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**FROM THE NETWORK PRESIDENT,
KATHERINE HELLIER**

You shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord God." Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them (Ezekiel 2:4-5, from the Old Testament Lesson for The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost).

Dear Friends in Christ,

As the church moves toward a decision in 2005 on whether to endorse same-sex commitment blessings and on the ordination of gay and lesbian people in committed relationships, I have been hoping and praying that the church would move even faster to decide these issues. After all, the church was supposed to make a decision in the early '90s. Two studies later, people still languish, while the church blows neither hot nor cold.

I recently heard news that there will most likely be debate on postponing the decision regarding blessings and ordination until the 2007 Churchwide Assembly. I was immediately angry and dispirited that my brothers and sisters might be asked to watch and wait yet again. I hope and pray that the church will allow the Spirit to blow in the dialogues and debates at the Assembly, that sense will prevail, and that the time line will remain the same. However, if the Assembly votes to postpone the vote, then we must be prepared to take action.

Representatives from the Alliance (Lutherans Concerned, Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries, Wingspan, Extraordinary Candidacy Project, and The Network) and members of
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THREATENED WITH RESURRECTION

by David Weiss

It would help us to remember the deep uncertainty of that original Easter season. Moving from the fear and despair after the crucifixion, into---who knew what? To borrow an evocative phrase from the poet, Julia Esquivel, the church found itself "threatened with resurrection." And not just with the resurrection of Jesus, but with *the resurrection of the church*.

Resurrection places an unmistakable stamp of divine affirmation on the very ministry that got Jesus killed. It makes frightfully clear what it means to be a follower of "the Way." It means striving after that same radically inclusive vision and practiced solidarity in one's own life, both individually and communally.

No wonder that, apart from the Spirit's intruding at Pentecost, Easter remains, to this day, a season of original uncertainty for the church. Resurrection is not for the faint of heart. Confessing the resurrection, imaging Jesus' life, originally risked setting oneself at odds with the powers that be, both cultural and political. Since Constantine ushered the church into the corridors of power, confessing the resurrection has risked clashing with church powers as well---not always, to be sure, but often enough.

What is truly miraculous then is that in the season after Pentecost the church *did* indeed embrace resurrection. And not merely as a claim about Jesus but *fundamentally as a pattern in its own life*. Resurrection life is so unimaginably new that it is almost always threatening and those who work on its behalf are often viewed as subversive.

The Sundays after Pentecost are *subversive Sundays*. They invite us to remind ourselves and the church, that resurrection is not so much about what happened to the body of Jesus, *but about what happens to the body of Christ*.

FROM THE NETWORK PRESIDENT

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Soulforce recently talked by conference call about our response to such a vote. The response might take the form of voting members and visitors immediately turning their chairs around and sitting with their backs to the stage. There may be visible symbols available to wear as part of the protest. Right now the details are being worked out. To all Network members who will be voting members or guests at the Assembly, we need you to be ready and willing to join in this protest. Before the Assembly please pray for the Spirit's guidance for your fellow members, continue to write letters of support to the members of the Task Force, and be ready to join in whatever response is deemed appropriate.

EXPRESS YOUR CONVICTIONS,

by email or letter to The Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality:

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GOING TO MILWAUKEE?

by Audrey Mortensen

You will enjoy the "City on the Lake" when you get to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly on August 11-17, 2003!

The Alliance (The Network for Inclusive Vision, Lutherans Concerned/North America (LC/NA), Wingspan Ministry, Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries, and the Extraordinary Candidacy Project) will have representatives at the assembly who will be registered visitors and will be staying at the convention hotels. The following activities have been planned by the Alliance:

Tuesday, August 12 - At the evening reception sponsored by the Commission for Women and the Commission for Multicultural Ministries, voting members and Alliance representatives will informally discuss recommendations of nominees to the ELCA Church Council, boards, and offices.

Wednesday, August 13 - LC/NA will host a Reception at the Hyatt in the evening. At this time you may check out a stole from the Network Stoles Project to wear during the plenaries as a sign of support for the pastors who have been removed from the ELCA roster.

Saturday, August 16 - A worship service, sponsored by LC/NA, will be held at St. James Episcopal Church, 833 W. Washington St., thirty minutes after the evening convention session is over. There may be a march from the Convention Center to the church.

During the Assembly, Alliance members will be communicating with voting members about impending resolutions. Even though there will only be an interim report from the Studies on Sexuality at this assembly, one never knows what will happen with resolutions. Let our President, Katherine Hellier, know (revkate@earthlink.net) if you will be at the Assembly or know of any supportive people who will be there. We will need contacts in each synod's delegations.

Above all, pray for the Churchwide Assembly, all the leaders, and all the voting members, that the Holy Spirit will fill the hearts of those who are making decisions for our church at this critical time

BEGIN ALWAYS WITH JESUS

By George Evans

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Jesus Christ in Matthew 11: 28-30).

Begin always with Jesus. People of faith simply have no need to evade truth, invent new science, culture, anthropology, or social science, hurriedly pursue any speculations, or succumb to fear. No need, certainly, to invent new theology. Grounded in Jesus Christ, our faith, truly the faith of all so grounded, will stand no matter each day's realities. Be confident of that! That's why I offer Christ's words, "Come to me . . ."

Many church members, both gay and straight, clearly are in despair. Arguments are hot within the church and the attacks, even when seemingly well-intentioned, often are brutal. The image all the faithful must carry in such debates and battles is the oldest one of all for Christians, Christ of the Cross. Comfort, strength, and salvation itself come from Christ and Christ alone. The Cross is more than an incident at the end of a special man's life. Boldly the Cross declares that Jesus Christ saves us in all life's conditions. All sides of our ELCA debates on sexuality believe that, I trust. But sadly, our words written and spoken do not always project that quality of faith. Be vigorous to assert your faith convictions! Let no one take faith in Jesus Christ from you!

Christ, I believe we all know, reaches out to all manner of people, but many appear determined to shut some people out. Or, what is every bit as bizarre, they would afford for their sisters and brothers only a qualified access to Christ and Christ's work, and even then require of them some form of cleansing. Where does anyone gain such license? "It's in the Bible," is a frequent claim? If you think so, we discover again that we don't read the Bible in the same way. When engaging Christ as our lens or our listening post for the Bible, don't we meet One who reached out, who was inclusive? ("Inclusive" is not an evil word in Christian usage.) Was Christ not accused of being with the wrong people (Luke 7:34)? Did He not warn that we could not keep His new wine in the old wineskins (Matthew 9:17)? More

importantly, didn't Jesus take a dim view of those who cast stones (John 8:1-11)? There is a welcoming posture about Jesus that Christians are obliged to acknowledge: "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17).

Do you remember that when the Apostle Paul raised the subject of same-sex encounters in Romans 1, he described the people he meant as those who "exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (vs. 25)? After talking about their infidelities, the Apostle further described them as "filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanders, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless" (vss. 29-31).

Wow! Let's agree that, if any candidates with these attitudes or behaviors apply for ordination, we will oppose them. Candidacy Committees and bishops struggle enough and no parish wants anyone behaving like that in their ministry. More to the point, is Paul describing the gay and lesbian members of our congregations about whom we are in earnest discussion in today's debates? Indeed, I think not!

Instead, aren't we lifting up for consideration neighbors, sisters and brothers in Christ, who are our children and our friends, persons we know well, who are of good character? Is Paul describing the gay and lesbian members of our congregations who teach Sunday School, usher, assist at the altar, care for the infirm and elderly, are our organists and choristers, fellow Christians, worshipers of God, devout in so very many respects? Beyond this, are those first century miscreants described by Paul at all like the gay and lesbian persons we know, who care for their parents, are good members of families, serve in all the professions, teach and coach, are elected to public office, and responsibly contribute to life in our communities? Are our fellow

church members, whose lives are undergoing harsh scrutiny in the church today, like the people characterized in Romans 1 as "full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness . . . God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless"? Is Paul's first century denunciation an accurate description of those who ask us to pray for their committed unions, as they forswear promiscuousness and pledge fidelity? Is the Apostle speaking of women and men who hear God's call to carry Word and Sacraments among our people and offer pastoral care in our churches? The answer to all of the above is a clear, "No!"

Surely, we don't believe that Paul in his day was describing anyone today who opposes abuse and offers love and service as a follower of Jesus? It just may be that in the heat and fear generated by today's debates we have been confused by first century immorality issues and are doing harm by equating those issues with the life reality of some fine twenty-first century Christians. If so, and I believe it is, the appropriate question for us now is one we teach children to ask, "What would Jesus do?"

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Basic Convictions

Asked to comment on writings and comments opposing and severely limiting the place of gays and lesbians within the church, I discovered I wanted to express some basic convictions:

- 1) We are all children of God! Never should we allow that faith-driven fact to become a euphemism or platitude among God's adopted faithful, straight and gay. That fact must have a strong presence in all our discussions.
 - 2) There are no perfect people. Hard to believe that isn't self-evident? Whatever the Creator intended—and only the Creator fully knows—the Bible, theology, and science do agree that the Creation has changed. A working theology today must include the Fall and across the spectrum of its work address Darwin, basic biology, genetics, solid social science, and everyday experience. Theology should teach us to acknowledge differences between whatever we believe was intended in Creation and today's reality. A generation living with HIV, SARS, a dynamic society, mad cow disease, an
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expanding universe, and people who wear glasses, to mention a scant few of the changes, should reckon with the reality that we humans and our world have changed since Creation. Our only understandable task is to live neighborly (Jesus Christ) in a world groaning in travail (St. Paul).

Likewise, no one has a Biblical license to expand Jesus' description of what God intended in marriage (Mark 10: 2-12 & Matthew 19:3-12) into a law that determines the role of gays and lesbians in the church. Jesus in these passages is responding to the Pharisees' entangling question about an easy divorce practice for males based on an interpretation of Moses' Law. Jesus is speaking to marriage and divorce. Not to disappoint modern protagonists, but it is a stretch to turn Jesus' words against easy divorce into a *law* about the whole of human sexuality. Jesus' words about divorce are not rightly extended to condemn gays and lesbians in responsible, committed life-relationships.

3) Genuine "anecdotes", life stories, are valid! Some complain that the case for accepting same-gender unions is being made by telling anecdotes about individuals that do not convey some larger or Biblical picture. We should stop belaboring this! The stories of Christians are always important. They describe us and ours. If we cannot hear or believe brothers and sisters whom we know, whom can we believe? Again, how do we gain license to dismiss the living testimony of our sisters and brothers? Hearing their testimony, the story of people that we know, can trust, and with whom we share Christ, is certainly better than grasping at half-truths and worn-out myths about gays and lesbians, a science that doesn't seem to exist, and promoting psychological therapies validly held to be questionable.

4) No doors should be closed except to practices that are harmful, abusive,

or destructive of God's children. All practices and situations that are abusive or harmful should be named and denounced. Yes, those who wish to explore various therapies should be supported as they do so. But, in a caring and truthful spirit, they must also be cautioned about the possible negative consequences of attempting to force, through therapy, changes from a homosexual into a heterosexual orientation.

Most gays and lesbians understandably resent the implication that they cannot be accepted as children of God without changing their sexual orientation.

Most gays and lesbians understandably resent the implication that they cannot be accepted as children of God without changing their sexual orientation. Many have paid a high price to learn about themselves and have accepted who they are

only after years of struggle. Those persons now know, as well as any of us ever do, who they are as God's daughters and sons. That knowledge was likely gained apart from uncertain ventures down roads prepared for them by persons unwilling or unable to accept them as children of God.

All parties must be cautioned that those who advance therapeutic theories tell in their own descriptions that only a small percentage, I believe it is usually stated as around twenty-five percent, of those who choose to make some therapeutic effort, have any semblance of what even the proponents regard as success, and that only under the most favorable conditions. There is no guarantee of the healthy permanence of such efforts. Honesty requires all to counsel that the possibility of psychological harm is real.

Beyond all of this, the issue for people of faith is first to acknowledge that God is well able to determine, without our help, who are God's children. To date, God has not set any apparent psychological prerequisites. Where would a similar requirement for extensive therapeutic change of our basic nature, as a pre-condition of acceptance, leave the rest of us?

5) Conversations within the body of faith must be genuine conversations. Understanding does not follow statements that denigrate and prejudge who is or is not a sinner. It is unacceptable arrogance to categorize gay and lesbian persons within the body of faith with a level of judgment

reserved for God. The church should not cooperate with those who would place its members in situations where prejudice has free reign. The ground rules for conversations must make this abundantly clear. Conversations are not opportunities for assaults.

6) Humans, fundamentally, are not meant to live alone (Genesis 2:18). The Bible says it and most of us know it personally and relish this fact. Employing this commonly accepted basic truth in a world vastly changed from Creation, it is not exceptional, nor upon reflection surprising, that attraction, love, and a union occur between two persons of the same gender. For everyone to live their lives of "not being alone" in the exact manner that many believe was "intended" at Creation, indeed would be a surprise. Homosexuals like all of God's children are not meant to be alone.

Christians pray at every meaningful juncture in their lives. For persons who are gay and lesbian, it is as natural to make their life commitments with prayer in public view within their community of faith as it is for heterosexuals. Prayer is offered whenever people seek to place themselves humbly before God, grounded in the Savior's invitation, and to celebrate God's presence in their lives. For lesbians and gays to pray as they make life commitments before God, in whose presence we all live and have our being, is not a redefinition of marriage, no matter the fears of some in the church.

Our Lutheran Grounding

The essence of our being Lutheran Christians is our straightforward, central conviction, expressed by St. Paul, "For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'the one who is righteous will live by faith'" (Romans 1:17). We likewise remember and claim with Paul and Luther:

But now apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by His blood, effective through faith (Romans 3: 21-25).

My credentials to write are indeed scant. A parish pastor, I have no other credential. For me, it is essential you know that. I do, nevertheless, believe that the doing of theology and the practice of a holy faith take place primarily in the parishes where God's children gather. Moreover, for several years, but sharply in the last year and a half, I have become aware as a pastor of the fear gripping many, including some very earnest clergy, regarding gay and lesbian persons in the church.

Sadly, I confess what many of you knew and I did not always believe, that "homophobia" is truly alive among us. Why else the fervor? Publications, resolutions, expensive media presentations in a flood are testimony to this fear whatever their hoped for purpose. In addition, persons who threaten schism testify to the virulence of the phobia. Today, we are hardly having a straightforward debate among Christian folk who love and respect one another in the spirit of Jesus, or among persons who know that their unity is of God.

Asked to write in response to some of what is being said and written, I first begged off. Reading what I write you may wish I had been successful and someone more able was writing. I am grateful for your indulgence and the invitation. Sadly, it may be helpful for me to state I am fully a heterosexual, have always been—although it was not a conscious decision of mine—, and to my knowledge have no one in my family who is not. I trust this will not disqualify my comments and convictions? It is only part of my story.

The Bible, the Confessions, "Tradition"—whatever is meant by that word these days—and, above all, Jesus Christ are not the possession of any group or party. From the arguments I observe, I suspect that gay and lesbian persons are expected to believe that the Bible and therefore the Word has little for them, unless they undergo a prescribed change. So, also, the Confessions of the church, let alone "Tradition," offer little to undergird their lives?

Now, no one has a charter granting them possession or management of Tradition. Although Tradition is a word employed often in the current debates, it is difficult to find a common bond connecting Tradition to Jesus Christ. As sometimes applied to gay and lesbian persons, Tradition has taken on a status it lost regarding dietary laws,

women's hats, ordination, bishops, divorce, adultery, and more. Even a cursory reading of the Gospels provides instance after instance of Jesus challenging the Pharisees on what must have been their Tradition.

Many who attempt to condemn gays and lesbians in the current debate appear to have lost their bearings on the difference between the church's core of Tradition—for Lutherans always related to Justification by Faith and the person of Jesus Christ—and that accumulation of customs which may at some time have been labeled "Traditions." The Tradition of the church is that which the church must pass on. It can stand to be questioned and is not in danger of being replaced by new evidence, experiences, or understandings. It is able in a salutary manner to consider what is real and genuine and lasting. It will not crumble under the weight of reality. Yes, we do eat formerly forbidden food, ordain women, and we are not afraid.

Rigid views that calcify the past are thoroughly threatened by the possibility that Biblical examples used in current discussions, examples often labeled Tradition, may not actually refer to what their lesbian and gay sisters and brothers live and experience today. What a problem! To discover yourself dressed for battle from the time and circumstances of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greco-Roman world of Paul; then to discover that the field on which you are prepared to fight has shifted.

The details of Leviticus admit to stoning and proscribe eating oysters. Long ago we set those laws aside. Yet, we have never set aside the underlying call of Leviticus to preserve life and carry our lives before God in all Holiness. The Augsburg Confession, Article XXVIII, gives instances in which even New Testament proscriptions were set aside by the Reformers. There are proscriptions set aside within Holy Scripture itself. As in every generation, we must live before God today. To do that responsibly we must employ what we understand today.

Some fear this allows license. Some fear this means "anything goes." That's not true! Christ's message is filled with the employment of God's law captured by a love of God and neighbor. Christ did not eliminate the law, but in His person fulfilled the law. Never to fear! Those who stand on Christ do have a posture and a

mandate to follow for every age. Passing that posture and mandate along is our longstanding "Tradition." This is not about customs or the intentions of Creation. With Christ, Scripture and life take on clarity and we are freed from the selective literalism bogging down the current debate. Literalism is a disease much worse than fundamentalism.

We do require definitions. *Tradition* too easily comes at us with a capital "T", when we actually mean custom. Custom, like convention, means people's habits in given circumstances and time. Tradition is what must be passed on from generation to generation. *Righteousness* in Lutheran theology is derived from a relationship with God and reflects God. It must not be trivialized by focusing it on contemporary issues of sexuality and then largely on homosexual persons. This surely occurs when we turn into God's law what we think God intended. Our *Righteousness* is rooted in our relationship with God. Our deepest motives are grounded in that relationship. *Sin* is a rebellion as readily found among heterosexuals as among homosexuals. Can we include these definitions in our current debates?

For persons of faith, as Dr. James Dunn reminds us in his work on the theology of Paul, used in most of our seminaries, God continues by grace to exercise "his justifying righteousness, the process of salvation. . ." This is the essence of Luther's classic formula, "*simul peccator et justus*"—sinner and justified at one and the same time (James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul The Apostle* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998], 386).

In a recent lecture, Carter Lindberg employed the basic understanding required for any attempt to be faithful to Luther's grasp of justification:

In light of justification by grace alone salvation is now seen as the foundation of life rather than the process or goal of life. Salvation is received not achieved. The merciful God freely accepts the sinner. God's acceptance is so radical that there are no religious or ethical prerequisites to salvation. Luther's emphasis upon the Word of God also relativized all human structures and relationships thereby freeing them from ideology, and for
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service to the neighbor (“Faith Active in Love: Reflections on Luther’s Contributions to Social Welfare,” delivered at The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, May 6, 2003).

Let’s talk about this understanding of justification in our debates on the place of gays and lesbians within the church?

As the Confessions say about all of us and our need for repentance:

This repentance endures among Christians until death because it struggles with the

sin that remains in the flesh throughout life. As St. Paul bears witness in Romans 7:23, he wars with the law in his members, etc. --- not by using his own powers but with the gift of the Holy Spirit which follows from the forgiveness of sins. The same gift daily cleanses and sweeps away the sins that remain in works to make people truly pure and holy” (Smalcald Articles, III, 3, 40, *The Book of Concord*, ed. Kolb and Wengert, [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000], 318).

Righteousness must not be trivialized. Righteousness in a child of God is larger than having a “correct” practice of “intended” sexuality. We cannot morally sift out heterosexuals and then slap a special standard for sexual righteousness on people who live out their homosexuality, based upon our presumption of their having a moral fault. We are all sinners saved by Jesus Christ. Where does this fit into today’s debate?

Nor, can we trivialize the Word of God in what appear to be attempts to protect God by imposing human understandings and customs to define righteous behavior. I am helped by a speech The Rev. Dr. George W. Forell delivered to an assembly of “Word Alone,” November 19, 2002. I

believe Forell states accurately what we Lutherans believe at our best and what must prevent us from trivializing or moralizing our faith to the point of becoming twenty-first century Pharisees. Professor Forell may not agree with my use of his words in this article, but I believe what he wrote applies to how we Lutherans must think in order to be Lutheran in the living of our faith. Never can we lose our conviction that the Word of God is far more than the Bible itself with its varied understandings, as God has led and inspired people over the ages. Forell accurately presents, I believe, what Lutherans believe regarding God’s living Word:

Righteousness must not be trivialized. Righteousness in a child of God is larger than having a “correct” practice of “intended” sexuality.

The centrality of the Word in Lutheran theology means the centrality of Christ. We read the written Word from Genesis to Revelation in the light of Christ. The key to the Scriptures for us is expressed in Luther’s words: *Was Christum treibet*, What drives Christ home. This hermeneutical principle of

Luther’s theology is one factor that makes it worth being a Lutheran because it supplies the key to the Scriptures. If it is lost, neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament makes much sense except as colorful documents of ancient times.

Further, Forell, speaking of how seriously Luther took sin and our involvement in sin, refreshingly reminds us:

But as we have seen Lutheran theology takes grace even more seriously; it is penultimately very realistic about the human situation. It is totally unsentimental about human goodness and virtue. We are not saved by our morality or spirituality. [*Obviously we can add sexuality, biology, psychology, etc.*] But ultimately Lutheran theology is completely optimistic about God’s grace and willingness to save sinners. Our hope is not based on our goodness and ability to save ourselves but completely on God’s love and willingness to save us. This is revealed to us on the cross of Christ. Saints are not moral superstars but sinners saved by grace though faith in Jesus Christ.

Children, Not Half-Children, of God

The debates over sexuality will go on, but we must not despair. The ELCA does not have a good record in conducting studies

and debates, or in communications. That is evident and will affect what is currently happening. But we, individually, locally, and hopefully in our regional and national expressions of our church, can do better. The key is to talk with one another as children of God and to insist upon the obvious truth that God’s children include both gays and lesbians.

These are not half-children. *They are real!* They are not going to go away and there is no therapy or science or set of tricks likely to “cure” or eliminate them—they have undoubtedly been with us since the beginning of humanity. If they are authentic, then we must deal with them in terms of their authenticity. They cannot be dismissed as somehow incomplete or less than their heterosexual sisters and brothers.

Acceptance of gays and lesbians as complete children of God does not mean that we must accept any sexual practice! Abuse is wrong! That clearly includes “man-boy” groups among gays and their like among heterosexuals, all predators upon youth and children, and those engaged in abusive or destructive conduct. The dreadful equating of homosexuality with pedophilia must be forthrightly refuted by evidence and fact. The evidence and the facts must be accepted by the church and not reformulated to fit prejudices. We must name abusers and condemn their practices. In condemning such and distancing ourselves from them it is clearly wrong, often preposterous, to level broad charges against persons who are gay and lesbian, while excusing heterosexuals from similar scrutiny.

The American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, an organization that has opposed the blessing of same-gender unions and the acceptance of pastors in such unions, has made the accusation that this will “distort the Biblical record, appeal to questionable scientific theories, suppress inconvenient data, and rely overwhelmingly on individual experience which has been conditioned by contemporary culture and values” (“A Pastoral Statement of Conviction and Concern,” ALPB, 11/1/2002). Such charges also fall under the label of a distortion of facts. Some rightly ask who really is doing the distorting?

No matter how well-intentioned, the ALPB’s broad statements cut both ways. “We call the church to recognize that personal experience is not a reliable interpre-

tive key to the Word of God," the ALPB requests. That's right, many including gay and lesbian Christians might well respond, "Only Christ and Christ crucified," is the interpretive key. For these Christians, their personal experience has been a struggle burdened by ancient labels, ignorance, and unjustified fears. The terrible "interpretive key" used against them has been an ancient world, its immorality, and a truncated, literal interpretation of Scripture.

The ALPB decries "personal experience and the sharing of anecdotes," hoping rather for "the teaching of Holy Scripture and the theological and confessional witness of the church." The suspicion is strong that such statements, however well-intentioned, fail to recognize the authentic life of God's people, the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit among us, and the depth, breadth, and power of a Christ-centered faith. This faith is active, daily equipping gay and lesbian Christians, along with their heterosexual sisters and brothers in Christ, for today's world.

Just as the virtue of being chaste does not require celibacy, chastity, in its profound meaning, and homosexuality are not mutually exclusive. This is as true for those with the experience of living as one of God's gay or lesbian persons as it may be for heterosexuals. Those with such life experiences need to be heard by any whose questions are prompted by their faith. Evangelical Faith, our Reformation faith, requires of us that at a minimum we engage one another with hope and promise. Those who raise their heads above the fray will see that much and will try to do all necessary to "maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of the peace" (Ephesians 4:3), ---truly, a task for all the faithful.

Clearly, what is happening around us is that the world is losing its fear of persons who are gay and lesbian, who live responsibly and constructively among us. The ancient fears are being laid to rest each day, as individuals, homosexual and heterosexual, come to know one another and

develop relationships grounded in respect and neighborly love. It is a kind of barbarism to erect barriers that prevent responsible people from making life commitments that permit them to care for one another, hold property together, and be recognized in both the church and the civil world.

In the recent Supreme Court decision, *Lawrence vs Texas*, regarding a sodomy law, Justice Thomas, who dissented from the majority decision, believing this an issue for the Texas Legislature, indicated that were he in that Legislature he would vote against the law, stating "the Law before the Court today is... uncommonly silly." The least the church can do is to think and pray together on these developments. Perhaps we are again encountering one of those life conditions in which the world teaches the church? We have certainly been in that position in the past on a number of issues. Perhaps this phenomenon is akin to what Bonhoeffer meant about a "world come of age."

It is a kind of barbarism to erect barriers that prevent responsible people from making life commitments that permit them to care for one another, hold property together, and be recognized in both the church and the civil world.

If so, it will be because the church has mechanically ignored the Spirit who enlightens us in every age. Instead, we will be found opting for Biblical literalism and placing that literalism in our lives in a manner reserved by Lutherans for Christ alone. There is no question of ancient views. There is a question—yes, a genuine question—regarding the background and actual dimensions of those ancient views and their theological, cultural, social, and personal applicability today. There is no question that

there are practical issues surrounding ordination and the conditions related to life commitments between any two of God's children. The life condition of being
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LOST MEMBERS

If you know the addresses of any of these Network members, please let us know: Alexia, Ruth Almen, Sonja Anderson, Tom & Diane Anderson, Joyce Arnold, Marlys Boote, Alma Garza Cano, Andi Carlson, Leslie Fordahl, Lorraine Hooper, Esther Jacobson, Greg Johnson, William Leh, Molly Lloyd-Wilson, Corrine Schmidt, Wendy McCardie, C. William Pearson, Tricia Peavler, Gloria Peterson, May Robinson-John, Kathie Sandmeier, Kathryn Scheitmueller, Dawne Spalding, Todd Vanlaningham, Anna Wiley.

SOLASCRIPURA, THE WESLEYAN RECTANGLE, AND THE LIVING HUMAN DOCUMENT

by Robert W. Wohlfort

By Who's Authority?

In the tradition of St. Paul, I begin this piece of writing by establishing my credentials. You are entitled to know by what and whose authority I claim this space.

My first "credential:" like you, the reader, I am an evolving person of faith, open and seeking to do the will of our Lord. This seeking often is frustrating, occasionally clear, and, from time to time, life altering. It is upon the alteration of life that I will focus.

I am a pastor of The ELCA. Ordained in 1969, I have lived out my entire ministry in the specialized work of pastoral counseling ---all of it in Washington, DC. For the past ten years I have been part of a small pastoral counseling group in a suite of offices in the downtown of our nation's capital. For my first twenty-five years of ministry I was part of a large pastoral counseling center with dozens of office locations in churches in the city and suburbs of Maryland and Virginia. We were fifty therapists strong. We were clergy and lay, women and men, young and old, gay and straight---to name but a few of our demographics. In addition to my caseload of clients, I served, at various times, as this center's clinical director, executive director, and instructor/supervisor in our training program. I am a Diplomate of The American Association of Pastoral Counselors and a Licensed Clinical Psychologist. To use an old term, I am a "shrink."

There are two other credentials that qualify me to use this space---credentials related to being a person of faith. I was born into and grew up in a household of Mom, Dad, and my older brother. Our family was one of the pillars of the church. And never, at any time, was anything ever said about sex. Nothing!

My other credential is the fact that I was born into and grew up in The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. It is within this context that I was baptized, confirmed, married, received my college and seminary (Concordia, St. Louis, 1966) educations, and ordained. I believe that I received a
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very fine classical education---in some ways. A major deficit in The LC--MS educational enterprise was the near total absence of encouragement to learn to think, critique, question, and doubt. Another deficit was the paucity of courses that had to do with the pastoral care of people! And, like at home, nothing was ever said about anything related to sex! Hence, my pilgrimage west to Claremont [California] School of Theology for a Doctor of Theology degree in pastoral counseling and the psychology of religion---a total focus on "the person," including his/her sexuality!

Claremont was the beginning of an awakening that could not be quieted. It was my first post-public high school education that was non-Lutheran. It was my first opportunity to study and wrestle with theological issues with non-Lutheran men *and women*. It was the first time that I *knowingly* conversed in any depth with openly gay men and lesbian women. As I reflect on this time I am amazed and embarrassed at my ignorance!

While at Claremont I applied for and received the Carroll A. Wise Doctoral Fellowship at The Pastoral Counseling and Consultation Centers of Greater Washington [D.C.], also known as, The PC&CCGW. I assumed that after the nine-month clinical fellowship I would make myself available for a call to a congregation. Dynamically, relationally, psychologically, and theologically, my time with The PC&CCGW was a continuation of Claremont. My desire was to stay with this center and its people; I believed I was called to this ministry. I was the only Lutheran on staff for several years. Gathered in that center of ministry were the full spectrum of Protestants (clergy and lay/men and women), a Franciscan priest, Jews, Unitarians, psychologists, psychiatrists, and licensed clinical social workers. The PC&CCGW was a veritable Noah's Ark for pastoral psychotherapy. I loved it! My nine months expanded to twenty-five years. As I wrote earlier, I served as The PC&CC's clinical and executive director. In those capacities I recruited and hired clergy and lay therapists---men and

women---who would contribute to this dynamic ministry in the nation's capital.

In 1984, two years into my tenure as executive director, I resigned from The Lutheran Church---Missouri Synod to affiliate with The Lutheran Church in America. I could no longer be part of a church body that, among other positions, was so stridently opposed to the ordination of women. As the husband of Doris, the father of two daughters and a son, and as an executive seeking and hiring women clergy for ministry, I needed a church home that welcomed women into the fullness of ministry. Also, I needed and wanted to be a man who did not participate in discriminatory practices in faith and life.

The Rising Consciousness of Diversity

It is clear to me now (there are some benefits to growing older!), that the issue about women as clergy was not only about women as clergy. That issue also was a metaphor for my dimly conscious lifelong welcoming and involvement with the diversity of persons in my life. The neighborhood in which I grew up was overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. The public schools I attended in Yonkers, New York, were overwhelming Roman Catholic and Jewish. Two years of my high school were in the inner city of Yonkers where many of my schoolmates had nearly unpronounceable Polish names and a large number of the boys and girls carried family names that ended in vowels. African Americans made up a large percentage of the student body in those two high school years. For me, it made little sense to be warned, inside of my home and outside, not to play with "the Catholics, the Jews, the niggers, the spics, and the wops." I was marginally obedient and conflicted.

Looking back on my quarter century with The PC&CCGW, I thrived in that atmosphere of colleague and client diversity. Thursday was my favorite workday. Often that day would begin with a seminar on some aspect of pastoral counseling work. We who were governing the day-to-day operations of The PC&CCGW came together to learn, to question, and to challenge our selves and one another. We concluded the morning with our council meeting. We attended to the business of this robust, thriving pastoral counseling and education center. This group was verbal, confronting, full of humor, honest, and loving. Most were clergy and we represented

a diversity of theological training and opinion that coalesced in our passion for the ministry before us. A raucous lunch preceded an afternoon and evening of clinical work.

The Transformation Continues

Concurrent with my journey of diversity outlined above was my conscious pilgrimage into the hearts and lives of gay and lesbian persons. That pilgrimage began with my encounter with the minister of a Unitarian Universalist church in the Washington Suburbs. I will call him Tom.

For all of my twenty-five years at The PC&CCGW, I had an office in this church. (Does God have a sense of humor or what: a newly ordained pastor of The LC--MS is carrying on his ministry three days per week in a Unitarian Universalist congregation!) I regard those days as another transformative life experience. At least once a week I would join the staff of the congregation for our brown bag lunches. Rich theological discussion enlivened many of those meals. Within a couple of years, I was asked to preach on a Sunday morning. I made it clear that I would come as a Lutheran pastor who would bear the sensibilities of who was gathered for worship and I would not compromise who I was. I was invited again and again. Some of the members were offended by my homilies. Most were grateful for my presence, message, and our mutual ministry of pastoral counseling. I had the good sense not to seek the permission of the district president or synodical bishop as I made my appearance in the Unitarian pulpit. They had enough trouble.

In 1973, this congregation was searching for a senior minister. I was asked to participate in the interviewing process. I accepted with gladness. Out of that process grew a deep and trusted friendship with the man who was hired. He served as senior minister for twenty years. I have Tom's permission to relate his and our story.

Two or three years into service as senior minister, Tom entrusted to me information that only his wife and a few close friends were privileged to know. Tom is gay. Over the course of the next few months, Tom recounted his tortuous journey. As a youth he was affiliated with the United Methodist Church and he engaged in long and arduous acts of penance and prayer to be relieved of his homosexual condition. When I read the account of ELCA pastor/bishop Paul

Egerton, as he reflected on his oldest son revealing to him and his mother that he was gay, I associated this account with Tom's struggle:

As a devout Christian who knew from early childhood that something was very different about him and who suspected from adolescence that this difference was something unacceptable to God, our son had devoted himself to prayer and trust in the grace of God. Preachers said God loves all people unconditionally and could change persons who came with a broken and contrite heart. So, for years, night after night in the privacy of his closet, he took his broken and contrite heart to the throne of grace, praying for God to change him. But God did not change him. Did that mean he was so defective that even a gracious God did not love him? What else is a teenage mind to conclude? ("One Family's Story," in *Homosexuality and the Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*, ed. Walter Wink, [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999] 25, 26).

In addition to taking his struggle to the throne of God, Tom engaged in numerous therapies. As you can imagine, his efforts to change his orientation through years of psychoanalysis and other therapeutic routes did not achieve that goal. However, the therapy was a salutary moment in Tom's life.

My experience of therapy . . . led me to a greater self-acceptance. It did not do what I went seeking: cure me of homosexuality . . . the two therapists I worked with mostly neither promised that or said that it was impossible. They did other things for me. I think they hoped that change might be possible, but not in a vein of condemning what I was. They made me stronger, less vulnerable, and they also helped me in my own process of figuring out how and why I was different, though we never came to definitive answers about that. [Letter from Tom to Wohlfort: June 8, 2003]

I am grateful that my friend was fortunate in having competent and compassionate therapists.

Tom's marriage was, in part, another gallant effort in self-remediation. Tom and his wife remained partners until her death, after a short illness, in 1994, that coincided with

his stepping down from his position as senior minister to enter work on behalf of the denomination at its headquarters.

Three years after Tom left the congregation, he wrote to his membership that he had found love again---with a man. He came out of the shadows to the people he had pastored for twenty years. It was a painful decision for Tom to remain closeted in a denomination and congregation that were forthright activists for full inclusion for gays and lesbians while living the reality of what such disclosure would mean on behalf of a wife and son whom he loved and a congregation that he also loved and who loved him.

Some of you will raise the question of honesty. I can only tell you that for a gay man growing up when I did, honesty was a luxury. I could not have been allowed to be a teacher or a minister if I had been honest about sexual orientation. There were no models for me; I did the best I could to live out my commitments. [Tom to his congregation, October, 1997]

Theological and Pastoral Reflection

Theologically and pastorally, what are we to make of all this? As a pastor in the Lutheran tradition I am called upon to examine my life and practice of ministry through the lens of our core principle, "Sola Scriptura." Unfortunately, my earliest impression of this principle was the reductionistic posture of Bible verses and proof texts---taking portions of the Sacred Word (often out of context) and using them as ammunition. Another misfortune, substantiated by The LC--MS educational posture of non-critical thinking, helped breed into me an unquestioning loyalty to the church of the Reformation with its pronouncements, positions, and statements. Were I still of this bent of mind, the citing of Genesis 19 (Sodom and Gomorrah), Leviticus 18 (Holiness Code), Romans 1, etc., would suffice as a foundation for the [mis]treatment of the issues related to homosexuality. "Well, doesn't God's Word say . . . ?!"

So, I ask myself, how is it that I found myself to be more than comfortable, that it was even "right" for me, to be in the pulpit of the Unitarian Church? How was it possible for me to say an eager "Yes!" when asked to distribute the bread of our Lord at the service of worship at the annual meeting of The American Association of

Pastoral Counselors---another Noah's Ark of clergy and lay men and women of the Christian traditions? What guided my movement from total naiveté regarding gay and lesbian persons to my present "place" of welcome, embrace, blessing, support, acceptance, and advocacy?

A Methodist pastoral counseling colleague assisted me in this challenge by informing me of her denomination's counterpart to "Sola Scriptura," the Wesleyan Rectangle. The four corners of this principle are *Scripture, Tradition, Wisdom, and Experience*. I believe that a right practice of Sola Scriptura includes the practice of living the creative tensions of this Rectangle. I deeply believe that our God is continually at work in revealing His/Her will for faith and life in our time---ongoing revelation. We can lovingly embrace our *Traditions*, bring to bear upon them our growth in *Wisdom*, and lift up our *Experiences*, as we seek what is God's good word for us in our time as we meditate upon the *Scriptures*.

Of those four corners, it is Experience that is central for me---the Experience of having in my trust, for thirty-five years, hundreds upon hundreds of individuals and couples who have come to me, a pastoral psychotherapist, for help. It is the Experience, as written above, of being in intimate, long, and devoted friendship with hundreds of ecumenical and inter-faith colleagues that has made "Sola Scriptura" come alive for me. It is the (Sacred) Experience of being invited into the life of Tom that has challenged me to see him as I imagined Our Lord would see him. It is living in the (Holy) Experience of professional intimacy with persons who earnestly and joyfully live a faith practice that is different from mine that compels me to be open in the ways that Jesus and his Spirit encouraged/demanded reception of those "the world" deemed unworthy of reception. Again, it is from the perspective of becoming older, that I can say that somehow God was working mischief in my life when, even as a boy, I asserted my desire to play with and to know my neighborhood mates and classmates who were decidedly non-Lutheran. I thank my pastor, Adolf Meyer, who was ahead of his and the church's time in his open affiliation with the church next door to St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, St. Barnabas Roman Catholic Church. In a time (it *(continued on pg 10)*

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seemed to me) that being Lutheran meant being anti--Roman Catholic, Pastor Meyer was a guiding beacon of a different perspective.

The Living Human Document

There is a phrase for this Experience: "The Living Human Document." Those of you who have participated in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) will recognize these words as those of The Reverend Anton T. ("Pappy") Boisen, the founder of The CPE movement. A man with a troubled mental health history, Mr. Boisen became the chaplain of Worcester State Hospital in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1924. As the result of his own journey into and out of mental illness, Chaplain Boisen believed in and vigorously advocated for a primary role of religion/theology/spirituality in the treatment of medical and mental conditions. He was relentless in his theme of "studying the living human document"—of listening to the story of a person's life with utmost respect and attention. Each person and each person's story were sacred documents to whom we had to be openly present and by whom we had to be open for influence if we were to be worthy of the role of pastor, doctor, chaplain, therapist.

I have come to believe experientially in the awesome mystery, humor, grace, and mischievous nature of God. As my relationship with Tom deepened and the transformative process in me was having its way, it is startling how many gay and lesbian persons and couples "showed up" in my life! Some of these persons have been clients. More have been acquaintances, neighbors, colleagues, and dear friends.

Our youngest daughter, Kathleen, traveled to The Netherlands in 1986, as part of a youth exchange program. Her host was a single man, several years older than she. We met him four years later in his home town and we count him and his partner as the dearest of friends. We were made wel-

come in his home and he and his partner have graced ours. Together they made the trip from The Netherlands to Vermont for Kathleen's wedding in 2001.

Kathleen's best friend from college is the daughter of a Lutheran pastor and his wife. That marriage dissolved when the mother settled for herself that she was lesbian. She and her partner have been guests in our home and we count them as friends.

I have participated in the ordination of a woman into the Episcopal priesthood and later was a witness to her service of holy union with her partner.

Gay and lesbian singles and couples were, are, and will be, my clients. Am I an expert

Each person and each person's story were sacred documents to whom we had to be openly present and by whom we had to be open for influence if we were to be worthy of the role of pastor, doctor, chaplain, therapist.

in matters related to the gay and lesbian community? No, I am not an expert—this I know. What I also know is that the mysterious and mischievous Spirit of God is working silently and relentlessly in my life, so that I am more and more becoming a man, a (Lutheran)

Christian, a pastor, and a pastoral psychotherapist, who, when I am at my best, appreciates the Uniqueness and the Holy of The Living Human Documents whom I am privileged to encounter.

"... The Uniqueness and the Holy of The Living Human

Documents whom I am privileged to encounter" ---this statement includes my self and includes my encounter with my self and our encounters with our selves. The Great Commandment of the Hebrew Scriptures brought forward by Jesus, the Christ, into the Christian Scriptures reads, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with

Since all of us are sexual beings and many if not most have a fair share of anxiety, fear, guilt, and confusion regarding this dimension of our beings, the minority sexual group, the homosexuals, are the ones receiving the non-conscious self-hatred/loathing.

all your soul and with all your mind . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:38, 39, NRSV). For emphasis, I suggest that the second part of the Great Commandment read, "You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself"

Increasingly, I am aware of the breadth

and depth of self-hatred and self-loathing that resides in many of those who come to me for therapy. Such self-hatred/loathing is rarely recognized for what it is. Instead, the easiest of all the psychological defenses, projection, is (non-consciously) put into play and the hatred is displaced to others. Others become the hated one. Since all of us are sexual beings and many if not most have a fair share of anxiety, fear, guilt, and confusion regarding this dimension of our beings, the minority sexual group, the homosexuals, are the ones receiving the non-conscious self-hatred/loathing. Also, I believe, gays and lesbians are us, that is, we are much more like them than we are different. There is nothing obviously different about them and I believe that it is the fragile nature of our differentness that is threatening.

Hope

Hope is future expectation based on a present reality. In my lifetime I have witnessed and participated in the movements that dismantled the public aspects of segregation. In my lifetime I have experienced the increase of parity for women in the social

and professional worlds. In my lifetime I have seen and heard at synodical assemblies, the increase of resolutions pertaining to blessing the unions of gay and lesbian couples and the ordaining of gay and lesbian persons in openly committed same-gender relationships. As this article is being written, the Prime Minister of Canada is proposing the recognition of marriage for same-gender couples.

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You, the reader, and I share an identical credential. We have Experienced the richness of the diversity of persons. Some happen to be gay and lesbian who are containers of the holy and are deserving of our full embrace.

THE NETWORK FOR INCLUSIVE VISION

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 congregational life and in the 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. Since that original group of ten persons, The Network roster has grown to almost 1300 members.

Network members are church members, bishops, lay professionals, seminarians, diaconal ministers, deaconesses, Associates in Ministry, professors, and pastors—fathers, mothers, spouses, siblings—who believe it is time to register publicly their opposition 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 and displayed on banners at services of worship and special functions.

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 around sexuality;
- To affirm committed and faithful same-sex relationships with appropriate 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, to support those who provide care for these victims, and to advocate in 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 clergy and the blessing of same-gender relationships, in order to bring recommendations to the 2005 Churchwide Assembly. A Task Force has been established to work on this study and regional hearings are being held. Network members are encouraged to write to the task force, to attend task force hearings in their regions, and to make their voices heard in their synods, so that at the 2005 Assembly our church will fully include sexual minority people, not only in congregational life, but in the ordained ministry of the ELCA.

Join us!

You can become a member of the Network by filling out the form below and mailing it with an annual contribution, \$25 for individuals, \$35 for households, \$10 for students, to: Arnold Keller, Treasurer, The Network, Beach Station, PO Box 4464, Vero Beach FL 32964-4464. Make your check payable to: The Network. If you are already a Network member, but have not made a contribution this year, please renew your membership.



Name _____

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ELCA Synod _____

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Professor | <input type="checkbox"/> Seminarian | <input type="checkbox"/> Diaconal Minister |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deaconess | <input type="checkbox"/> Church Member | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | |

BEGIN ALWAYS WITH JESUS

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homosexual, in itself, can hardly be shown to disqualify God's children from either a blessed union or ordination.

There will always remain the challenge for Christians to view all questions through Christ. Jesus said, "Do not fear, only believe" (Mark 5:36). Cannot all the children of God sing with the Psalmist:

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb,
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works; that I know very well" (Psalm 139:13-14)?

George Evans is pastor of The Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, McLean VA. He was a Navy Chaplain for twenty-eight years, active duty and Reserve, most of that with the Marine Corps. He served as The Chaplain of the Marine Corps, its senior chaplain.

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I am hopeful that with every successive generation more and more of the non-conscious parts of ourselves will become conscious and intentional with the result that we will regard ourselves and our neighbors as holy and living human documents who will receive our own and each others love, respect, and justice. You, the reader, and I share an identical credential. We have Experienced the richness of the diversity of persons. Some happen to be gay and lesbian who are containers of the holy and are deserving of our full embrace.

Robert Wohlfort is a pastor of The ELCA who is called to the Specialized Ministry of Pastoral Counseling. For thirty-five years he has carried out this calling in Washington, DC. He is a Diplomate of The American Association of Pastoral Counselors, a Licensed Clinical Psychologist in The District of Columbia and a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in The State of Maryland.

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UPCOMING EVENT**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 Robert Rimbo, Southeast Michigan Synod
- The Rev. Heidi Neumark, Transfiguration Lutheran Church (RIC), Bronx NY
- The Rev. Erin Swenson, licensed therapist, ordained Presbyterian minister, and transgender woman, Atlanta GA

Bible Study, The Rev. Barbara Lundblad, Union Seminary, New York

Chaplains, The Rev. Deborah Conrad, The Rev. Paul Winters

The Lutheran Network for Inclusive Vision
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