



## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

August 24, 2009

Dear Companions in Ministry,

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." (2 Corinthians 13:13)

Over the past few years, we have been in regular communication with you as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America engaged in a churchwide study of matters relating to human sexuality, which would lead to decisions at our 2009 Churchwide Assembly. As the time of the August assembly in Minneapolis, Minnesota, approached, our whole church engaged in 50 days of focused prayer for the ELCA, for those attending the assembly, for decisions that would be made, and for faithfulness in discerning those directions to which God is calling our evangelizing church in mission and service for the sake of the world. Each day ELCA members joined together to pray: "O God, you open the hearts of your faithful people by sending into us the light of the Holy Spirit. Direct the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by the light of that Spirit, that we might have a right judgment in all things and rejoice at all times in your peace; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen."

We thank you for also surrounding our church with your prayers during this time. These prayers have been deeply appreciated.

Our Churchwide Assembly concluded its deliberations on Sunday, and we wanted to share with you as soon as possible the outcome of the assembly's deliberations.

Statement on Human Sexuality. In February 2009 we sent you the results of our multi-year study of human sexuality, a proposed social statement: *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*. Valuing your perspectives and knowing that we are part of a global communion that is wider than the ELCA, we invited you to share your response with us and with the ELCA bishops of your companion synods.

*Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* is a theological and teaching document that builds on the key Lutheran principles of justification by grace and Christian freedom to serve the neighbor. It emphasizes that central to our vocation, in relation to human sexuality, is the building and protection of trust in relationships. It therefore affirms that we are called to be trustworthy in our human sexuality and to build social institutions and practices where trust and trustworthy relationships can thrive. The social statement addresses marriage, same-gender relationships, families, protecting children, friendships, commitment, social responsibility and moral discernment. Regarding same-gender committed relationships, the social statement says that this church is not in agreement and recognizes the different perspectives which are present among us.

On August 19, 2009, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly discussed and adopted this statement by a two-thirds vote, 676-338. The assembly did not make any substantive changes from the version of this statement that was sent to you earlier. The full text of the final version of this statement is attached. This document and the implementing resolutions adopted by the assembly can also be accessed at [www.elca.org/assembly/actions](http://www.elca.org/assembly/actions).

Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies. After the statement on human sexuality was approved, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly engaged in long and prayerful debate on possible changes in

the policies that govern pastors and others who serve on the rostered ministries of our church. We shared with you in February these recommendations, which were developed by the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality. We appreciated the responses from many of our global companions that we received directly and those that were conveyed through the bishops of your companion synods.

The Churchwide Assembly has affirmed the task force's recommendations to make changes in churchwide policy documents that will make it possible for those in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders in the ELCA. The assembly adopted several resolutions, following a strong statement about how we will live together in the face of our disagreements:

- "RESOLVED, that in the implementation of any resolutions on ministry policies, the ELCA commit itself to bear one another's burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all" (adopted 771-230 as amended).
- "RESOLVED, that the ELCA commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support and hold publicly accountable life-long, monogamous, same-gender relationships" (adopted 619-402).
- "RESOLVED, that the ELCA commit itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church" (adopted 559-451).
- The fourth resolution the assembly adopted called upon ELCA members to respect the bound consciences of those with whom they disagree; declared intent to allow structured flexibility in decision-making about candidacy and the call process; eliminated the prohibition of rostered service by members in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationships; recognized and committed to respect the conviction of members who believe that the ELCA should not call or roster people in committed same-gender relationships; called for development of accountability guidelines; directed that amendments to ministry policy documents be drafted and approved; and stated that this church continue to trust congregations, bishops, synods and others responsible for determining who should be called into public ministry (adopted 667-307 as amended).

The full text of assembly's actions and related material can be accessed at [www.elca.org/assembly/actions](http://www.elca.org/assembly/actions). (Background information from the task force's pre-assembly executive summary and the full text of these four resolutions is also enclosed.)

As the assembly adjourned, we acknowledged that there continues to be disagreement within our church – and within our global Lutheran communion – about this decision. We will continue to be in a time of prayer and deep conversation within the ELCA – and wish to continue the conversation with you, as companions in the common mission God has entrusted to us. Once again, we ask for your prayers for us, and we invite you to share your thoughts in writing or when you next visit with us or our ELCA Program Directors.

While much time at the assembly was spent in discussions relating to human sexuality, the assembly also took several very important decisions on other matters, including:

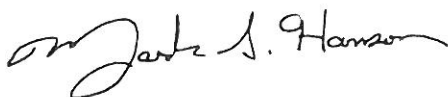
- HIV and AIDS. The Churchwide Assembly voted to launch a special, \$10 million campaign to implement an ELCA HIV and AIDS strategy that was approved by the ELCA Church Council earlier this year. Through this strategy, the ELCA joins many other churches in the Lutheran World Federation that are implementing churchwide plans to assist their congregations and all parts of the church to respond faithfully and effectively in the HIV and AIDS crisis. The assembly's action commits the ELCA to raise the funds needed to implement this strategy – and

to continue and expand the ELCA's commitment to support ministries of companion churches in other countries, as they respond to the HIV and AIDS crisis in their churches and communities.

- Malaria. A two-year pilot phase that could precede a major churchwide initiative to combat Malaria, in partnership with companion churches, was adopted by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. The assembly heard via video from Presiding Bishop Naison Shava of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, Mrs. Verna Mzezewa, a health care professional who serves as HIV and AIDS coordinator for the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa, and Bishop Ambrose Moyo, who heads the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa. These church leaders shared their views on how a Malaria emphasis, integrated with work on HIV and AIDS and tuberculosis and with community-based efforts to address poverty, would be a welcome extension of their ministries.
- Full Communion with the United Methodist Church. By a vote of 958-51, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted a full communion agreement with the United Methodist Church. This is the sixth full communion relationship for the ELCA – and the first for the United Methodist Church. Full communion means a common confession of Christian faith; mutual recognition of Baptism and sharing of Holy Communion; joint worship and exchangeability of members; mutual recognition of ordained ministers for service in either church; common commitment to evangelism, witness and service; common decision-making on critical matters; and a mutual lifting of condemnations that may exist between the churches.

Dear friends in Christ, for many years we have walked together sharing our resources and gifts for the sake of God's mission to the world. During our journey together we have learned from one another, held up each other in prayer, and built our capacity for mission and ministry. Once again, thank you for walking with and praying for us as we approached this important assembly. We look forward to continuing conversation with you related to the decisions that have been taken by the ELCA at its Churchwide Assembly – and pray that God will continue to accompany and guide us in the weeks and months ahead. Let the unity given us in Christ keep us together as coworkers and collaborators in God's mission to restore community.

In God's Grace,



The Rev. Mark S. Hanson  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



The Rev. Rafael Malpica Padilla  
Global Mission Unit  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Enclosures (3)

2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly Action: "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust"  
"Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust"

2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly Action: "Report and Recommendations on Ministry Policies" (together with background information from Executive Summary)