



Metropolitan Chicago Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Pastoral Letter in Response to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly

Saturday, August 22, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

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

Grace, mercy, and peace from God, and Christ Jesus our Lord. I am writing this from the Minneapolis Convention Center where the 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has made decisions about our life together.

In addition to passing the Lutheran Malaria Initiative, Funding of the HIV and AIDS Strategy, and Full Communion with The United Methodist Church, the assembly passed the Social Statement: "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" (as amended), and Ministry Policies Resolutions (1 and 4 as amended).

For many in our congregations, the issues surrounding human sexuality are of particular significance.

1. As I indicated, we have adopted a new Social Statement entitled "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" by a two-thirds majority.
2. Based on this statement, the assembly subsequently adopted several policy recommendations that create a possibility for our church to develop policies that will allow congregations to bless same-gender relationships, and to call openly gay and lesbian pastors who are in publicly accountable life-long monogamous relationships.

These decisions may evoke strong emotional responses. It is my hope that we can create a holy space where, as a synod, we can engage in faithful, thoughtful, respectful, and meaningful conversations about what these decisions mean for us together as we continue to witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our conversations on this matter will continue through the coming weeks and months, but I would like to offer several initial observations that might be helpful:

1. The actions of the assembly create options and opportunities - they do not demand change on a congregational level. If your congregation is already open and affirming toward people with a homosexual self-understanding, these decisions provide denominational support for your open and welcoming position.
2. If your congregation maintains a more established understanding about attitudes and teachings concerning human sexuality, nothing in these decisions requires any congregation to change its current practice or even its current teaching about human sexuality.
3. These decisions do not create new policies - they merely authorize the churchwide office to create policy changes. These changes will take time. The synod office will be providing an outline in a few days that will describe what our practice will be as we wait for the official policies to be developed.
4. The synod office will be working with conference deans to offer conversation forums where members of congregations can ask questions and raise concerns about these changes with me and the synod staff.
5. I am asking our congregations and parishioners to give time for conversation and reflection before making any moves that might change your relationship with the ELCA. Know that we are going to work hard to leave room for differences of local practice based on the notion of bound conscience.

I am sure many of you have been following the proceedings, and I am grateful for the staff of the Lutheran Center for providing such thorough coverage. As a reminder, information is available online at www.elca.org. One of the blessings of our democracy is freedom of the press. I trust, however, that we will not let the media define what these decisions mean for us as a church.

I would like to close, in light of our decision to enter into Full Communion with The United Methodist Church, with the first verse of *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling* (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship Hymn #631*):

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heav'n, to earth come down!
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

As we gather for and participate in worship this Sunday, let us pray for the Church, listen to the Word, and receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, the Eucharist, that proclaims that God is for us in Jesus Christ.

In Christ,

Wayne N. Miller
Bishop