

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

July 2009

23 synods call for 2/3 majority for ministry standards

Twenty-three synod assemblies have voted to ask the voting members of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to support a two-thirds majority requirement for proposed changes to ELCA teaching and standards which would allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex relationships.

According to synod assembly results received by Lutheran CORE, synods supporting the two-thirds majority requirement for the ministry policy recommendation are: Allegheny, Central/Southern Illinois, Delaware-Maryland, East Central Synod of Wisconsin, Florida-Bahamas, Indiana-Kentucky, Lower Susquehanna, Northeastern Iowa, Northern Great Lakes, Northern Illinois, Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana, Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, Northwestern Minnesota, Northwestern Ohio,

Northwestern Pennsylvania, Pacifica, Slovak Zion, South Dakota, Southwestern Pennsylvania, Southwestern Texas, Upper Susquehanna, Virginia, and Western Iowa.

A proposal to change the assembly's rules of procedure so that a two-thirds majority vote would be necessary to change ELCA ministry standards will be brought before the Churchwide Assembly at its first session Aug. 17. The proposed rules of organization and procedure recommended by the ELCA Church Council require only a simple majority to approve the proposed ministry policy resolutions.

"We are pleased with the significant number of synods that are supporting a two-thirds majority requirement for the ministry policy recommendation," said the Rev. Paull Spring, chair of Lutheran CORE.

"Both the requests from the 23 synods and the deep divisions shown in synod assemblies argue for a two-thirds majority for these controversial changes," said Spring, the retired bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod. "A two-thirds majority should be required for the sake of the unity of the ELCA."

ELCA Secretary David Swartling has told synod assemblies that resolutions and memorials approved by synod assemblies regarding a two-thirds majority will be reported to the Churchwide Assembly prior to consideration of the assembly's rules of organization.

ELCA synod bishops overwhelmingly support a two-thirds vote requirement for the ministry policy resolutions.

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Gagnon to speak at Churchwide for Lutheran CORE

One of the leading experts on the Bible and homosexual behavior will speak at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Minneapolis.

The Rev. Dr. Robert A. J. Gagnon will be featured as a part of Lutheran CORE's efforts at the Churchwide Assembly. Lutheran CORE will host a presentation by Gagnon on Wednesday evening, Aug. 19.

Gagnon, a Presbyterian pastor, is Associate Professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological

Seminary. He holds degrees from Dartmouth College, Harvard Divinity School, and Princeton Theological Seminary. He has written extensively on biblical teaching on homosexual behavior. Gagnon is the author of *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* and co-author of *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*.

As a part of its work at the assembly, Lutheran CORE will provide devotions each morning and strategy sessions each night for voting

members who are working to uphold biblical teaching on human sexuality within the ELCA.

A Thursday evening session will feature a panel discussion on the work and future of Lutheran CORE and of efforts within the ELCA to uphold the authority of Scripture.

Lutheran CORE is seeking volunteers to assist with efforts at the assembly. To volunteer or for more information, e-mail info@lutherancore.org or call 1-888-551-7254.

Synod Assemblies divided on ELCA sexuality proposals

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The bishops voted 44-14 in support of a two-thirds majority in a straw poll during their March 5-10 Conference of Bishops meeting.

The deep theological divisions in the ELCA are evident in synod assembly votes — both in the vote totals at synod assemblies and in the different positions taken by different synods.

Fourteen synods have asked the Churchwide Assembly to reject the proposed recommendation on ministry policy which would allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex relationships. Instead, the Allegheny, Northeastern Iowa, Northwestern Minnesota, Northwestern Ohio, Northwestern Pennsylvania, Slovak Zion, South Carolina, South Dakota, Southern Ohio, South-western Minnesota, Southwestern Pennsylvania, Southwestern Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia-Western Maryland

Synods asked the Churchwide Assembly to affirm the ELCA's current standards in *Vision and Expectations* and *Definition and Guidelines for Discipline*.

Seven synods — Allegheny, North-eastern Iowa, South Carolina, South Dakota Synod, Southern Ohio, Southwestern Pennsylvania, West Virginia-Western Maryland — approved memorials asking the Churchwide Assembly to reject the proposed social statement. Instead, they ask the ELCA to continue to rely on its current teaching documents on sexuality: ELCA Messages *Sexuality: Some Common Convictions* (1996) and *Commercial Sexual Exploitation* (2001) and the social statements of the ELCA's predecessor churches, The American Lutheran Church and Lutheran Church in America.

The Western Iowa Synod approved a resolution affirming marriage as a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between a man and a woman.

Twenty-eight synod assemblies have voted to support both the proposed social statement and the ministry policy recommendation: Arkansas-Oklahoma, Central States, Eastern Washington-Idaho, Florida-Bahamas, Greater Milwaukee, Indiana-Kentucky, La Crosse Area, Metro Chicago, Metro New York, Metro Washington, D.C., Minneapolis Area, Montana, New England, New Jersey, Northeastern Pennsylvania, Northwest Washington, Oregon, Pacifica, Rocky Mountain, St. Paul Area, Sierra Pacific, South Central Synod of Wisconsin, Southeast Michigan, Southeastern, Southeastern Iowa, Southeastern Pennsylvania, Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast, and

Upstate New York.

The Eastern North Dakota Synod, Lower Susquehanna, North Carolina, and Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synods approved memorials in support of the proposed social statement.

The Grand Canyon and Northeastern Minnesota Synods approved a memorial in support of the ministry policy resolutions but did not address the social statement.

The Northern Great Lakes Synod narrowly approved resolutions in favor of the proposed social statement and Resolutions 1 and 3 of the ministry policies recommendation but rejected Resolutions 2 and 4.

Twelve synods approved memorials asking the ELCA to develop resources for blessing same-sex relationships: Metro Chicago, Metro New York, Metro Washington, D.C., Minneapolis Area, New England, Northeastern Minnesota, Northeastern Pennsylvania, Northwest Washington, St. Paul Area, Sierra Pacific, Southeast, and Southeastern Iowa.

Lutheran CORE was able to have information tables at 37 synod assemblies to share resources on the ELCA sexuality proposals and information about Lutheran CORE.

Memorials at synod assemblies are the way for ELCA synods to respond to the sexuality proposals and to communicate with the voting members of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

Lutheran CORE is also sending letters to voting members asking them to uphold biblical teaching on sexuality.

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Published monthly by

Lutheran CORE -
Coalition for Reform

2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112

www.lutherancore.org

The Rev. David J. Baer, editor
editor@lutherancore.org

Please copy and share
this newsletter widely.

More than 2,300 people add their names to Open Letter

More than 2,300 people have added their names to an Open Letter to the Voting Members of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly from prominent Lutheran theologians and church leaders. The letter asks the voting members to affirm biblical teaching on sexuality and to reject proposals to change church teaching and policy regarding marriage and same-sex sexual behavior.

The open letter was released May 19 and was mailed to the 1,045 voting members in June.

The ELCA Churchwide Assembly (Aug. 17-23 in Minneapolis) will consider a proposed social statement which would change church teaching on marriage and sexual behavior and a proposal to change ELCA standards to allow rostered leaders to be in same-sex relationships.

“The proposals are in fact no

compromise. They clearly imply that same-sex blessings and the ordination and rostering of homosexual persons in committed relationships are acceptable within the ELCA. The teaching of the church will be changed. We should not make such an important decision without clear biblical and theological support. The Task Force did not provide such support, nor has it been provided in statements from some of our colleagues in ELCA institutions,” the open letter states.

The letter offers five reasons why the proposals must be rejected.

Lutheran CORE brought together some prominent theologians and church leaders April 29 in Phoenix to draft the letter. Other scholars and church leaders were then asked to add their names to the open letter. More than 60 scholars and church leaders have signed the letter.

As of July 6, more than 2,300 people had added their names to a list of people endorsing the letter. Other ELCA pastors and lay members may add their names to the list of signers online at www.lutherancore.org. The open letter and list of signers are also at www.lutherancore.org.

Sept. convocation to focus on future

Lutherans from throughout the United States will gather in September in suburban Indianapolis to discuss the future for confessional Lutherans in the ELCA. Lutheran CORE is sponsoring a Convocation Friday and Saturday, Sept. 25-26, at Christ the Savior Lutheran Church in Fishers, Ind., which will consider possible responses to the biblical and theological crisis in the ELCA.

The convocation will focus on conversation around the theme “What after Minneapolis?” a reference to the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly Aug. 17-23 in Minneapolis. The ELCA Churchwide Assembly will consider proposals which would

change church teaching on sexuality and would overturn the way the Bible has been understood by Christians for nearly 2,000 years.

Lutheran CORE plans to strengthen and expand its mission and ministry. A constitution will be considered as part of the formal organization of Lutheran CORE.

Pastors and lay people who are committed to the future of confessional Lutheranism are encouraged to attend. Cost is only \$25 per person and includes dinner on Friday evening. Registration forms are available online at www.lutherancore.org.

Join the conversation!

What after Minneapolis?

*Is there a way to stay
in the ELCA?*

*What does the future hold
for those in the ELCA
who uphold
the authority of Scripture?*

Lutheran CORE 2009 Convocation

Sept. 25-26

Christ the Savior Lutheran
Fishers, Indiana
(suburban Indianapolis)



www.lutherancore.org

Two Theologies of Reconciliation

By Paul R. Hinlicky

In listening to the debate at my Synod Assembly in Virginia, an old insight returned to me with fresh clarity. Listening to the debate on a resolution to become a "Reconciling in Christ" Synod, I realized that the dispute before us is not an otherwise manageable disagreement about the interpretation of a few Bible passages within the framework of a common faith and confession. What the debate about accepting homosexuality reveals is that, in fact, we in the ELCA are conflicted about what the gospel is and what it means for us today.

As I listened, I heard two contending, if not conflicting, theologies of reconciliation sounding out. According to the first, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them. The reconciliation pertains first of all to the Holy God and sinful humanity in preparation for the coming of His Reign and is thus truly but as yet imperfectly realized in the fellowship of penitent but believing sinners in the church militant. Here, all who are contrite, confessing rather than protesting their sins, are welcomed and included, until the Kingdom comes in fullness and power from above to make us whole. In the interim, by the grace of the Spirit, we master sin and are no longer mastered by it, living by the forgiveness of sins.

According to the second, God is progressively realizing through human history more and more inclusive forms of fellowship, overturning the prejudices, bigotries, and stereotypes of the past. Here, all who have been stigmatized are

welcomed and included with the good news that they are accepted just as they are, since as such they have been created by God. In this theology of reconciliation, the historical Jesus is the prophet of radical welcome, and accordingly the authentic church of Jesus is the vanguard of progressive history, leading secular society on to its divinely intended destiny. So it is imperative that the church itself manifest such perfect welcome in its own ranks, to show society the way forward, by the full inclusion of gay and lesbian persons.

*We in the ELCA
are conflicted about
what the gospel is
and what it means
for us today.*

Version One, which is classical Lutheran and Augustinian theology, can include aspects of Version Two, but Version Two, if taken as normative, excludes Version One. Version Two is classical Liberal Protestantism. Let me explain.

At its best, Version One also strives for inclusion according to the movement of history. It is not stand-pat conservatism, since its Trinitarian conviction is that this here-and-now-of-history is our Father's world. Therefore faith itself requires us critically to receive the insights and discoveries of our own age as the ongoing creative work of the Father of Jesus Christ. We have to

think of creation, not as a static stage once erected in the dim past and now to be preserved at all costs against any change, but rather that creation itself groans for fulfillment in "the glorious liberty of the sons of God," and that in the course of events (also outside the Church!), God our heavenly Father is active to move the wayward creation onward to its divinely intended destiny.

Thinking this way, we can critically receive innovations like the democratic revolution, post-Copernican cosmology, or the emancipation of women as works of our heavenly Father. Thus, the Church is ever free to modernize: obedience to temporal authority under our conditions means political participation in the democratic process, creation faith now contemplates the Big Bang and the evolution of species, ordination in the Church includes otherwise competent women presenting themselves for service to Word and Sacrament. Likewise we can receive the scientific insight today that much homosexuality is experienced as a spontaneous and incorrigible orientation. For many it is not a choice but a condition. We can thus, under carefully considered conditions, recognize though not bless with the blessing of Genesis 1:26-28 (cf. Mark 10:2-12) same-sex couples. We can modernize in such ways because, according to faith, this is our Father's world.

But Version Two, carefully thought out and rigorously taken, excludes Version One. It regards the separated existence of the Holy Church with its exclusive claims (Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone from the Scriptures

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Anglican Church in North America is constituted

Anglicans from throughout North America gathered June 22-25 in Bedford, Texas, to formally constitute the Anglican Church in North America. The new denomination unites some 100,000 Anglicans in 700 parishes into a single church — including many congregations and four dioceses that have left The Episcopal Church.

“It is a great day because working together we have been able, by God’s grace, to reunite a significant portion of our Anglican Church family here in North America,” said Bishop Robert Duncan of Pittsburgh who was elected as the ACNA’s first archbishop.

“We are in the process of being recognized by and partnering with churches around the world,” Duncan said. “Just the other day, the Church of Uganda recognized our new province.” The Anglican Church of Nigeria also recognized the ACNA. Together, these provinces represent the Anglican Communion’s two largest provinces and tens of millions of Anglicans.

The preamble to the ACNA constitution says they are “grieved by the current state of brokenness within the Anglican Communion prompted by those who have embraced erroneous teaching and who have rejected a repeated call to repentance.”

“We are part of something big,” Duncan said. “God isn’t just bringing Anglican Christians together. Across the Church, people are re-embracing Scripture’s authority. Christians are once again discovering the beauty, wisdom and grace of our 2,000-year-old tradition.”

“The teachings we hold to are the teachings that have governed the Anglican branch of Christianity for decades,” said Bishop Martyn Minns of the Convocation of Anglicans in North America. “So, in that sense, we’re not doing anything particularly new, but what we are doing is establishing that we want to stay within the [Christian] mainstream.”

The ELCA is conflicted about the gospel itself

Continued from Page 4

alone) and distinctive moral standards (the one-flesh union of male and female as sign of the unity of Christ and His body) as part of the problem of human division rather than its solution. Here, the very idea that the church should exist to call people out (ek-klesia) of a fallen world into the fellowship of penitent but believing sinners as a sign of the Kingdom which comes from above is found to be divisive and exclusive. People who adopt this Liberal Protestant theology of reconciliation in turn sooner or later find that they have to reject the faith of the Church by which it exists as a separated, i.e. holy, society. Christianity too must be overcome.

If this analysis has purchase, what the ELCA should do is draw back from the precipice, realizing that it is fully immersed in a life-and-death

theological controversy not about homosexuality as such but about its normative theology of reconciliation. But that won’t happen unless the reckless and polarizing recommendations of the Task Force are defeated, and the people of the ELCA, in genuine contrition, face up instead to the real and deep theological disagreements that are tearing them apart.

As if to confirm this analysis, a local pastor on the other side of this debate, responding to an earlier draft of this blog post, sent me the new statement signed by Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago faculty. You can read it for yourself to see a sad attempt at alleging Lutheran fidelity to the Confessions, these faculty members do without the Cross of Christ or the doctrine of sin, turning grace into acceptance of others rather than mercy for sinners. In a series of

coming posts, I will dissect this sad but also revealing statement, because it demonstrates both that we are conflicted about the gospel itself and that theologians on the side of the Task Force Recommendations cannot with intellectual honesty call their theology of reconciliation recognizably Lutheran any longer. In preparation for the forthcoming analysis, take some time to read Article XXIII of both the Augsburg Confession and the Apology.

Paul R. Hinlicky is the Tice Professor in Lutheran Studies at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia.

This essay is reprinted from Lutheran Forum online. Several essays on the ELCA sexuality proposals including Dr. Hinlicky’s responses to the LSTC faculty statement are available online at www.lutheranforum.org.

Silesian Lutherans ask ELCA to uphold biblical teaching

Lutherans in other parts of the world are asking the ELCA to uphold biblical teaching on marriage and homosexual behavior by rejecting the proposed social statement and ministry policy recommendation.

Following is an open letter from Stanislav Piętak, the bishop of the Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, to the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA.

The Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession is located in the Czech Republic. The church is in a companion synod relationship with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

Dear Bishop and Leaders of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod,

I greet you with thankfulness for your interest in the partnership with our church. With joy I look back to the time of your visit in January. Shared dialogues are bringing a lot of useful impulses. I also warmly thank you for inviting the leadership of our church, which will be led by vice-bishop Jan Waclawek. For sure we need to get to know each other and join our strength for the task of evangelization of this world to which we are called by our Lord Jesus Christ.

During communism we secretly dreamed that one day we might be able to work together with Lutheran churches from the U.S.A., Scandinavia, and other Western countries. We suffered the attacks of atheistic ideologies and repressive forces of totalitarian leaders, and we prayed for freedom. That is why we view freedom as a precious gift from God which brings a great opportunity for faithful service to our Savior.

We are troubled whenever we hear that the freedom is misused to put down God's ordinances. As a clear example we see accepting of other ways of sexual relationship than those in the marriage of one man and one woman. I am convinced that we are not called to make sin tolerable. We can share our love to people who have an attraction to the same sex by calling them to repentance in faith in their Savior Jesus Christ, not by redefining the biblical stand on sin.

Any other stand would be very disappointing for us and would threaten our partnership.

We closely observe the discussion which is going on in your church body. We pray that your synod would take a clear Biblical stand this summer and vote against accepting the proposed social statement on human sexuality. Any other stand would be very disappointing for us and would threaten our partnership. According to our constitution, our ministry is incompatible with anyone or any organization which is in any way defending the homosexual lifestyle.

But even if the statement is accepted, we hope for continuing partnership. Even though we would not be able to cooperate as church bodies, we are sure that we can develop our partnership through those in your church body who are opposing this

statement and who are faithful to the Scripture even in the area of human sexuality.

Nevertheless, we continue to pray for good news from your church and for continuing partnership, and we do it with a hope to be joined in fulfilling Christ's command to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-16). "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments" (I John 5:2).

With wishes of God's blessing in following our Lord Jesus Christ,

Stanislav Piętak
Bishop of the SECAC

Please support Lutheran CORE

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

We are 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 as we work to uphold the authority of Scripture in the ELCA.

Gifts may be given online at www.lutherancore.org or sent to:

Lutheran CORE
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202

Reformation or Transformation?

By Raymond J. Brown

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is at a crossroads, having a choice between **Reformation** and **Transformation**. The older term is one which is at the heart of Lutheran confessionalism and ecclesiology, such as it is and has ever been. **Reformation** means simply ridding the good of that bad which has crept in. The newer, trendy (though I confess to already having become sick of it) **Transformation** means essential change into an altered state of different properties. I did not do well in two semesters of chemistry, but I do remember that much. Anyhow, this is the choice before the ELCA: **Reformation** or **Transformation**?

Formation

Formation is an essential part of the Christian life. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) calls for disciples to be made, not churchgoers, not committee people, not busy parish people (though disciples may well be all three and probably should be). It is rather well explained in the C.S. Lewis essay "Nice People or New Men?" He spoke of a path which was not easy, but good. He even spoke of pulling out bad teeth, among other allusions. And **Formation** is not the purchase of a day.

To use a secular example, in my salad days I was an athlete of sorts. I played high school and college football and also ran track. The **formation** of an athlete and team member took time, probably more effort from me as I had the right build for neither sport (166-pound college linebacker and hurdler with a 30-inch inseam). So I had to develop all available limited physical

properties and additional mental and emotional ones. I will never forget my first day of August double sessions as a high school freshman in New Jersey. I had no idea that human beings could work that hard or that I was capable of that much perspiration. Or that people would speak that harshly to me. It was **formation**.

When I initially left active military duty, I became the first track coach at a new high school in New Hampshire. It was just freshmen and sophomores then. No upperclassmen to show the way, no concept of past practice routines, expectations, examples, or traditions. **Formation** was the hardest part of my job. These kids knew nothing and were into cell phones and video games and too much extra-curricular activity. And perhaps for the first time in my life I fully comprehended how important proper and extended **formation** had been in both my athletic and military careers.

Of course, **formation** is a crucial part of the Christian life. I have been a Sunday School teacher, Confirmation teacher, and Bible study participant for many years. I was also a lay leader at sea on my first three ships. One thing that struck me over the years is how little **formation** seems to go on among many of those I participated with in these endeavors. There was no shortage of "nice people," but precious few "new men" in terms of primary Christian knowledge and disciplined thinking. This might well be the root all heresies milling about in the ELCA today.

Reformation

Reformation is near and dear to us

Lutherans. We annually recall blessed Martin Luther's nailing his 95 theses onto the cathedral door at Wittenberg every eve of All Saints Day. However, we do need to recall what **Reformation** means. It means the removal of faults and abuses.

The Lutheran reformers were quite adamant that they were "not minded to manufacture anything new." Indeed, their hope and prayer was to return the Western Church to its original and purer form. Thus certain human inventions and practices of works-righteousness were expelled. But that was **Reformation**, not **Transformation**.

If I may be permitted another secular illustration . . . when I had completed some years of "**formation**," though I thought of it as incarceration, at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, I reported to my first ship. The ship was *screwwwwwwwed up*. In those days just after the Vietnam war, racial tensions and drug abuse were rife. Pride in uniformed service was at an all-time low. And the educational level of recruits was nothing like it would become only several years later. But one year after I had begun witnessing this zoo, a new second in command and third in command reported aboard to assume their duties. The former would later become Commandant. The latter, who had been a football teammate during Academy days, is Commandant now.

Things needed to be squared away. And *less* than a year later, the senior U.S. Navy Admiral for training in the Atlantic would write: "A positive attitude, superior readiness, and

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professionalism have resulted in the highest Operational Readiness Evaluation in memory. . . .” But what I most recall was that these two officers insisted upon a return to basics. They wanted **reform**. They arrived with no new profound management philosophies or “**transformational**” tendencies. Heavens, the Coast Guard had been going to sea for 200 years and the English-speaking people for 1,000. New stuff was not required, just prizing that which had already been proven. Basic documents were broken out, dusted off, and adhered to. Oh, we did get rid of no shortage of bad actors. But all in all it was a return to basic proven truths about how to take a ship to sea — with honor, respect, and devotion to duty. That was not easy either, but it was good.

One can perceive some of this outlook in the Coalition for **Reform** these days. And “**Reform**” is a good word, without arrogance and implying that the fundamentals of the Lutheran Church and its confessions and past practices are foundationally awry.

Transformation

Transformation has been bandied about by so-called defense intellectuals (most of whom never put on the uniform of their country) and many politicians for several years now. But it has worked its way into the ELCA.

There are the Radical Welcome folks, writing books and blogging and organizing in a way that would be the envy of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. These insist on **Transformation** as a necessary step for the ELCA to take. Trying to be fair, I believe that these are the wrong

steps they want taken at the Church-wide Assembly and well beyond:

- Acceptance of GLBT activity as legitimate Christian lifestyle.
- Elimination of masculine pronouns for God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) specifically and anywhere else with respect to the people of God where it is even remotely possible.
- Curtailing of missionary activity in other religions, as such is cultural imperialism.
- Worship which is not attempting to objectively honor God, but which meets our own felt needs.
- Teaching which alters “the whole counsel of God” as the church has known it for over 20 centuries.
- Admission to the Eucharist for those who are not baptized, nor necessarily even believers in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.
- Status quo on abortion policy — which is essentially “support it and shut up (please).”
- Altar and pulpit fellowship with almost everybody.

All this owes more to the spirit of the age than to any doctrinal discovery.

The remarkable success of the **Transformers** owes more to Saul Alinsky’s “Rules for Radicals” than Holy Writ. Even outside organizers have been contracted. But one must admit that the **Transformers** have done their work quite well, evil though it may be.

I only became aware of the ubiquity of “**Transformation**” as an ELCA buzz word in the last year. My own parish is one where all the national

tensions have come home to roost. A questionnaire came out where we could grade the importance of priorities and offer comments for a call process. One of the questions was if I was “willing to embrace transformation . . .” I commented that I did not know what this was, but sounded like something Donald Rumsfeld or [then Presidential candidate] Barak Obama would say. But I eventually learned what was meant.

Recently I listened to a sermon when **Transformation** must have been mentioned a dozen times. I really did not get the sermon, though I finally got the meaning behind the word. Many in the ELCA are indeed minded to manufacture something new.

Deformation

There *is* a Biblical basis for a certain kind of **Transformation**: “Be ye not **conformed** to this world, but be ye **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the will of God, whatever is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2). However, I fear that present ELCA trends are indeed **conforming** to the world. That is not real **transformation** (that took place at the Resurrection and Pentecost and in our individual lives at baptism and the remembrance thereof), but **deformation**. **Deformation** makes one less than one was.

Anyone prefer **Reformation**?

Raymond J. Brown is a security consultant in New Hampshire. He serves on the board of the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau. He wrote the “Laity to Laity” column for the theological journal Lutheran Forum for many years.