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October 19, 2009

Bp. Jessica Crist
Montana Synod, ELCA
2415 13th Avenue South
Great Falls, MT 59405

Subject: Walk the Talk of Welcome

Dear Bishop Crist:

Churchwide Assembly in August in Minneapolis was monumental in so many ways. And now we are "living into" that recommendation for policy change.

Paul and I, as Lutherans Concerned/North America Regional Coordinators for your synod, have worked in your synod for several years promoting the Reconciling in Christ program within your congregations. This program focuses on extending an intentional welcome to gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered (glbt) Lutherans. Churches that have this conversation find it helps them discuss other difficult issues, too.

The ELCA has now made a public stand on full participation of glbt people in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous relationships as rostered leaders in our church. We also realize that not all churches have had the discussion surrounding the welcome of glbt people and how the impact of policy change may affect their individual congregation. The "intentional welcome" portion of the RIC program becomes a way of assisting churches in having this conversation. There are several ways to begin the conversation in a congregation, but an effective way is to provide a gathering to present material to several congregations at one time. Once an individual congregation has this groundwork, we work with each congregation as they proceed with the discussion. There are people trained in your synod to lead this work. Of course, we will always welcome a congregation who takes the bold step to be Reconciling in Christ, but we believe the conversation which provides a basis for understanding is critical.

As you talk with congregations in your synod and plan your synod events, would you keep this discussion in mind. *Walk the Talk of Welcome* would be a great session at synod assemblies, cluster meetings, or pastor convocations to open a discussion of welcome to our glbt community; it is not designed for discussion about blessings of same gender relationships or ordination. Our goal is to help congregations with this discussion.

Lutherans Concerned/North America, Inc.

A Christian Ministry Affirming God's Love for People of All Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities

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In addition to the welcoming ministry, we work collaboratively with Rev. Chris Berry, convener of the Goodsoil legislative team, for positive acceptance in this region. We are delighted with the potential for policy change. We are excited to lend our assistance for further understanding within the Lutheran settings in your synod.

Blessings in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul + Karen Jolly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a plus sign between the names.

Paul & Karen Jolly
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