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Prominent Lutheran theologians and church leaders affirm biblical teaching on sexuality and call for defeat of ELCA sexuality proposals

May 19, 2009 — Prominent Lutheran theologians and church leaders have written an Open Letter to the Voting Members of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) asking them 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 Tuesday, May 19.

The 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly (Aug. 17-23 in Minneapolis) will consider a proposed social statement which would change ELCA teaching on human sexuality and a proposal which would change church standards to allow ELCA pastors to be in same-sex sexual relationships. The open letter will be mailed to the 1,045 voting members of the 4.7-million-member denomination's Churchwide Assembly.

“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:

1. “If the assembly adopts the proposed rules of procedure, a simple majority of one Churchwide Assembly will alter the moral teaching on sexuality we have shared with the vast majority of the church past and present. We are concerned that such a procedure shows an indifference to the common mind of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church throughout the ages and across cultures.”
2. “The church is founded on the whole Word of God, both law and gospel. The Task Force texts seem to permit variation on all ethical questions, no matter how fundamental. How Christians behave sexually is not a matter of indifference to our life in Christ.”

3. “If the ELCA were to approve the public recognition of same-sex unions or the rostering of persons in such relationships, it would damage our ecumenical relationships.”

4. “Our unity in the office of ministry will be fractured.”

5. “Conscience can err. The Word of God, not conscience, is the final court of appeal in the church.”

“We feel we are called to support and advocate the biblical teaching on human sexuality and urge you to defeat all the proposals from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality that the Church Council has forwarded to you. We pledge to you our prayers and we invite you to work with us for the renewal of our church under the Word of God,” the open letter concludes.

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. Other ELCA pastors and lay members may add their names to a list of people endorsing the letter online at www.lutherancore.org.

“We wanted a clear statement from Lutheran theologians and church leaders who uphold biblical teaching on sexuality as it has been believed and taught by the Christian Church for nearly 2,000 years,” said the Rev. Paull Spring of State College, Pa., chair of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

“We are grateful for the scholars and church leaders who have been willing to stand with us and with the vast majority of Christians worldwide and throughout time,” said Spring, the retired bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod.

The open letter is available online at www.lutherancore.org.

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