

Open Letter to Bishop Hanson from Former Bishop Paull Spring

Re: Bishop Payne's presiding at Communion Service in Chicago

July 27, 2007

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Bishop Hanson,

Bishop Margaret Payne of the New England Synod has announced that she intends to preside at a celebration of the Holy Communion at a special service during the Chicago churchwide assembly. This service - not a part of the regular agenda for the assembly - is to be sponsored by Lutherans Concerned/North America and others, and the preacher for this service is to be Mr. Bradley E. Schmeling, a former pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Bishop Payne's participation in this service raises many questions by us in Lutheran CORE.

Article 14 of the Augsburg Confession affirms that "nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call." Mr. Schmeling is no longer an ordained minister of our church and no longer has a regular call to ministry in our church. How can Bishop Payne defend her participation in a service at which Mr. Schmeling is to deliver the sermon?

The ELCA is currently in the midst of a process toward developing a possible social statement on sexuality, for action at the 2009 churchwide assembly. A specific process has been developed for preparing this social statement. How does Bishop Payne's participation in this service affect the credibility of this process? How does her participation in the service lead toward peace, unity, and prayerful deliberation throughout our church on these matters?

Our church understands itself to be one church, with congregational, synodical, and churchwide expressions. Each expression of the church is to be an interdependent partner with the other expressions. How does Bishop Payne's leading this service reflect the polity of the ELCA? Are individual bishops and synods somehow exempt from the interdependence that we expect from all expressions of the church?

We object strenuously to Bishop Payne's serving as presiding minister at a Eucharist, for which Mr. Schmeling is the indicated preacher. We look to you to redress this matter. You are the only one who can do so! We ask that you address our concerns to Bishop Payne, in your role as chief pastor of our church. We also ask that you publicly express your disapproval for her decision to preside at the service.

When The Rev. Paul Egertson was called as a synodical bishop, he indicated that he would resign from the office, should his personal convictions prove to be in conflict with the official policies of our church. With great integrity, he resigned as a synodical bishop when faced with this situation. Is it not appropriate for Bishop Payne to do the same thing now?

We respectfully ask whether Bishop Payne's anticipated action is a matter of discipline.

Regards,

Paull E. Spring
Chair, Lutheran CORE Steering Committee

CC: Bishop E. Roy Riley, Bishop Margaret G. Payne