

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

February 2009

ELCA sexuality recommendations to be released Feb. 19

On Thursday, Feb. 19, the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality will release its proposed text of an ELCA social statement on human sexuality and its recommendations on whether the ELCA should change its teaching and policy to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships.

The Task Force's policy and social statement recommendations will be made available to pastors and other rostered leaders a day earlier through a special web site.

Lutheran CORE will respond to the social statement text and the Task Force's policy recommendations. An initial response will be available at www.lutherancore.org on Feb. 19.

Lutheran CORE's web site has a significant collection of links to documents on the Bible and human sexuality including responses to the *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*. Responses to the revised statement and the Task Force's roster recommendations will be posted to the web site as they become available.

The Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality met Jan. 23-25 to complete its work on a possible social statement on human sexuality and on a request by the 2007 Churchwide Assembly "to address and to make recommendations to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly on changes to any church policies that preclude practicing homosexual persons from the rosters of this church."

The ELCA's sexuality study time line reports that this was the task force's "final meeting."

It's not too late to affect ELCA sexuality decisions

ELCA members still have two opportunities to shape the social statement text and the content of proposals regarding standards for pastors and other rostered leaders that will be considered by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

The ELCA Church Council will decide the form of the proposals that will be considered by the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly and may edit the proposed social statement and other Task Force recommendations.

Synod Councils may respond to the Task Force's social statement and policy recommendations and offer advice to the ELCA Church Council through resolutions prior to the council's March 27-30 meeting.

ELCA bishops will meet March 5-10 and may respond to the social

statement text and recommendations on ELCA rostered leader standards.

ELCA members are encouraged to communicate with their Synod Council members and synod bishop about the text of the social statement and about whether the ELCA should change its behavior standards for pastors and other rostered leaders.

On Thursday, April 2, the social statement text recommended by the ELCA Church Council will be released online. The Church Council's policy recommendations will also be released that day.

ELCA Synod Assemblies have the opportunity to respond to the Church Council's recommended social statement text and its recommendations regarding standards for pastors and other rostered leaders

through memorials and resolutions.

Lutheran CORE will provide possible resolutions for Synod Councils to send to the ELCA Church Council and possible memorials for Synod Assemblies to address the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Lutheran CORE has prepared resolutions asking that a two-thirds majority vote be required for any changes to church teaching and policy that would allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships. The model resolutions are available online at www.lutherancore.org.

Resolutions and memorials directly addressing the statement text and roster recommendations will be produced after the statement and roster recommendations are released.

Lutheran CORE resolutions ask for two-thirds majority

Lutheran CORE has produced model resolutions to help ELCA Synod Councils and Synod Assemblies to ask that a two-thirds majority be required to change church teaching and policy to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships.

The resolutions must be proposed locally following the rules for your synod. We encourage you to work with others in your area to bring these resolutions to your Synod Council and Synod Assembly.

At its Nov. 15-17 meeting, the ELCA Church Council voted to delete a proposed rule which would have required “any motion to come before this Churchwide Assembly regarding changes in this church’s current policy and practice for the rostering of ordained ministers, diaconal ministers, associates in ministry, and deaconesses shall require a two-thirds vote by the assembly for adoption.”

The two-thirds majority requirement was a part of the rules of procedure recommended by the ELCA Church Council’s Constitutional and Legal Committee. The Church Council voted 19-10 to delete the two-thirds majority requirement.

The model resolutions from Lutheran CORE ask that the two-thirds majority recommendation to change standards for pastors and other rostered leaders be reinstated in the rules of procedure for the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

The resolution for Synod Councils asks the ELCA Church Council to reinstate the two-thirds majority recommendation. The ELCA Church Council will meet March 27-30 and could restore the two-thirds majority rule at that time.

The resolution for Synod Assemblies memorializes the ELCA Churchwide Assembly to add the two-thirds majority requirement to its rules of procedure. The 2009 Churchwide Assembly will adopt its rules of procedure and could add the two-thirds majority requirement at that time.

The resolutions note that a two-thirds majority vote is usually required for major decisions including the adoption of an ELCA social statement and for amendments to the ELCA constitution and bylaws.

They also note that a decision to change church teaching and policy to

allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships holds the potential to be very divisive in ELCA synods and congregations and to cause both membership and financial losses for synods and congregations.

A super majority vote — such as a two-thirds majority — would require an overwhelming majority of Churchwide Assembly voting members to make such a significant change to church teaching and practice.

The 2007 Churchwide Assembly voted “to direct the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality specifically to address and to make recommendations to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly on changes to any church policies that preclude practicing homosexual persons from the rosters of this church.” The Task Force’s recommendations will be released on Thursday, Feb. 19.

Given the divisive nature of these proposals, a two-thirds majority to make a significant change in church teaching and policy would be best for the sake of the unity of the ELCA.

Lutheran CORE’s model resolutions are available at www.lutherancore.org

Lutheran CORE planning tables for 2009 Synod Assemblies

Lutheran CORE is planning to have information tables at 2009 ELCA Synod Assemblies. We are seeking volunteers in each of the ELCA’s 65 synods to help with the display table for their Synod Assembly.

“We presently have 24 synods covered. I’m excited. This is proving to be a great way to get the word out

about Lutheran CORE and other reform work going on in the ELCA, and to let people know that we are a national movement,” said the Rev. Mark Braaten, pastor of Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church in Tyler, Texas, who is coordinating the project. “I’m hoping we can have display tables in at least 30 or more synods.”

Lutheran CORE will provide the resources for the table and will cover any charge for the table by synods.

If you have any questions about this project or if you are willing to help with a Lutheran CORE table for your Synod Assembly, please contact Pastor Braaten at 903-561-1865 or oslc@suddenlinkmail.com.

Steering Committee discusses Lutheran CORE's future work

The vision for the future of Lutheran CORE was the primary topic of discussion when the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee met Jan. 26-27 at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio.

The vision includes plans for Lutheran CORE to expand its work as a network of individuals, reform groups, congregations, and synods within the ELCA. The network will focus on strengthening congregations and synods so that the confessional Lutheran witness to the authority and sufficiency of God's Word is upheld in North America.

There is strong agreement that Lutheran CORE needs to expand its network regardless of the decisions

made by the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. A Steering Committee subcommittee will finish the writing of the plans for this vision this month.

Some parts of the plan will be implemented in the next few months, but the major kick-off for the vision will be at a convocation for Lutheran CORE members Sept. 25-26 at Christ the Savior Lutheran Church in Fishers, Ind.

In other work, the Steering Committee developed plans for a DVD that will introduce Lutheran CORE to ELCA members; planned Lutheran CORE's annual gathering April 27 at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minn., and planned for Lutheran CORE's presence and

involvement at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly Aug. 17-23 in Minneapolis.

The Steering Committee expressed its thanks for the strong financial support from its members last year. Gifts from individuals, congregations and reform groups enabled the coalition to raise the necessary funds to end the year in the black and to more fairly reimburse the WordAlone Network for the services that it has provided to Lutheran CORE.

The coalition's involvement at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly means there will be substantial expenses this year, so the Steering Committee hopes that Lutheran CORE supporters will be able to meet that challenge.

Please support the ministry of Lutheran CORE

Lutheran CORE leaders have been very encouraged by the significant support received at the end of 2008.

Lutheran CORE is planning extensive ministry leading up to and during the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. These efforts will result in significant expenses.

Lutheran CORE is counting on those who remain committed to the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of the church's proclamation, faith, and life to continue to support Lutheran CORE in 2009 as ELCA members must respond to those who are asking the church to change its teaching and policy on human sexuality.

Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Reform) is a coalition of individuals, congregations and reform movements

in the ELCA. Lutheran CORE seeks to be a voice for the solid, faithful core that is the majority of ELCA members, pastors, and congregations.

Lutheran CORE is grateful for your prayers and support. As a grassroots organization, we are constantly looking to partner with those who wish to work together for positive reform in the ELCA. Lutheran CORE is a way for us to work together toward our common goals.

Lutheran CORE depends on financial support from those who share our commitment to work for positive reform in the ELCA. You may give online at www.lutherancore.org or send gifts to:

Lutheran CORE
c/o WordAlone Network
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202

Please make checks payable to the WordAlone Network and indicate that your gift is for Lutheran CORE on the memo line.

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Please copy and share
this newsletter widely.

“Faithful Journey” or “Will We Be Found Faithful?”

*By Pastor Dan Selbo
St. Timothy Lutheran Church
San Jose, Calif.*

The Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality is now in the process of revising its *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality*. Having asked for response from congregations, members and agencies of the ELCA, to be submitted by November 2008, the Task Force has committed itself to revise the draft document and to present its revision on Feb. 19. At that time, the Task Force will also be making recommendations regarding homosexuality and ministry. Specifically, it will be recommending whether to change the current ordination standards for clergy “that preclude practicing homosexual persons from the roster of this church.”

Once the final draft is submitted, along with the accompanying recommendations, ELCA members will have opportunity to respond to the final draft and the recommendations by submitting resolutions to their respective Synod Assemblies. The results of those resolutions will be passed on to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly as information to be considered. The ELCA Conference of Bishops will also be offering their input to the final draft, along with their own recommendations, as will the ELCA Church Council. The Churchwide Assembly is scheduled to adopt, revise, or reject the Social Statement and the recommendations brought forward at the 2009 gathering.

Under the banner of “Journey Together Faithfully,” the ELCA has been on a journey that began at the 2001 Churchwide Assembly. And what a journey it has been! Seven years of study have taken place. Countless individual and collective hours have been given in the process. And

thousands if not hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent. If the time, energy and finance this journey has taken are an indication of its faithfulness, there is little doubt that these years have been well spent.

But the question we face in the ELCA is not so much whether the journey itself has been faithful. The question we face is whether the end result will be faithful. Will the results of these seven years, countless hours, and not insignificant financial investment produce a statement that is faithful to what God has said to us about sexuality? Or will they result in a journey that has been faithful, but a social statement that is not?

And so what is a Social Statement in the church? A Social Statement in the church is to be a theological and teaching document, designed to assist members in forming judgments on social issues. Social Statements offer a framework for moral discernment. They also set policy, guide advocacy, and become a public witness to the world. As a result, although not binding to individuals and congregations, they are important documents that represent our best understanding of what God has called us to teach and profess.

And so what has God called us to teach and profess? What has been our witness to the world in regard to human sexuality? Throughout its history, the Lutheran Church has uniformly and consistently taught that the gift of intimate sexual relations is one to be enjoyed exclusively within the bonds of marriage. The Lutheran Church has also taught that sexual relations outside of marriage, including same-sex sexual relations, are by nature sinful and to be resisted. And these uniform and consistent teachings are not unique to the Lutheran community. They are uniform and consistent throughout the

entire Church. And they are based upon the Christian community’s best understanding of the biblical witness we have been given.

Thus, in order to be found faithful, as it adopts a Social Statement on Human Sexuality, the ELCA will either have to uphold the standards and practices that have been part of 2000 years of Christian Church teaching and history, or it will have to provide sufficient scriptural basis for changing such standards and practices. Anything less will result in a church body that is unfaithful to its calling and unfaithful to the One it is called to follow.

In considering the specific questions facing the ELCA, it is important that we do not confuse the issues at hand. Some within the church today are advocating a new theological understanding of human sexuality in which same-sex sexual relationships would be treated like marriage. The argument set forth, in large part, is based upon human rights and justice and equality. And each of these is a good and valid and commendable trait and ideal to keep in mind. But the question facing the ELCA is not whether we should discriminate against, or condemn, or exclude gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender persons on the basis of sexual orientation or gender. (That’s where the human rights and justice and equality arguments naturally lead.) The question facing the ELCA is whether it should bless or condone a type of conduct (same-sex sexual relations), based upon its understanding of Scripture that the Christian Church has taught, throughout its history, to be sinful.

The Lutheran Confessions state the following about the Bible and its authority for the Church. From the

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Found Faithful?

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Formula of Concord: “We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only *rule* and *norm* according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged. . . . Other writings of ancient and modern teachers, whatever their names, should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture. Every single one of them should be subordinated to the Scriptures and should be received in no other way and no further than as witnesses to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic times.”

The ELCA Constitution states the same (Chapter 2. Confession of Faith. Article 3): “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.”

If we are to be found faithful in the process of our journey that leads to a social statement on sexuality, the Bible must continue to be the *source* and *norm* of what we teach and believe. It needs to be at the heart of our witness to the world. It needs to remain as the heartbeat of the life we share together.

As its *source*, the statement must be built upon what we have been given in Scripture. What we teach and believe about marriage, family, sexuality, homosexuality, etc. must be clearly supported by the biblical witness. It must move from biblical interpretation to practical application. And it must never waiver from that commitment.

Now, certainly, other sources may and, perhaps, need to be considered (such as science and psychology) in understanding the sexuality issues

involved, and in coming to a healthy and helpful response to the people we are called to serve. But the Bible must remain the primary source of what we teach and believe.

In the same way, the Bible must also serve as the *norm* for our teaching. A *norm* is a standard or a guideline or a boundary. The Bible must be the standard or the guideline or the boundary by which we live. The Bible must also be the standard or the guideline or the boundary for the social statement we adopt. If it is, then we will have something to offer and say to the world that is uniquely Christian and Christ-centered. If it is not, then what we teach and believe will be at best a departure from, if not a betrayal of, the biblical witness we have been given.

Early in October, during the time when representatives of the ELCA Task Force were traveling throughout the country to listen to responses to the Draft Social Statement, I attended one of the hearing sessions in my own synod. It was a relatively small gathering — about 30 of us in attendance. And because of the setting in which I live (Sierra Pacific Synod), I was not surprised that I was one of only two, advocating for the Church’s teachings on homosexuality and ministry to remain as they currently are and have been throughout its history.

What surprised me, however (in fact, what saddened me), was that I was one of only two who argued for the Scriptures, the Law (as it convicts and points us to Jesus) and the Gospel (as it forgives and gives new life), to be the basis for our Social Statement on Human Sexuality. Every other argument was an argument for human rights, justice, and equality — arguments that confused the real issues and questions we face. Every other argument was one that chose not to use the Bible as the *source* and *norm* of what we teach and believe. And every argument was one that represented a

departure from, if not a betrayal of, the biblical witness we have been given.

Throughout the seven years of our “faithful journey,” as we have been working through a process that will result in a Social Statement on Human Sexuality, we have had sexuality standards in place for our clergy, based upon our best understanding of what the Bible teaches. But those standards have too often been dismissed by the very ones charged with upholding them. We have also had policies in place, by which we have agreed to abide, that have been regularly and intentionally disregarded by pastors and bishops advocating for change. In the same way, we have teachings in the ELCA that are supported by the Scriptures. But the arguments set forth for changing them, have something else as a foundation in mind.

And so the question remains . . . as does the final answer. Has the journey been faithful? I do not know. We have certainly invested a good amount of time, energy, and resources to come to the place where we now are. We have a draft statement, now in the process of being reworked. We will soon have a final statement and recommendations in hand. And a vote will be taken that will adopt, revise, or reject the statement and the recommendations presented.

If those investments and those upcoming actions are an indication of faithfulness, then perhaps it has been a faithful journey. But faithfulness to a journey is not the question. Faithfulness to Christ and to the witness of Scripture is what is at stake. And I hope and I pray, for the sake of the ELCA and its witness to the world, that we get the answer right.

Reprinted from “FOCL Point,” the newsletter of Fellowship of Confessional Lutherans. FOCL is one of the member organizations of Lutheran CORE. For more information on FOCL go to www.foclnews.org.

Unconstitutional ordination takes place in Philadelphia

Steve Kaiser — a man who was not approved for ordination by the ELCA because he refused to abide by ELCA standards for pastors — was ordained Sunday, Jan. 25, at Lutheran Church of the Holy Communion, an ELCA congregation, in Philadelphia, Pa.

Kaiser had served the congregation as lay staff, but the congregation voted on Dec. 8 to call him as a pastor and to ordain him. The Rev. Karen L. Hart, an ELCA pastor, is pastor of the 400-member church.

Several ELCA pastors were among 40 vested clergy who took part in the service, according to an internet report. The Rev. Margaret Ainslie, pastor of Atonement Lutheran Church in Philadelphia, preached. Ainslie is an ELCA pastor.

The participants in these ordinations have acted in ways that violate the ELCA constitution. The ELCA constitution states that “An ordained minister shall comply with the constitution of this church” (C7.22) and that “ordained ministers shall be subject to discipline for . . . willfully disregarding the provisions of the constitution or bylaws of this church” (C20.21.01).

ELCA congregations must “agree to call pastoral leadership from the clergy roster of this church in accordance with the call procedures of this church except in special circumstances and with the approval of the synodical bishop” (C9.21).

“A congregation that maintains as its pastor an ordained minister who has resigned or been removed from this church’s roster of ordained ministers or that calls as its pastor one who has not been approved for the roster of

ordained ministers may be removed from the roster of congregations of this church by the Synod Council upon recommendation of the synodical bishop” (C9.23).

Kaiser was not approved for ordination in accordance with the standards and process outlined in the ELCA bylaws (C7.31.13).

Kaiser, a 1999 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 conduct of pastors.

Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America explains: “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. . . .

“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 39 “rostered clergy,” three seminarians, and two people “approved for call.”

ELM reports that there have been 16 unauthorized ordinations of pastors in the ELCA’s 20-year history and one ordination in the Evangelical Lutheran in Canada. Half of the unconstitutional ordinations have happened in the last three years.

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

Some of ELM’s 39 “rostered clergy” are serving as pastors in ELCA congregations in violation of ELCA constitutional requirements.

It is unknown what action Bishop Claire Burkat of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod will take in response to the actions of the ELCA clergy involved in the service and the action of the congregation in violating the ELCA constitution.