

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

August 2008

ELCA Synods renew their commitment to Scripture

Nearly two-thirds of the ELCA's 65 synods reaffirmed their commitment to Scripture and to reading and studying the Bible at their 2008 Synod Assemblies.

These reaffirmations came in response to a five-year initiative approved by the 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly called "Book of Faith: Lutherans Read the Bible."

Through a resolution approved by their synod assemblies, 41 synods made a commitment to become a "Book of Faith Synod."

Synods have committed themselves "to live in and from the Word of God in all our meetings, assemblies and events, so that as we regularly and increasingly hear, read, study, share and are engaged by God's Word, we lead by example in faithful service and holy living." The synods also asked their congregations to make similar commitments.

Synod assembly voting members were asked to "covenant together to begin a regular practice of Bible study and prayer, gathering with others in their congregation and/or community to speak and hear the Word from one another."

The resolution explains the purpose of this effort is "in order to become more fluent in the first language of faith — the language of Scripture — that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered, and sent by the Word."

"This is an initiative and not a program," explained Dr. Diane L. Jacobson, director of the Book of Faith initiative and professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. "It's really a matter of you taking the vision and deciding as a congregation how you're going to have Scripture become more a part of the culture of your congregation."

"The enthusiasm for the Book of Faith initiative is palpable," Jacobson said. "There is a groundswell of interest in this initiative. It's an enormous opportunity that we have."

Lutheran CORE is very supportive of this effort and all efforts to recommit the ELCA, its synods, congregations, and members to Scripture and to regular Bible study. Lutheran CORE's mission is to seek to preserve within the ELCA the authority of God's Word according to the Lutheran confessions.

The ELCA has a strong commitment to Scripture in its Confession of Faith which is included in the churchwide, synod and congregational constitutions: "This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life."

As the *source* of the Church's proclamation, faith, and life, Christians draw their understandings for faith and life from the Bible. As the *norm* of the Church's

proclamation, faith, and life, Christians look to the Bible to define what is a faithful interpretation of the Christian faith.

Lutheran CORE offers resources for studying and discussing the authority of Scripture that may be helpful to ELCA members and congregations especially during the "Book of Faith" emphasis.

These resources are available at www.lutherancore.org in the education resources section:

A Lutheran Statement on the Authority and Interpretation of Scripture in the Church explains the significance of the debate on the authority of Scripture in the ELCA and Lutheran CORE's commitment to the authority of God's Word.

Rightly Explaining the Word of Truth: A Bible Study on the Authority and Interpretation of Scripture, a five-session Bible study by Pastor Steven King of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Maple Lake, Minn.

Lutherans Approach the Bible, a summary of the confessional Lutheran approach to the authority and interpretation of the Bible by the Rev. Dr. Roy A. Harrisville III, pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Menomonie, Wis.

We encourage members of ELCA congregations to use these resources as a part of their continued study of Scripture and its authority.

Lutheran CORE Steering Committee makes plans for future

The Lutheran CORE Steering Committee met July 15 at Zion Lutheran Church in Brentwood, Pa.

Steering Committee actions included:

✚ Reviewed the five emphases of Lutheran CORE and efforts in each area.

✚ Discussed *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* and importance of submitting responses by Nov. 1.

✚ Discussed the need to encourage congregations that have stopped attending synod assemblies because of frustrations with the politics and theology of more radical synods to re-engage in their synod and the ELCA and to support our efforts.

✚ Planned to encourage Synod Councils to request that any change in ELCA ordination standards require a two-thirds vote.

✚ Received report on ELCA Church Council meeting and plans to have a Lutheran CORE representative attend Church Council meetings.

✚ Received reports from member organizations including WordAlone and LC3.

✚ Discussed fund-raising and need to coordinate fund-raising with member organizations.

✚ Received reports from Lutheran CORE Synod Coordinators.

✚ Received report on Lutheran CORE Advisory Council meeting. Advisory Council suggested consideration of a “confessing movement.” They also recommended drafting an Open Letter on sexuality draft. The next Advisory Council meeting is March 9-10.

✚ Discussed Lutheran CORE table at

ELCA Global Mission Event in LaCrosse, Wis.

✚ Discussed concerns over reductions in ELCA missionaries. A group is being formed to send missionaries. Lutheran CORE will work with both the ELCA and with alternative mission organization.

✚ Asked the Rev. Paull Spring to prepare a “pastoral letter” to Lutheran CORE constituency.

✚ Discussed plans for 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

✚ Discussed plans for Lutheran CORE gathering Sept. 25-26, 2009.

✚ Endorsed Sola Publishing and will encourage the use of its materials.

The next meeting of the Steering Committee will be Sept. 23 at Holy Trinity Lutheran in Abington, Pa.

Article by Lutheran CORE leader printed by Lutheran magazine

An article by the Rev. Paull Spring, chairman of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee, was printed in *The Lutheran* magazine for August.

Spring, the retired bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod, responded to a question that asked, “What’s at stake for Lutheran CORE and the ELCA?”

“My reply was that we in Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Reform) are concerned for the interpretation of the Bible as God’s word of law and gospel and for the confessional integrity of the ELCA as a Lutheran church body. I added that what truly troubles us in Lutheran CORE is the

question, ‘Who’s in charge of the church?’ Is it private opinion and the relativistic mood of the times — does the world set the agenda for the church or is it Scripture and the confessions of our church?”

“Biblical authority as God’s word of law and gospel is CORE’s chief concern. We hope Book of Faith, the current ELCA initiative to study the Bible, will move our church toward a more Lutheran approach to the Bible,” Spring wrote.

He also highlighted Lutheran CORE’s efforts to uphold the standard for marriage as a lifelong union of one man and one woman, traditional

Trinitarian language for God, evangelism, and global mission.

“We in Lutheran CORE pray regularly for our church and our synodical and churchwide leaders. We are neither liberal nor conservative — but centrist. We focus on the role of Scripture and confession. Most of all, with the Spirit’s help, we seek to lift up the work of Christ and his word for our church.

We could not obtain permission from Augsburg Fortress to reprint the entire article. It can be read online at http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article_buy.cfm?article_id=7316.

Bishop permits pastor to preside at same-sex marriage

An ELCA pastor in California will preside at a same-sex marriage with permission of his bishop, reports the *Ventura County Star*.

“In a fight where Scripture is often used against gay marriage, the Rev. Brian Elster says God is calling on him to preside over the wedding of two men,” the article says.

The July 4 article — headlined “Same-sex unions divide faithful: Pastors struggle to reconcile law with Scripture” — highlights the debate between traditional Christians and those who believe God supports same-sex sexual relationships.

Elster, 54, is the pastor of the Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer in Oxnard, Calif., near Los Angeles.

“Knowing he would be asked by two of his congregants to perform their marriage, he asked for the approval of higher-ups. He said Bishop Dean W. Nelson gave his OK as long as Elster’s own congregational leaders also approved it. That council met twice and voted to sanction Elster’s involvement in the wedding. It wasn’t unanimous,” the article reports.

“What it says is that there is a division in opinion in the congregation that reflects the division

of opinion in the community.”

“I’m going out on a limb. There are people who firmly disagree with what I’m going to do,” Elster told the reporter. “When it comes to two people who say they want to enter into a covenant of faithful commitment to each other, what should we do but stand up and applaud.”

Elster told the reporter “his role as a pastor is to recognize God’s presence in people’s lives. And if that presence is nurtured by the union of two people, it’s his job to bless that union.”

Newspaper: ‘A New Wave of Gay Seminarians’

In a July 16 story headlined, “A new wave of gay seminarians prepares to take the pulpit,” *City Pages*, an alternative newspaper in Minneapolis, told the stories of four students from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. — the ELCA’s largest seminary.

The story says that Lauren Wendt

heard a voice in church saying, “Go to seminary” and “You’re gay. Get over it.” Wendt later pursued a same-sex relationship and became a student at Luther.

Margaret Kelly is seeking ordination through Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries because she refuses to abide by the conduct standards for ELCA pastors. She is serving an internship at an ELCA congregation in Washington, D.C.

Brenda Froisland, a woman in a same-sex relationship, is serving as a lay minister at an ELCA congregation in Minneapolis. The 2005 graduate’s approval for ordination has been “postponed indefinitely” by the Minneapolis Synod awaiting a change in policy regarding the ordination of practicing gay and lesbian persons.

Also featured was Dustin Nelson, a Master of Arts student who is not seeking ordination.

German Lutherans do not elect gay bishop

The Rev. Horst Gorski, a gay activist, was one of two finalists to be the Lutheran bishop of Schleswig in northern Germany.

The election attracted significant media attention in Europe and North America. News reports suggested that the election of Gorski could result in a division in the Lutheran World Federation similar to that in the Anglican Communion.

The Rev. Gerhard Ulrich was elected bishop of the Schleswig Diocese, one of three dioceses of the Northelbian Evangelical-Lutheran Church. Ulrich defeated Gorski 77-56 in the July 12 election.

Even though news reports showed opposition to Gorski based on his sexual behavior, Gorski told reporters that homosexuality played no part in the vote. Rather, he said it was more of an urban-rural debate.

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Please copy and share
this newsletter widely.

Texas ordination defies ELCA teaching and policy

Lura N. Groen — a woman who was not approved for ordination by the ELCA because she refused to abide by ELCA standards for pastors — was ordained Saturday, July 26, at Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Houston, Texas. The congregation voted to call Groen on April 27.

The Rev. Arnold Tiemeyer, a retired ELCA pastor from Audubon, Pa., presided at the ordination. The Rev. Dr. Stephen Ray, a United Church of Christ pastor and professor at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill., preached.

“Calling someone who is not on the ELCA clergy roster is in violation of the congregation’s constitution (C6.03.c). It is also a breach of their covenant with the other ELCA congregations,” Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod Bishop Michael Rinehart wrote in a June 13 message to synod leaders. “Calling a pastor who is not on the ELCA clergy roster could open them up to disciplinary action.”

“She will not be considered an ELCA pastor . . . she would not be ordained into this church or any other church we are aware of,” Rinehart wrote.

“Accepting this call could jeopardize a future application to be on the ELCA clergy roster,” he said.

“We don’t know how the bishop will respond,” Groen said in a TV interview. “He has the freedom to not discipline us or to discipline us. That is his choice. He has spoken to me personally on a personal level and been very warm and welcoming.

“He has told the congregation not to expect discipline,” she said.

The ordination was planned as a media event with “a designated area for the press at the service” and time scheduled for media interviews. A \$100/plate fund-raising dinner was held following the ordination.

“To be quite honest, availability for press interviews just prior to the event and preferred seating for the press left me and others with the feeling of a publicity stunt,” Rinehart wrote.

This was the second unauthorized ordination of a person who refused to abide by ELCA standards for ordained ministers this year.

Three former ELCA bishops — the Revs. Darold Beekmann, Lowell Erdahl, and L. David Brown — were among the ELCA pastors who participated in the unauthorized ordination of Jennifer Nagel, a woman in a same-sex relationship, Jan. 19 in Minneapolis.

The participants in these ordinations have acted in ways that violate the ELCA constitution. The ELCA constitution states that “Ordained ministers shall be subject to discipline for . . . willfully disregarding the provisions of the constitution or bylaws of this church” (C20.21.01).

Neither woman was approved for ordination in accordance with the standards and process outlined in the ELCA constitution (C7.31.13).

Groen, a graduate of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, was “approved for call” by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries, an organization that “approves” the ordinations of individuals who refuse to abide by the ELCA’s standards for the sexual conduct of pastors.

Vision and Expectations — Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America explains: “The expectations of this church regarding the sexual conduct of its ordained ministers are grounded in the understanding that human sexuality is a gift from God and that ordained ministers are to live in such a way as to honor this gift. Ordained ministers are expected to reject sexual promiscuity, the manipulation of others for purposes of sexual gratification, and all attempts of sexual seduction and sexual harassment, including taking physical or emotional advantage of others. Single ordained ministers are expected to live a chaste life. Married ordained ministers are expected to live in fidelity to their spouses, giving expression to sexual intimacy within a marriage relationship that is mutual, chaste, and faithful. Ordained ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships.”

Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries reports that it “credentials and rosters qualified candidates of all sexual orientations and gender identities for ministry.” Its web site reports 38 “rostered clergy,” five people “approved for call” and three seminarians.

Some ELM-rostered clergy are serving as pastors in ELCA congregations in violation of ELCA constitutional standards. ELM reports that there have been 14 unauthorized ordinations of pastors in the ELCA’s 20-year history and one ordination in the Evangelical Lutheran in Canada.

The ELCA has more than 17,000 pastors and 10,000 congregations.

New California bishop challenges ELCA teaching and policy

A newly-elected ELCA bishop has been publicly challenging ELCA teaching and policy regarding same-sex sexual relationships since being elected bishop.

The Rev. Mark Holmerud was elected bishop of the Sierra Pacific Synod on April 26 and was installed as bishop on July 12.

Holmerud spoke at the Lutherans Concerned Assembly July 3-6 in San Francisco. Lutherans Concerned is one of the organizations advocating change in ELCA teaching and policy on same-sex sexual relationships. Lutherans Concerned is working for the acceptance of the sexual behavior of "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender" people.

The Lutherans Concerned Assembly included worship and workshops led by individuals removed from the ELCA clergy roster for misconduct and those ordained in defiance of church policy and procedure.

Holmerud also was a part of the Lutherans Concerned entry in the San Francisco "LGBT Pride" Parade on June 29. The parade is well known for extravagant displays of homosexuality.

"Bishop Holmerud and his wife Debbi rode on the back of a convertible leading a group of 45 Lutherans Concerned supporters," reported an internet blog that posted a photo of the bishop in the parade. It is believed to be the first time an ELCA bishop has participated in the event which celebrates LGBT sexuality.

In a June 13 letter regarding same-sex marriages in California, Holmerud explained that even though he

understands that ELCA teaching and policy does not allow an ELCA pastor to preside at a same-sex marriage, he does not "have intentions to bring charges for discipline against a pastor who chooses to solemnize a same-gender marriage."

At his installation service, Holmerud promised to "discharge (his) duties in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church and in harmony with the constitution of this synod."

According ELCA synod constitutions bishops are to:

✚ "Preach, teach, and administer the sacraments in accord with the Confession of Faith of this church" (*S8.12a*).

✚ "Practice leadership in strengthening the unity of the Church and in so doing:

"1. Exercise oversight of the preaching, teaching, and administration of the sacraments within this synod in accord with the Confession of Faith of this church;

"2. Be responsible for administering the constitutionally established processes for the resolution of controversies and for the discipline of ordained ministers, other rostered leaders, and congregations of this synod" (*S8.12h*).

Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America — the document that articulates the ELCA's expectations of its pastors — explains that individual pastors, congregations, or synods must be faithful to the teaching and practice of the ELCA:

✚ "Pastoral identity carries with it expectations and accountabilities that are determined by the whole Church and not simply by a given congregation, synod, institution, or agency served by the ordained minister.

"The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has high expectations for those who serve within the ordained ministry of this church. It does so because it recognizes that when offense is given by an ordained minister, the witness of the gospel may be impaired and the ability to carry out public ministry is threatened."

✚ "It is essential for an ordained minister to be able to understand and faithfully interpret the Scriptures and the Christian tradition. In this question the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America asks that its ordained ministers assume responsibility for upholding this church's doctrinal tradition through faithful preaching and teaching. All who have been ordained and who serve as pastors in this church are expected to accept and adhere to the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. . . .

"In identifying specific documents as normative for preaching and teaching, this church expects its ordained ministers to understand that the faith of the church is corporate, not individualistic; catholic, not sectarian; orthodox, not heretical. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expects that its ordained ministers teach nothing 'that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church' (Conclusion to the Augsburg Confession)."

Resources available to help in responding to sexuality draft

Lutheran CORE has provided resources to assist ELCA members as they respond to *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*. Lutheran CORE encourages ELCA members to submit a response to the statement by the Nov. 1 deadline.

Links to detailed reviews of the draft statement and to other helpful documents on human sexuality are available at www.lutherancore.org in the marriage and family educational resources section.

An Open Letter calling for major revisions to *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* was prepared by Lutheran CORE. ELCA members are invited to add their names to this Open Letter as a part of their response to the draft social statement.

The first draft of the social statement was released in March. You may request a copy by calling 1-800-638-3522, ext. 2996. Members of ELCA congregations have the opportunity to respond to the draft until Nov. 1. A response form is provided in the draft document. A link to the draft and to the ELCA's online response form is available at www.lutherancore.org.

Links to these resources are available in the marriage and family resource area of www.lutherancore.org:

✚ An Open Letter to the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality and the ELCA Church Council and Conference of Bishops.

✚ Lutheran CORE's summary response to *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*.

✚ A Response from Lutheran CORE to *Draft Social Statement on Human*

Sexuality by retired ELCA bishops Kenneth Sauer and Paull Spring.

✚ "Some Questions and Answers about the ELCA Sexuality Discussions."

✚ "Keeping Faith" — arguments that support upholding the biblical norms for sexuality.

✚ "A Critique of the *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*" by the Rev. Dr. Carl E. Braaten.

✚ "A Sexual Ethic for Teletubbies, or Lutherans Embrace a Formless World" by Dr. Robert Benne.

✚ "Some Critical Observations on the Use of Scripture in the ELCA *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*" by the Rev. Dr. Stephen Hultgren.

✚ Open Letter to the ELCA sexuality task force and the ELCA bishops about the *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*" by the Rev. Dr. Stephen Hultgren.

✚ "What Are They Talking About?" two reviews of *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* by the Rev. Jonathan Jenkins.

✚ "A Pastoral Letter on the Continuing Discussion in the ELCA Concerning Homosexuality" by the Rev. Tom Renquist.

✚ "The Bible and Sexual Boundaries" by the Rev. Dr. Craig R. Koester.

✚ "New Testament on Homosexuality: Denying God's Purpose" by the Rev. Dr. Walter F. Taylor Jr.

✚ "Law and Sexual Behavior" by the Rev. Dr. Gerhard O. Forde.

✚ "The Normative Character of Scripture for Matters of Faith and Life: Human Sexuality in Light of Romans 1:16-32" by the Rev. Dr. Gerhard O. Forde.

✚ "Is Orientation the Issue?" by the Rev. Dr. James H. Burtness.

✚ "Is it lawful to marry?" by the Rev. Philip Nesvig.

✚ "The Authority of Scripture in the 'Homosex' Debate" by the Rev. Dr. Robert A. J. Gagnon.

✚ "How Bad Is Homosexual Practice According to Scripture and Does Scripture's Indictment Apply to Committed Homosexual Unions?" by the Rev. Dr. Robert A. J. Gagnon

✚ "The Bukoba Statement" by the Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

✚ "Sexuality: Some Common Convictions," ELCA Church Council Message (1996).

✚ "Vision and Expectations — Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America."

✚ "Sex, Marriage and Family," A Social Statement of the Lutheran Church in America (1970).

✚ "Human Sexuality and Sexual Behavior," a Social Statement of The American Lutheran Church (1980).

✚ "Teachings and Practice on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage," a Social Statement of The American Lutheran Church (1982).