently a regular contributor.

Circle one: monthly / annually

The Lutheran Network for Inclusive Vision
11918 SE Division, PMB 316
Portland, OR 97266-1037

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

We **affirm** the authority of God's Word for our faith and life. We acknowledge that our church has, on the basis of scriptural interpretation, condemned all sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage. However, we believe recent and respected scholarship requires other interpretations of certain biblical passages, particularly as they apply to committed and faithful same-gender relationships.

We **believe** it is time for ELCA clergy, Associates in Ministry, and church members to challenge the policies and practices which continue to bring so much pain to the gay and lesbian members of our church and their families, and to deprive the church of gifted professionals.

We **further affirm** the vision of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in which the Gospel of God's grace in Christ is central. It is that Gospel which empowers us to move beyond estrangement to mutual trust, consolation, and cooperation in the life and ministry of the church. We are deeply concerned when the only choice given to our gay and lesbian pastors, Associates in Ministry, diaconal ministers, deaconesses, and seminarians is to be silent or to leave the church. Furthermore, the continued expulsion of gay and lesbian professionals who are in stable, committed relationships deprives the church of positive role models for its gay and lesbian members.

THE NETWORK Board of Directors

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**the
network
newsletter**

Are You Linked?

The Lutheran Network
For Inclusive Vision

The Network

11918 SE Division PMB 316
Portland, OR 97266-1037
Telephone: 503 251 2967
Email: Network178@earthlink.net
www.inclusivenet.com

Our Purpose:

THE NETWORK provides a public roster of church leaders committed to witness to the inclusive Gospel of Jesus Christ by fostering the full inclusion of sexual minorities (persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered) in the congregational life and ordained ministry of the ELCA.

Who Are We?

As with most organizations, THE NETWORK began as a small group of individuals who were committed to the ideal expressed in our Purpose Statement. Out of that original group of ten persons, THE NETWORK has grown to almost 1300 rostered members.

NETWORK members are church members, bishops, lay professionals, seminarians, diaconal ministers, deaconesses, Associates in Ministry, professors, and pastors --fathers and mothers, spouses and siblings -- who believe it is time to register their opposition publicly to the continual expulsions and forced resignations of ELCA pastors who are openly gay or lesbian. Names of NETWORK members are listed on a public roster, which is shared with ELCA officials.

We come together as ELCA church leaders who want to move from quiet questioning of our church's policies on sexuality to public advocacy for change.

We Publicly Challenge the ELCA:

- ◇ To promote an environment open to honest and faithful discussion as together we seek greater clarity under God concerning issues surrounding sexuality;

- ◇ To affirm committed and faithful same-sex relationships with appropriate church liturgies and provide pastoral care for gay and lesbian people as for all other members of the ELCA;

- ◇ To change the current guidelines in "Vision and Expectations" and "Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline," which discriminate against gay and lesbian clergy, Associates in Ministry, and seminarians;

- ◇ To accept qualified women and men, regardless of sexual orientation, as pastors and professionals of this church and as candidates for ministry within it;

- ◇ To seek justice for victims of sexual orientation discrimination within the church and to support those who provide care for these victims and advocate on their behalf.

What Are Our Immediate Goals?

At the ELCA 2001 Churchwide Assembly, voting members authorized a four-year study on homosexuality, addressing questions about the ordination of openly gay and lesbian clergy and the blessing of same-sex relationships. Recommendations will be brought to the 2005 Churchwide Assembly.

A task force has been established to work on this study and regional hearings will be held to hear from ELCA members across the country.

NETWORK members are encouraged to write to the task force, to attend the hearings in their areas, and to make their voices heard in the ELCA office in Chicago, so that at the 2005 Assembly our church will finally include openly gay and lesbian people, not only in the life of its congregations, but in its ordained ministry.

JOIN US!

You can become a member of **THE NETWORK** by filling in this information and mailing it with an annual individual membership fee of \$25, household membership fee of \$35, or student membership fee of \$10, to: Arnold Keller, Treasurer, THE NETWORK, Beach Station, PO Box 4464, Vero Beach FL, 32964-4464. Make your check payable to: *The Network*

Name: _____

Address _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____

Work Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

FAX: _____

ELCA Synod: _____

Pastor

Bishop

Associate in Ministry

Diaconate Minister

Professor

Deaconess

Seminarian

Other _____