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for Inclusive Vision**

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**FROM THE PRESIDENT**

*Katherine Hellier*

And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting (Acts 2:2).

I have been reading reports from the 2005 synod assemblies around the country. Memorials are being sent to the August Churchwide Assembly informing its Voting Members of the minds and hearts of Voting Members in the synods. At the Oregon Synod a resolution was offered to make no decisions regarding ordination or blessings and to allow the Churchwide Assembly to do its job. There were commendations of the work of the ELCA Church Council and a memorial to approve their recommendations.

What passed at our assembly was something more surprising than any of us who had worked on other resolutions could imagine. The assembly voted to memorialize Churchwide to lift the ban on ordination of candidates in covenanted same-gender relationships and to give pastors the discretion to bless such relationships, asking the church to develop resources for these blessings.

Then, we voted to become a Reconciling in Christ Synod. There was great joy, as well as tears, laughter, and happy dances outside the assembly hall. More than getting what we wanted, the congregation members and leaders in the Oregon Synod found they could listen to each other, that for once the church could be a safe place to talk together.

I believe that we could all be surprised at the Churchwide Assembly this summer. In fact, I'm looking forward to the Spirit's continued and unexpected movement through the hearts of those who  
*(continued on pg 12)*

**WHAT ELCA VOTES CANNOT CHANGE**

*by Phillip A. Gaines*

The inspiration for this article was a simple message from an unlikely source, "IAMRU." The license plate seemed to hypnotize me. Five letters drew me in from across the parking lot, as though the metal plate had eyes, luring me closer. "I am; are you?" It did not take me long to surmise what the owner of this vehicle was asking, for underneath that license plate were several bumper stickers proclaiming the answer. All the bumper stickers shared one theme---religion. Some were basic, "Found Jesus" and "I [heart] Jesus." But the one that slapped me in the face was a simple black cross sitting atop a backdrop of rainbow colors. Simple, but direct. Understated, yet powerful. The message conveyed to me by the owner of the vehicle was simple: Christian and gay.

Symbols carry enormous significance for Christians. We see the cross as the price paid for our sins by the Son of God. We see the cross as a reminder of Jesus' journey from birth, to three years of ministry, to betrayal, to crucifixion, to resurrection, to ascension. Because of Jesus' journey, I know my sins have been forgiven and my life completely renewed. Because Jesus' death signifies the forgiveness of my sins, I have been given an opportunity to serve our Lord. After reading that simple phrase, "IAMRU," it dawned on me that it is my faith in Jesus that sustains me in all adversity and gives me reason for Hallelujahs when blessings are received. "IAMRU" peels layers off the enormous ball of indecision that has infected the lives of ELCA members since the Sexuality Study  
*(continued on page 9)*

## FAITHFULNESS REQUIRES MORE

by Jeff R. Johnson

Thirty-five years ago, Lutherans took a bold step in admitting women to the clergy rosters of our church. When the Lutheran Church in America decided to admit women to their roster, they did so by changing a single word. The LCA constitution read at that time: "A minister of this church shall be a man whose soundness in the faith, aptness to teach and educational qualifications have been examined and approved . . . and who has been properly ordained." On June 29, 1970, the General Convention amended this requirement by simply replacing the word "man" with the word "person." A minister of this church shall be a person---oh, that the ELCA's language would be so inviting!

The action in 1970 was described as "tradition-shattering," and as having been taken with dramatic and unexpected suddenness. The Rev. Dr. Robert J. Marshall, LCA president, is said to have observed, rather sullenly, "The proof of the pudding will be in the eating." Thirty-five years later, it is difficult not to find unanimous support for these courageous actions of our predecessor church bodies. While not everyone was pleased thirty-five years ago, we all rejoice today that this tradition of exclusion within our church shattered with dramatic suddenness---and simplicity!

So, too, is the case today with the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) people. Not everyone will be pleased with the action that needs to be taken. But we will look back at this as a very important time when our church acted decisively to welcome and to include those who continue to be victimized by a living tradition of exclusion and misinformation in our communion. Thirty-five years ago, to admit women to the roster of the church, a single word was changed and history was made. The Voting Members to this year's Churchwide Assembly will have an important opportunity to take a similar step to remove the policy of discrimination under which we have been laboring for the past fifteen years.

## Goodsoil Goes to the Church Council

At least, this was our message, when in April my co-chair, Jeannine Janson, and I joined with other members of the Goodsoil Coalition at the meeting of the ELCA Church Council. Goodsoil is the coalition of advocacy and activist groups working to end officially sponsored discrimination against LGBT people within the ELCA. Jeannine and I were given the opportunity to address the Council and to present to them a petition signed by over 1,500 members of this church urging them to take the steps necessary to remove the policy of coercive celibacy for LGBT persons.

The Church Council chose instead to send forward to the 2005 Churchwide Assembly in Orlando a complicated piece of legislation. The Council's recommendation maintains the current official policy of coercive celibacy for LGBT people and proposes a complex and unique process of exceptions that might open the possibility for some LGBT pastors to serve---in spite of the official policy of exclusion. Hardly justice! The Council's recommendation requires changes in the bylaws of the church and would necessitate a two-thirds majority vote for passage in Orlando. (Visit, online, [goodsoil.org](http://goodsoil.org), for the Council's proposal).

Only two Council members voted against this recommendation. Ellen Maxon was one of them. Ellen is an openly lesbian member of the Council and a true voice for justice calling on our church to take seriously its relationship with LGBT people and its responsibility to them in light of our understanding of baptism. She voted against this recommendation because it keeps the current policy of discrimination in place and does not represent justice for LGBT people.

## Goodsoil Objects to Church Council Recommendations

Goodsoil does not endorse the Council's recommendations. They fall short on many important levels. To quote from our position paper on the [goodsoil.org](http://goodsoil.org) website:

1. The Church Council's proposal fails to dismantle or challenge the ideological framework that is the basis for the policies of injustice and oppression within our church. The Council's recommendation reinforces the idea that LGBT people are by nature more sinful than heterosexual people. Equally disturbing is our church's continued teaching about the heterosexual structure of God's creation. It is troubling

that our church will not clearly and unambiguously repudiate these ideas. It is disappointing that the church will not speak to the sanctity of covenanted, same-gender committed relationships and marriages.

2. We remain concerned that this proposal is an attempt to maintain "unity" at the expense of LGBT people of faith.
3. The Council's recommendation does not remove the current policies of discrimination. This leaves LGBT clergy in jeopardy in many places throughout this church. As long as the current policy of discrimination remains in place, it could be arbitrarily or capriciously enforced against LGBT rostered leaders in synods across our church.
4. With ELCA policies of discrimination officially in place, it is difficult for the whole church to "live together faithfully." Despite the ELCA's rhetoric of full participation, this new proposal does nothing to remove the current policy of discrimination and creates a separate standard and a second class process for LGBT candidates and rostered pastors. Under this proposal, the call to "live together faithfully" is, unfortunately, an empty invitation.
5. The current proposal replaces one form of discrimination with another and embeds it in the governing documents of the church. Under the Church Council's proposal, LGBT candidates and rostered clergy will continue to be subject to requirements not applied to straight clergy, creating a separate and unequal class of clergy.
6. This proposal does not address the situations of LGBT rostered clergy currently serving at all levels of this church's leadership, as well as those who have been disciplined or those who are ordained and on the ECP roster. No provision has been made in the Council's proposal for these clergy to be fully and publicly welcomed and honored in the ELCA ministries in which they presently serve.
7. The exceptions proposal is unwieldy, unworkable, and demeaning. The concept of exception in this proposal is patently objectionable, as exceptions are always granted against some normative standard, which, in this case, is exclusionary and discriminatory. Even the exception process for ordinations under Call to Common Mission does not require so many levels and types of approval. Under the current

proposal, candidates will require the approval of a candidacy committee, synod council, synodical bishop, and finally the Conference of Bishops.

8. Finally, this proposal has little chance of passing in Orlando. Because the resolution is a bylaw change, its passage requires majority agreement of two-thirds of the Voting Members in Orlando. This proposal risks becoming mired in parliamentary wrangling and the process may well fail to express the will of the Assembly.

### Goodsoil Asks Questions

We have developed a list of important questions for consideration by anyone who believes that the Council's recommendation is essentially a positive development. Rather than simply accepting it in its current form, we would invite you to evaluate and analyze the recommendation critically and to offer your own proposals to strengthen it. Among the questions available on our website are:

How will the proposed policy lead to full participation for LGBT people? Is there a plan/timeline for reviewing this policy? How will the church know if this policy succeeds or fails?

Does the proposed policy recognize the difference between "being out" and "being partnered"? Must a candidate for the roster be out to be granted an exception? Does the proposed policy provide a context in which it is safe for people to come out? What guarantees the candidate's safety?

What happens to congregations in this process? Do they issue a call and wait for the rostering decision? Do they declare an intent to call and wait? Can a congregation revisit its decision while the request is pending? What if they decide to issue the call even if the exception is denied?

What criteria will the Conference of Bishops use to evaluate requests for exceptions? Will the Conference of Bishops make its decisions by consensus? Can one bishop veto any exception request? What happens when an exception request is turned down by the Conference of Bishops?

What happens to someone on the ELCA roster who requests an exception and is denied? Does this lead to removal from the roster or a disciplinary hearing? What if the congregation wants the pastor to stay if

the exception is denied? Will the names of all candidates requesting exceptions be public or will they remain confidential?

Are candidates previously removed (or resigned) from the roster or from the ELCA candidacy process, for failure to comply with the celibacy requirements of "Vision and Expectations," eligible for rostering exceptions? Are Extraordinary Candidacy Project (ECP) pastors eligible for this process or is the process open only to candidates with ties to the ELCA (e.g., currently on the ELCA roster, seminarians)?

How will the church ensure mobility for pastors rostered under this process? Will there be a list of bishops and synod councils who are not open to candidates who have been granted exceptions? What happens if a candidate on the exceptions list accepts a call in a synod where the bishop is not supportive? Is the bishop able to block this alone? Can bishops create zones of discrimination/non-exception? Is the exception tied to a specific call? Does a new call require a new exception? Will there be a list of LGBT people who have been granted exceptions?

Will there be a box on the candidacy forms for candidates to check indicating sexual preference and/or relationship status? What happens if a person who has received an exception marries heterosexually? Can that person's name be stricken from this list of exceptional candidates? Is that person then transferred to the "regular" roster?

How does the proposal express the justice at the center of our Church's confession?

### Goodsoil Proposes a Simple Vote

Instead of this complex and, in our opinion, unjust process of exceptions, Goodsoil proposes that the Churchwide Assembly be given the opportunity to express its will clearly with a simple yes or no vote. Yes, or no:

This church shall admit to its regular candidacy process all qualified persons, including LGBT people in covenanted same-gender relationships, and shall enforce no unique restrictions or requirements against them.

A simple yes or no vote would express the clear intention of this church. With this vote, the Assembly could direct the appropriate units of the church to make the changes necessary to accomplish their intention. A yes vote on this type of action would enable the kind of just and faithful relationship with baptized LGBT sisters and brothers that is in the best tradition of our church's capacity to include and welcome.

Goodsoil remains committed to the end of discrimination within the ELCA, to faithful, genuine conversation within our church, and to the full participation of LGBT people in our church. We continue to encourage our LGBT sisters and brothers to oppose and resist activities and policies that perpetuate spiritual violence on ourselves and our community.

We urge our allies to dream with us the "dream for justice" that allowed our church thirty-five years ago to make a simple change and to shatter years of debilitating exclusion and oppression. With your action this August, a similar change can be made. Faithfulness requires as much.

**Yes, or no:  
This church shall admit to its regular candidacy process all qualified persons, including LGBT people in covenanted same-gender relationships, and shall enforce no unique restrictions or requirements against them.**

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*He was ordained extra ordinem in 1990 at a service at historic St. Paulus Lutheran Church in San Francisco that was attended by over a thousand persons, with (continued on pg 12)*

**TAKING EXCEPTION  
TO EXCEPTIONS**

by Barbara Lundblad

I was in Jerusalem when the *Report and Recommendations from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality* was released in January. One of the pastors in our group had a lap top, and soon the EMBARGOED words appeared on the screen. How far away the ELCA report seemed as I read the words at the Lutheran Guest House in Jerusalem! No matter what the report said, it wouldn't bring down the separation wall or stop suicide bombings or ease tax assessments on Augusta Victoria Hospital (I remembered the familiar argument: "If we didn't spend so much time debating homosexuality, we could spend time doing God's work in the world.") A Jewish leader there described his sense of time: "In the United States you think in decades; in Europe people think in centuries; but here in Jerusalem, we think in millennia." (I remembered two other familiar arguments: "We dare not overturn what the Church has taught for two millennia," and "Be patient, the church can't change in a decade.")

Several months have passed since January. We now have not only the Task Force report, but recommendations of the Church Council to the Churchwide Assembly. As I sat down to write this response, I was overwhelmed by the sense that everything has already been written. What more can be added to Larry Rasmussen's wise words in the last edition of *The Network Letter*? I've read responses from Goodsoil and from Solid Rock Lutherans, lectures and essays by Robert Benne and Herbert Chilstrom. I can't think of anything to add to the conversation, so I will ask a few questions and gather up what we already know in something like a sermon. First, the questions:

**Are we serious about the recommendation that seems easiest to pass?**

The first recommendation on sexuality studies from the Church Council to the Churchwide Assembly is:

RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America--its members, congregations, synods, churchwide

organization, and agencies and institutions--be urged to concentrate on finding ways to live together faithfully in the midst of disagreements, recognizing the God-given mission and communion that we share as members of the body of Christ.

The Church Council had little difficulty passing this first recommendation, and it seems likely that a majority will push the "YES" button in Orlando. But do we believe it? It's far easier to live together faithfully with people who agree, who interpret the Bible in the same way, who hold the same views about sexuality.

Years ago Audre Lorde wrote about how difficult it is to relate to one another across differences:

We have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals.<sup>1</sup>

To do what we say we will do in Recommendation 1 is not easy, even if voting "yes" might be.

**What does living together faithfully look like?**

The Task Force and the Church Council have worked tirelessly to find ways to maintain unity in the midst of diversity. Recommendations 2 and 3 have been proposed to enable us to live together faithfully in spite of disagreements. Yet, both recommendations make some differences more valid than others. For example, in Recommendation 2, those who believe that blessing same-sex relationships is wrong are affirmed by the admonition to respect the previous guidance of the Conference of Bishops. The "whereas" clause makes opposition to such blessings clear: "We, therefore, do not approve such a ceremony as an official action of this church's ministry." Those who disagree--pastors who bless same-sex couples and couples who receive such blessings--do so knowing the ELCA does not approve. That is, their difference is less valid within this church.

**Let's imagine another possibility for recommendation to . . . RESOLVED, that, . . . we trust pastors and congregations in their local settings to discern appropriate ways to provide faithful pastoral care to same-sex couples.**

Recommendation 3 suffers from a similar disparity of differences. Those who believe that the ELCA should uphold current policy and practice regarding ordination are affirmed by knowing that the policies of the ELCA will not change. Those who believe "that the Holy Spirit is calling into public ministry persons who are in committed, same-sex relationships" must seek an "exception" to these official policies through a gauntlet of endorsements. While some might find "exception" to be positive--as in "She's an exceptional candidate"--the complicated bylaws make "exception" less valid, and the two-thirds majority needed, make it difficult to pass.

The exception provision may be the only way to maintain both unity and diversity in the ELCA. Though many of us continue to hope for more, it's important to acknowledge that the Task Force and the Church Council have provided *possibilities* for forward movement that have eluded most denominations. But we are still tempted to settle for one of the options Audre Lorde described: *ignore* our differences ("don't ask, don't tell"); *copy* the position that is dominant ("The majority of responses expressed *opposition* to . . . blessing . . . and ordaining . . .");<sup>2</sup> or *destroy* the position that is subordinate (" . . . a significant number of responses"--but still a minority--"expressed approval of such [blessing and ordaining] practices.")<sup>3</sup> If the exception provision or something more affirmative is voted down, this minority difference would be destroyed.

**Could living together faithfully with disagreements take shape in any other way?**

Let's imagine another possibility for Recommendation 2. After a series of revised "whereas" clauses, the whole recommendation could read:

RESOLVED, that, while members of the ELCA hold different positions on blessing same-sex relationships, we trust pastors and congregations in their local settings to discern appropriate ways to provide faithful pastoral care to same-sex couples.

This wording still needs work, but such a recommendation would offer more genuine possibilities of living together with disagreements. Some pastors and congregations will discern that faithful pastoral care

does not include a rite of blessing. Others will discern that blessing same-sex commitments is right and good.

But won't those who believe that same-sex relationships are wrong be "destroyed" by the rewording above? Consider the position of Lewis Smedes, who taught ethics for years at Fuller, a large conservative seminary. He speaks for many in our church who believe homosexuality is against God's intention. However, listen to his conclusion:

Reading the creation stories and what the New Testament tells us about marriage and family persuades me that the Creator originally intended the human family to flourish through heterosexual love. But nature has gone awry, as it sometimes does; and it seems most reasonable to me to believe God intends homosexual people to bear their destined burden in as morally responsible a way as they can...*Same-sex partnerships that are committed offer the best moral option available* [italics added].<sup>4</sup>

I, along with many who are reading this, disagree profoundly with Smedes and find his language very demeaning. However, he demonstrates that it is possible to disagree about homosexuality and still allow a more positive recommendation for blessing same-sex committed relationships.

### **Have we yet been honest about the source of our disagreements?**

It's refreshing to hear Paul's honest struggle over issues of sexuality in I Corinthians 7. "Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion . . ." (7: 25). He admits he has no word from the Lord on certain questions the Corinthians have asked. The advice he gives is clearly shaped by his sense of urgency about Christ's return---if you have a wife, don't seek to be free; if you have no wife, don't seek one. His sense that the time was short led him to counsel *against* marriage as a distraction and *for* celibacy as the best option for everyone. Even in our differences, can we acknowledge that Paul's sense of urgency influenced his answers as much as his reading of biblical texts?

Let's be honest: there are some things that are more intractable than opinions. Not long ago, I read an interview with Matt Hale, who was wrongly suspected of murdering family members of a Chicago judge who had found him guilty of white supremacist crimes. In the interview, Hale

was clear about his views. "Interracial marriage is against nature," he said; "it's a form of bestiality." He said he was drawn to white power as a young school boy, when he saw white girls kissing black boys. "I felt nauseous," he said. His feelings were real---they shaped his opinions, his commitments, and his actions. But his feelings cannot be grounds for harming African-Americans or for laws against interracial marriage.

Can people admit that some things just make them sick---the sight of two men kissing or the sight of happy lesbian couples on the steps of a Massachusetts courthouse? Like young Matt Hale, who got sick when he saw white girls kissing black boys, many people are nauseous at the thought of homosexuality. John Cobb calls this "the revulsion factor":

The real ground for moral condemnation today, as in much of the Christian past, is the sense that homosexuality is unnatural and hence against God's intentions. The strength of this sense comes from the revulsion felt by many heterosexuals at the thought of physical intimacy with members of their own gender . . . No one is to be blamed for feeling revulsion, but the decision to act on that revulsion in a way that injures others falls under moral criticism.<sup>5</sup>

Such feelings are real; they shape opinions and actions; but they are not the same as a word from the Lord. Our feelings about sex are even scarier than Matt Hale's memories from the school yard---for even in his disgust, he knew he would always be white. Sexuality is more mysterious, unpredictable, and very scary.

Over time, Christians have struggled, as Paul did, to address new questions and dilemmas. Much has been written about faithful discernment that led to changes in church teaching about slavery, women's ordination, astronomy, use of anesthesia in childbirth, divorce and remarriage---even the establishment of Lutheran insurance companies! Why is homosexuality so different from every other example raised? If we can be honest, a big part of the problem is "the revulsion factor." Nausea and fear are so powerful that many people cannot read the Bible according to the ELCA's own principles for interpreting Scripture.

**Have we abandoned the ELCA Constitution's definitions of God's word?**  
The Confession of Faith in the ELCA

Constitution was hammered out in debates of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church:

- a. "Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate . . ."
- b. "The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God . . ."
- c. "The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ . . ." (ELCA Constitution, 2.02. a, b, and c)

The adjectives "literal" and "inerrant" are not included to describe our understanding of "the Word of God." In addition, the order of the three statements was carefully chosen and is not open to reversal. While there are hundreds of churches that proclaim that the Bible is literally inerrant, the ELCA is not one of them. Yet it is a literal reading of certain texts that demands condemnation of same-sex relationships and forbids ordination.

The ELCA Constitution is not an aberration, but is grounded in long-held Lutheran perspectives. Luther developed a "canon within the canon," choosing as primary those books "that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know..."<sup>6</sup>

We go back further, to the Bible itself, where Jesus said to his disciples, "Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Matt. 13:52) ---not only what is old, but also what is new. Jesus calls Peter (Matt. 16:19) and the disciples (Matt. 18:18) to discern which teachings to bind and which to loose. It's clear that Jesus saw the need for faithful discernment in the ongoing life of the believing community. Jesus gave examples of such discernment in the Sermon on the Mount, sometimes expanding the written words, at other times contradicting what was written: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:43-44).

Turning to John's Gospel, we hear Jesus assure his disciples that he would not leave them orphaned: "The Holy Spirit . . . will" (continued pn pg 6)

## TAKING EXCEPTION

(continued from pg 5)

teach you everything, and remind you of all I have said to you" (14:26). A bit later in John, Jesus says, "When the Spirit of truth comes, [the Spirit] will guide you into all the truth" (16:13). If we believe the words of Jesus we will see that all truth had not yet been revealed to the disciples. We struggle prayerfully over Scripture texts, not because we want to make them more palatable, but because Jesus gave us the task of faithful discernment.

### Words of Assurance in the Midst of Disagreements

If we as a church affirm the blessing of same-sex committed relationships, if we affirm the ordination of partnered gay and lesbian people, who will we be? We will still confess our sins and hear God's gracious words of forgiveness. We will still proclaim our faith in the words of the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds. We will believe that the church is to be found where the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. We will baptize infants and adults, gather at Christ's table, support marriage, and bury loved ones in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. We will continue to trust Scripture as the source and norm for our lives.

But what can we say to those who fear the Bible has been abandoned? We can say what is true: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"---we still sing this glorious doxology to God for all that is and ever will be. We will continue to find ourselves in the poignant stories of our Genesis ancestors---sibling rivalry and jealousy, trickery and intrigue, barrenness and birth. Exodus is there, too, sustaining Jewish people through centuries of pogroms and holocaust, sustaining African-American slaves through lashings and lynchings. Sinai is still there clothed in smoke, the laws given on the mountain gathered up in the Great Commandments: Love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength; love your neighbor as yourself. Still we journey to the promised land, knowing that the promise is always tem-

pered by God's call to obedience and justice. There are violent stories we would rather forget, yet these stories are often interrupted by strangers like Rahab. Can you see the red thread hanging from her window, red as the blood on the doorposts of the Israelites' homes?

Still we weep with exiles carried off to Babylon---land gone, home gone, temple gone, hope gone, and future dried up. Yet the exile brought forth Israel's most glorious literature. The promises of exile remain with us in the midst of our own sense of loss---swords beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks; streams in the desert and flowers in the wilderness; comfort in exile; and an end to endless warfare. We hear words with our own names attached, "I have called you by name, you are mine" (Is. 43:1). Yet, these words always move us toward community, caring for the widow and the orphan, bringing the homeless poor into our house.

In the fullness of time, Jesus was born. The Word of God became flesh, born of Mary, descended from a strange genealogy of women. Jesus, daring to proclaim, "The kingdom of God has come near to you" (Luke 10:9)---even in the heart of Caesar's empire. Jesus, anointed by God's Spirit to bring good news to the poor and release to the captives. Jesus, feeding people, healing people---no one unclean, no one cast aside. Jesus, faithful unto death, even death on a criminal's cross. Jesus, not bound by death nor destroyed by evil. "He has been raised; he is not here. . . he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him" (Mark 16:6-7)---that is, go home! Some did see Jesus and many who didn't see believed the story. On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit Jesus had promised descended on them in a rush of wind and fire. The young church---small, scared, living under domination---moved out beyond Jerusalem to the very ends of the earth, surprised at every turn. An Ethiopian eunuch is baptized on a desert road, where there shouldn't have been any water! Cornelius and his whole household are anointed by the Spirit *before* Peter even had a chance to baptize them (so much for good church order)! All these stories are still there to surprise us and challenge our assumptions.

Paul's courage and passion are still there in his letters to the young churches. Can we hear his struggles as he fields questions about sex from believers in Corinth? Can

we memorize his words of hope and pass them on to our children?

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).

"Now faith, hope and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love" (I Cor. 13:13).

"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (I Cor. 12:27).

Finally, we come to Revelation's glorious promise: "See the home of God is among mortals" (Rev. 21:3). Look, there is the river of life flowing from the throne of God and from the Lamb. Look at the trees on the riverbank---their leaves are for "the healing of the nations"---not just one nation, but all nations. "Let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift" (Rev. 22:1, 2, 17).

This is enough for me. This is the word of our salvation. Go in peace. Serve the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Notes:

<sup>1</sup>Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, California: Crossing Press, 1984), 115.

<sup>2</sup>*Report and Recommendations from the Task Force for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Studies on Sexuality*, 10.

<sup>3</sup>*Report and Recommendations*, 10.

<sup>4</sup>Lewis Smedes, "Exploring the Morality of Homosexuality," in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*, ed. Walter Wink (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 78-82.

<sup>5</sup>John B. Cobb, Jr., "Being Christian about Homosexuality," in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*, 90-91.

<sup>6</sup>Martin Luther, "Preface to the New Testament" in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 117.

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## LAWS AND GOSPELS?

### Reflections on the ELCA Sexuality Studies Report

by Robert H. Smith

Back in February of this year, four faculty at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California, were asked to lead a community forum on the *Report and Recommendations from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality* (These presentations may be found online at plts.edu; click on “Faculty Responses to the ELCA Sexuality Task Force Report and Recommendations”). The four of us were Walter Stuhr, Emeritus Professor of Ethics; Martha Stortz, Professor of Historical Theology and Ethics; Gary Pence, Professor of Pastor Care; and myself. I am Professor of New Testament Studies, and I took it as my assignment to think especially about the biblical work used by the Task Force in reaching its conclusions.

Besides commenting on individual biblical passages or on the *Background Essays on Biblical Texts*, I tried to think again about that venerable Lutheran distinction, law and gospel. When my friend, Norm Theiss, invited me to write for *The Network Letter*, I thought that I could easily rewrite and expand my presentation for the February 23 forum. To that I have added here reflections on my own journey.

#### No Wholesale Change

*The Report* says that the members of the Task Force came to recognize that “the biblical-theological case for wholesale change in this church's current standards has not been made to the satisfaction of the majority of participants in the study” (*Report*, 10).

The four of us on the panel have spoken out not only in private but also in public, in the presence of all kinds of audiences, in oral and written presentations, advocating change for a number of years now. Wally Stuhr says he has been engaged in this issue for about thirty years; I don't know how far back Gary's and Martha's activities go, but my own probably goes back twenty years. Together the four of us may have logged about eighty or ninety years of study and thought, of speaking and writing.

We are, I think, clever people, but what is the result of our efforts? Failure. Or we might take some small comfort in the word, “wholesale.” We have not made the case for “wholesale change” in ELCA policy,

but only for small, incremental change. I am, of course, referring to the Task Force recommendations and not to any success or failure we may have had in other venues.

#### Learning from Failure

I have been pondering what I should learn from my failure. *The Report* says that people opposed to blessings of same-sex couples and rostering of people in same sex relationships “most frequently base their position on 1) the biblical texts that condemn same-sex sexual conduct and 2) the biblical doctrine of creation” (*Report*, 22).

It is well known, but worth repeating, that biblical texts condemning same-sex activity are very few in number. I count one in Genesis 19 and two in Leviticus 18 and 20. That is all in the entire Old Testament. The New Testament has very few words about such activity in three passages: Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and 1 Timothy 1.

Professor Arland Hultgren of Luther Seminary and Professor Walter Taylor of Trinity Seminary jointly produced the document, *Background Essay on Biblical Texts*, as material for the Task Force and for study in the ELCA. I could be dead wrong, but from other writings of theirs I would say that Professor Hultgren leans in the direction of change and Professor Taylor does not. The document that they jointly produced is a fine, fair presentation of the meanings (plural) that various people are finding in the very few biblical passages that have anything at all to say concerning same-sex relations. Part of what they demonstrate by their discussion is that no one of these passages is exactly crystal clear, and it is a mistake to speak as though they are. The study of Professors Hultgren and Taylor presents a variety of exegetical options and opinions with which people in the ELCA are operating.

#### Beyond Dueling Texts

Here I need to admit a serious shortcoming in most of my previous reflection and speaking on this topic. It is not enough for a teacher of Bible like myself to comment on the six biblical passages or to add to those six some few other passages, like the story of creation or words of Jesus commenting on marriage and divorce, where he quotes the Genesis story. I do not know how useful it is to remind people that Scripture directs our attention to the needs of the poor hundreds of times more frequently than it speaks of sexual matters.

Something more is required, beyond counting passages and offering detailed treatment of individual passages informed by historical and lexical studies. Everyone involved in the current conversation comes to the Bible with certain presuppositions or assumptions about the nature of the Bible. Rarely do arguments about individual passages or charts full of statistics change anyone's mind. The arguments and the statistics are simply incorporated into pre-existing paradigms or assumptions. I find myself contemplating one such assumption.

#### Law(s) and Gospel(s)

Lutherans have, since Reformation times, used the language of “law and gospel” in defining the content of the Word of God. “Law and gospel” declare what it is that we Lutherans expect to find as we read the Bible or encounter the Word of God in any of its other forms.

The congregational study document, *Journey Together Faithfully: Study Guide, Part Two*, (pp 8-9), offers this statement: “For Lutherans, the meaning of Christ's life, death, and resurrection is spelled out in the relationship of law and gospel.” It then continues by attempting to spell out two of the so-called “uses” of the law: “God uses the law to reveal our sin, our estrangement from God and each other. The law also provides norms that govern life in this sinful world.”

*The Report* of the Task Force also speaks of law and gospel and notes two “uses” of the law: “Key to our understanding of the Bible is that it is centered in Jesus Christ and that it speaks to us in law and gospel. (*Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*, 2.02) The law not only accuses us of sin; it also points to God's will for humankind.”

As *The Report* continues in the next lines, it emphasizes not the accusatory function of the law (called by most theologians in our tradition “the proper use” of the law), but the usefulness of the law in organizing human communities. *The Report* says, “As Lutherans we understand that God's gracious concern is also present in the law, which expresses God's concern for life, health, good order, and community. (Deuteronomy 5:33) The sexual laws of Leviticus 18 have the same rationale. (Leviticus 18:5)” (*Report*, 11-12)

(continued on pg 8)

## LAWS AND GOSPELS?

(continued from pg 7)

I regard the traditional Lutheran distinction between “law and gospel” as useful, and I do not advocate ignoring or dismissing it. But, as I think about “law,” I find myself helped by what the study documents quoted above call the first or proper use of the law, that is, the law in its accusatory function. Less helpful by far is the insistence that the Bible, as law, provides eternally valid norms for the governance of human life in all times and places.

When Luther spoke of the law or the gospel, he was talking about his fundamental experience of God. When he spoke of law, he spoke of his experience of God as his enemy. To speak of God as enemy means to experience the universe as puzzling, threatening, or even terrifying. We are thrown into existence as men or as women, of the sixteenth century or the twenty-first century, as Germans or Americans, as inhabitants of the first world or the third world, as members of this race or that. We do not get to choose our ancestors, our race, our century, our social class, our tribe or nation. All of that is given; it happens to us without our being consulted.

Paul Tillich speaks of the anxiety of death, the anxiety of guilt, and the anxiety of meaninglessness. I find his analyses of the human situation to be useful. Tillich thought that the anxiety of guilt was the dominant or prevailing mode of anxiety in the late Middle Ages. Luther, before his evangelical breakthrough, certainly felt alienated from God. He experienced God as making impossible demands on him and then calling him to account and holding him responsible, declaring him guilty. Without success Luther tried all the church's strategies and practices for finding peace with God.

John Staupitz, Luther's spiritual director,

recommended Luther for the post of professor of Scripture at the young university of Wittenberg. In time, Luther declared, “Scripture is a mighty forest, and there is not a single tree in it that I have not shaken.” He did not shake in vain. As Luther studied the Psalms and the Gospels and the letters of Paul, he naturally carried his experience along with him into his studies. In Christ, in the story of Christ, which is the story of the whole of Scripture, Luther began to experience God not as enemy, but as marvelously and unceasingly affirming and life-giving, as sheer undeserved grace.

Law and gospel are words designed to articulate fundamental experiences of estrangement and guilt, of being lost on the one hand, and of being found and brought home, caught up into the life of our Creator, on the other hand.

But it is easy to go wrong in theology, as in politics. Many people in our context, when they use the language of law and gospel, seem to me to be saying laws and gospels. I have been alarmed to hear Lutheran people recite a line that someone is feeding them, “Well, the Bible is not just gospel; it is gospel *and law*.” They speak as though it were possible to take a pen and mark one large set of passages “gospel” and another set “law.”

**When it seems that the real interest of the speaker is not the mighty, crushing Law (big L) but the many ordinances and laws (small l), then I fear that we are on the way to trivializing what Luther meant by the Law in the phrase Law and Gospel.**

In such an approach the great singulars are replaced, perhaps unwittingly, by plurals. “Gospel” morphs into “gospels” and becomes a set of wonderful, astonishing teachings, for example, teachings about Noah's rescue in the days of the flood or of Jesus' coming among us with the power to heal lepers and restore sight and walk on water and multiply loaves and fish. Ah, these stories are the gospel truth and Christian faith means believing

that these things happened precisely as narrated. “Faith” comes to mean agreeing that the words of the Bible about Noah or Abraham, Moses or Jesus, are true in the sense of corresponding exactly with historical reality.

Instead of Law with a capital L, we get laws, plural, with a very small l. People begin to talk as though the Bible contains many laws, (small l). But when the discussion moves quickly from Law (big L) to

laws (small l), and when it seems that the real interest of the speaker is not the mighty, crushing Law (big L) but the many ordinances and laws (small l), then I fear that we are on the way to trivializing what Luther meant by the Law in the phrase Law and Gospel.

### The Manger in which Christ Was Laid

The study document, *Journey Together Faithfully*, has a sidebar with a famous Luther quote: “Here [in the Scriptures] you will find the swaddling cloths and manger in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points. Simple and lowly are these swaddling cloths, but dear is the treasure, Christ, who lies in them.” (*Journey*, 10)

Luther did *not* write: “I went to the lowly manger, made of wood and full of straw, and, lo and behold, to my astonishment there I found two great gifts: first of all the Christchild but then, digging down deeply into the straw, I discovered something in addition: aha, a big thick book of laws and ordinances, a treasure of rules and expectations. How I thank God for this guidance!” I repeat, that is not what Luther said.

### Rules

But aren't there rules in the Bible? Of course there are. Do we need rules in human life? Yes. We have laws established by our legislators in Washington; we have laws and ordinances of the State of California and of the city of Berkeley. We have twenty-five mph zones and seventy mph zones and there are penalties for infractions. We have parents who say, “You are only fifteen years old and, yes, you have to be home by ten o'clock.” Of course we have laws and rules.

But what is the status of the “rules” and “regulations” or “laws” (small l) that stand in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and elsewhere? Luther wrote that the laws written down in the Pentateuch, the laws and ordinances governing the lives of the ancient Israelites were designed for Old Testament times, and they are no more or less useful for them, no more or less divine, than the laws of the state of Saxony are for us (*What Luther Says*, comp. Ewald Plass, vol. II [St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1959] 773). What a remarkable, sensible statement. In similar fashion he declared, “Yes, the whole Bible is the Word of God, but we must ask whether any given passage is the Word of God for us (*What Luther Says*,

vol.III, 1474). Some of the rules are God's word to our ancestors only.

I would call it biblical-theological progress, if more of us in the ELCA could see that laws and gospels is not the same as Law and Gospel. But these arguments of mine are not likely to produce change. I can imagine them being welcomed by people who already agree with me and seek change in ELCA policies, and I can also, without difficulty, imagine these thoughts being ridiculed and dismissed by those who do not want change.

### My Journey

As I look back on my own journey, I remember very clearly arriving in Berkeley in 1983, after fifteen years in St. Louis. I cannot say that homosexuality was on my radar screen when I lived and taught in Missouri. But I was not in the San Francisco Bay area very long before I had to begin thinking about it. I remember sharing thoughts with my colleague Everett Kalin and with my friend Paul Schulze.

I soon discovered something more powerful than the give and take of "thoughts," as important as clear, hard thinking may be. When I relocated to Berkeley twenty-three years ago, I entered a culture different from the one I had left. I became a member of a large and vital congregation in San Francisco. It is a congregation that consists, I think, overwhelmingly of heterosexual people. I remember being greeted warmly there on my first visit by a young couple with a newborn child. At the same time, the congregation had the reputation of being marvelously open and welcoming to gays and lesbians. For the first time in my life I began to have significant contact with gays and lesbians. In this congregation they are open and candid about their sexual orientation, but they identify themselves above all as brothers and sisters in Christ. They teach Sunday School, sing in the choir, serve on the church council. One, who has become a particular friend of mine, was asked by a fellow choir member to be god-parent at the baptism of her infant child. My experience in that congregation has been most powerful and has caused me to revise my prior way of thinking. I now read those six biblical texts (and others!) through the lens

**I now read those six biblical texts (and others!) through the lens of my lived experience in the company of gay and lesbian fellow members of that congregation.**

of my lived experience in the company of gay and lesbian fellow members of that congregation.

Some years ago Tim Lull, at that time the newly installed president of our seminary, returned from a conference in Chicago. He reported meeting a number of people for the first time, one of whom said to him, "Oh, you're the president of that homosexual seminary." Tim replied, "If we have many homosexuals in the San Francisco Bay area, it is because you have driven them out, in spite of their being your own baptized and confirmed children." Tim liked to describe San Francisco and some other urban centers as "cities of refuge," places where our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters in Christ can feel safe and welcome, as all should be in our congregations and schools.

As I look back on my last twenty years, I realize that careful interpretation of biblical texts has been important to me. But something else has been decisive: the experience of living, breathing human beings who, like all of us, desire to live their lives as disciples of Jesus

Christ. These brothers and sisters are frustrated in their spiritual journeys by the rebuffs and rejections visited on them by the very church in which they came to faith.

What is the way ahead? Given the fact that our whole nation is fixated on matters sexual, it may seem as though sex were the totality of Christian ethics. I do not expect "wholesale change" in ELCA policies this summer or any time soon. But I can dream, and I would love to be surprised.

*Ordained in 1959, Robert H. Smith served as pastor at Chappaqua, New York (1959-1968) and then taught New Testament at Concordia Seminary (1968-1974) and at Christ Seminary-Seminex (1974-1983) in St. Louis, and at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California (1983 to the present). By his first wife Meta, who died in 1991, he has three grown daughters. He is now married to the Rev. Donna Duensing. His email address: rsmith@plts.edu*

### ELCA VOTES

*(continued from page 1)*

began. That study is being analyzed again by our respective synods and then by the Churchwide Assembly. One thing is certain. Regardless of the outcome of the vote, my Christianity will remain intact. "IAMRU" for me means, I am a Christian; are you?

The most important characteristic of my being is my Christianity. God first, orientation second. All the rhetoric, argumentation, hateful language, and anti-gay resolutions that may be exchanged in the synodical and churchwide assemblies cannot change my Christianity. When I profess my faith in Jesus Christ, I do so because I was baptized and because I trust God's will to lead me to do what I can in the name of Jesus Christ. My Christianity must be the most important part of my life---not my sexual orientation.

The resolutions that are before the ELCA's synods and Churchwide Assembly this year will have an enormous impact on all the people of the ELCA. Regardless of the vote, some people may be compelled to leave their respective ELCA congregations for other denominations. But I will not. I have found in the Lutheran church a place that is comfortable for me to worship and a place where I believe the Lord truly is at work through people, like those who call Georgetown Lutheran their church home.

In the days, weeks, and months ahead, as we ponder and prayerfully seek God's direction in the matters of the Sexuality Studies, it is my hope that we will not forget our basic Christian characteristics, regardless of our sexual orientations. It will take more than a group opposing same-gender blessings and the opportunity for gay and lesbian pastors to have life-partners openly by their sides to change my views on Lutheranism and the good works done by the ELCA. But most of all, the vote will never change who and whose I am, a baptized child of God.

*Phillip A. Gaines  
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## PREPARING FOR POST-ORLANDO: LLGM SEEKS BOARD MEMBERS

by Lynn Mickelson

Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries (LLGM) is seeking dynamic leadership for its board of directors, as it enters an exciting period of growth and expansion. "Regardless of the outcome of the [ELCA] Churchwide Assembly in August, we will have lots of work to do," says co-chair Greg Egertson. "The Extraordinary Candidacy Project (ECP) has grown significantly in the last few years and we are anticipating a surge in interest and growth following Orlando (site of the assembly)," adds co-chair Mari Irvin.

As a result, LLGM has committed itself to expanding its board of directors and hiring full time staff by 2007. To meet these ambitious goals LLGM is inviting applications from a diverse, nationwide pool to fill five board positions. Because of our shared commitment to justice for sexual minority pastors, LLGM especially wants to receive applications from Network members.

Since 1990, LLGM has provided financial, legal, and spiritual support to pastors, seminarians, and other rostered ministers who are prohibited from serving Lutheran congregations because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender and will not disavow their relationships and agree to lifelong celibacy.

LLGM's mission is to empower sexual minority people called to Lutheran ministry. Because LLGM believes that sexual minority people who are otherwise qualified for ministry should not be prevented from serving only because of their same-gender relationships, it has partnered with the ECP to ensure that the pastors and ministers we support are fully prepared. Each pastoral candidate certified by the ECP has met the same standards required by the ELCA, except for pledging celibacy.

According to Egertson, "LLGM has a hefty mission that offers challenging, but deeply rewarding work. In our experience, when a congregation calls a member of the ECP roster, spiritual renewal happens. People are empowered by taking a stand for justice and by honoring the gifts that sexual minority persons bring to ministry. The church becomes relevant again because it reflects the welcoming wholeness of God, rather than the condemnation and judgment that is all too common in our church and society."

For more information about LLGM and our current activities, please visit our websites, [llgm.org](http://llgm.org) and [goodsoil.org](http://goodsoil.org).

If you are interested in applying to serve on the LLGM Board of Directors, please contact me, Lynn Mickelson, for an application form at my address below. If you are unavailable to serve now but would be interested in joining the LLGM board in the future, please indicate your wishes and availability on the application form. If you are unable to serve on the board but interested in providing other volunteer support, please complete an application.

Lynn Mickelson

LLGM Board Recruitment Coordinator  
C/O MAP, 1400 Park Avenue, Minneapolis,  
MN 55404  
[LLGMAlert@aol.com](mailto:LLGMAlert@aol.com)

### BOOK REVIEW

#### **CALLED INTO MINISTRY:**

#### **To Be a Good and Faithful Pastor: Reflections Of A Partnered Lesbian**

by Mary Albing, Kirk House Publishers, 149 pages, \$13.60

reviewed by Elizabeth L. Malone

Congregational search committees, in reviewing the qualifications for pastoral candidates, are apt to ask, "Is the candidate a good administrator? How is she or he with the young people? Can this person help us meet our budget?" But congregations ought to ask, "Is this a person of God? Can he or she bring us closer to God?"

Mary Albing, in this personal book, wants to remind us what is important about ministering. She focuses her readers on what the pastoral calling is about---really hearing and seeing people as they are; having compassion; feeling sorrow, love, laughter, hope, and courage with and in the people of God. That she is a lesbian, with a lesbian partner; that she is divorced; that she has had personal struggles---these elements of her personal life, she wants us to know, are like the life experiences everybody goes through. She attempts to "normalize" being a lesbian, while, at the same time, acknowledging the issues and conflicts her sexual orientation has caused in the church she loves and to which she is committed.

Each of the chapters of *Called into Ministry* is a reflection on her ministry, followed by a

sermon. The reflections are not particularly well written, but the sermons at the end of each chapter are. The chapters have the themes mentioned above, but there is much overlap among the various elements of being called; I had to consult the chapter titles occasionally to remind myself which theme was supposed to be the focus. The anecdotes are sometimes apt, sometimes not, and little care is taken in making transitions from one story to another. In contrast, each sermon focuses on a Bible text and expands the meaning of that text through narratives and repetition, with a directness that makes it a powerful statement.

Despite its flaws, Mary Albing has something important to say. That message was reported by my father, a Lutheran pastor, as part of O. P. Kretzmann's sermon on the occasion of my father's installation in 1953. Both Kretzmann's sermon and Albing's book point to the need for the church to rediscover the essential qualities of ministry and ministers, and to assess candidates for the ministry on the basis of those qualities. Mary Albing's reflections reveal that she is a person of God and a faithful pastor.

Elizabeth Malone's email address:

[Liz5025@aol.com](mailto:Liz5025@aol.com)

### TO THE EDITOR:

When Katherine Hellier wrote, "So nothing has changed with these recommendations" (volume 14, issue 1, Lent 2005, 1), I recall thinking first that nothing can change until the August Assembly. The Assembly will decide which, if any of the current recommendations, or those made at the Assembly, will move us forward to embrace full inclusion or continue the perpetuation of second-class status for gay and lesbian Christians within the ELCA.

Further, if the current task force recommendations are voted on, and passed by a two-thirds or possibly majority vote, there will be a change. To be sure, the change will be inadequate; it will be one very small step toward a greater inclusion; it will not be enough, but it may be a change.

Most likely, Synods will become similar to Episcopal Dioceses in that some Synod Bishops will ordain Gay and Lesbian Pastors who, like us heterosexuals, will be expected to live faithful lives within the covenant of our relationships or live celibate lives if we are not married or living in  
*(continued on pg 12)*

# THE NETWORK FOR INCLUSIVE VISION

## Our Purpose

The Network for Inclusive Vision 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, that is, persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered, in the congregational life and ordained ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

## Who Are We?

The nearly 1,300 Network members are members of the ELCA, lay persons, seminarians, diaconal ministers, deaconesses, associates in ministry, professors, bishops, pastors --- fathers, mothers, spouses, 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. The names of Network members are listed on a public roster, which is shared with ELCA officials and can be found on our website: [inclusivenet.com](http://inclusivenet.com) (click on roster).

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 we seek the Spirit's guidance concerning issues around sexuality;
- to provide pastoral care for gay and lesbian people, as for all other members of the ELCA;
- to affirm committed and faithful same-sex relationships with appropriate liturgies;
- to change the current guidelines for candidates for ministry, 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 them and advocate on their behalf.

## Our Task for the 2005 Churchwide Assembly

The 2001 ELCA Churchwide Assembly authorized the church "to study homosexuality with reference to two issues: the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination, consecration, and commissioning of people in committed same-sex unions." The Task Force established for this study offered three recommendations, made public in January, 2005:

- 1) "... that the ELCA concentrate on finding ways to live together faithfully in the midst of our disagreement."
- 2) "... that the ELCA continue to respect the pastoral guidance of the 1993 statement of the Conference of Bishops" ("pastors and congregations should be trusted by this church to exercise the wisdom of discretion in their ministry to same-sex couples and their natural and congregational families").
- 3) "... that the ELCA continue under the standards regarding sexual conduct for rostered leaders as set forth in *Vision and Expectations* and *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*, but that, as a pastoral response to the deep divisions among us, this church may choose to refrain from disciplining those who in good conscience, and for the sake of outreach, ministry, and the commitment to continuing dialogue, call or approve partnered gay or lesbian candidates whom they believe to be otherwise in compliance with *Vision and Expectations* and to refrain from disciplining those rostered people so approved and called."

The Alliance, a coalition of organizations supporting change in the ELCA policy, has drafted a counter-proposal to be adopted by as many synods as possible as a memorial to the 2005 Churchwide

Assembly. It may be found on their website, [goodsoil.org](http://goodsoil.org).

## We need your active support in several ways.

- 1) We need your dollars. We must provide resources for all Assembly Voting Members and communicate regularly with them. Please send your donations to the Network Treasurer at the address below.
- 2) We need you to go to local meetings of your congregation, clusters, and synod to advocate for our cause. Do not worry about what to say; the Holy Spirit will guide you.
- 3) We encourage our members to volunteer to their congregations to become members of their upcoming synod assemblies, in order to support resolutions for full acceptance of gays and lesbians in our church, such as those on [goodsoil.org](http://goodsoil.org).
- 4) We need volunteers to go to Orlando to stand in silent vigil for change, to pass out fliers and to do the multitude of small, behind the scene tasks that this effort will require. To sign up as a volunteer, go to [goodsoil.org](http://goodsoil.org).

Do not sit back and assume that someone else will do it. We need the active involvement of every Member of the Network.

## Join us!

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

Members receive The Network publication, *The Network Letter*, three times a year.



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**TO THE EDITOR**

*(continued from pg 10)*

a faithful relationship with our partners.

In my opinion, the only possibility for moving forward within the ELCA is to persuade Synod Bishops to communicate a willingness to change the "may" to a "will" in welcoming same-sex committed partners into his or her Synod. Of equal importance will be for gay and lesbian partners who wish to be ordained to promise fidelity in relationships or celibacy in singleness.

Such proposals will represent a change, though, for many within the GLBT community, the change will not be adequate. The other option, as I see it, is to follow the lead of WORD ALONE, ironic though it would be, and establish a "non-geographical" synod that would, I hope, at least have some affiliation with the ELCA.

Yours in Christ,  
Russell Melby, ELCA pastor  
Iowa Regional Director  
Church World Service NCCCUS

**FROM THE PRESIDENT**

*(continued from pg 1)*

gather in Orlando. Goodsoil is making plans for each day of the Assembly. As soon as Monday, August 8, the vote could be held on the two-thirds rule for the passing of resolutions considered to be policy changes. Hearings on resolutions will be held on Tuesday, with voting possible any time later in the week. You will be able to access the daily schedule coordinating Goodsoil and Assembly activities online at [goodsoil.org](http://goodsoil.org).

We in The Alliance strategic planning circle are excited about the possibilities in Orlando. I hope you are signing up with the ELCA to be Visitors to this Churchwide Assembly (register online at [elca.org](http://elca.org)). Florida is thought of as hurricane country. I believe that this summer a different kind of mighty wind will be blowing there.

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**FAITHFULNESS**

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*participation by over seventy clergy members. He was considered ineligible for placement in an ELCA congregation because of its policy of requiring a pledge of celibacy from gay and lesbian pastors. First United Lutheran Church challenged this policy and was expelled from the ELCA in 1995 for calling him to be their pastor. University Lutheran Chapel has been censured by the ELCA for having called him.*

*He is a co-chair of Goodsoil, the coalition of advocacy and activist groups working to end officially sponsored discrimination against LGBT people within the ELCA; a member of the Steering Committee for Religious Witness with Homeless People; a founder of the Extraordinary Candidacy Project; the immediate past chair of the Homelessness Task Force for the Telegraph Area Association; co-chair this year of the University Religious Council at CAL Berkeley; and a Teaching Parish Supervisor for Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary.*

*His email address: [jrobertj@earthlink.net](mailto:jrobertj@earthlink.net)*

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