

WHAT WAS ACTUALLY DECIDED AT THE CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY IN AUGUST?

Resolutions Related to Ministry Policies as Adopted by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly

First Resolution Adopted:

RESOLVED, that in the implementation of any resolutions on ministry policies, the ELCA commit itself to bear one another's burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all.

Second Resolution Adopted:

RESOLVED, that the ELCA commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable life-long, monogamous, same-gender relationships.

Third Resolution Adopted:

RESOLVED, that the ELCA commit itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church.

Fourth Resolution Adopted:

RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America call upon its members to commit themselves to respect the bound consciences of those with whom they disagree regarding decisions on the call and rostering of individuals in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships, in this church and with churches ecumenically and globally; and be it

further RESOLVED, that this church, because of its commitment to respect the bound consciences of all, declare its intent to allow structured flexibility in decision-making regarding the approving or disapproving in candidacy and the extending or not extending of a call to rostered service of a person who is otherwise qualified and who is living or contemplates living in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship; and be it further RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America make provision in its

policies to eliminate the prohibition of rostered service by members who are in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships; and be it further RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America make provision in its policies to recognize the conviction of members who believe that this church should not call or roster people in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship; and be it further RESOLVED, that the appropriate churchwide unit(s) be directed to develop, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, and the Church Council be directed to approve, appropriate guidelines for a process by which congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization could hold people publicly accountable in their relationships who are in or contemplate being in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships and who seek to be on the rosters of this church; and be it further RESOLVED, that the Committee on Appeals be directed to develop, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, and the Church Council be directed to approve, appropriate amendments to "Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline" and the Vocation and Education program unit be directed to draft, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, and the Church Council is directed to approve appropriate amendments to the "Vision and Expectations" documents and the Candidacy Manual to accomplish the intent of this resolution; and be it further RESOLVED, that additional policies be developed, as necessary, so that those whom this church holds responsible for making decisions about fitness for rostered ministry in general and for call to a particular specific ELCA ministry may discern, and have guidance in discerning, the fitness for ministry of a member living in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same gender relationship; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that this church continue to trust its established processes and those to whom it has given the responsibility to discern who should and should not be rostered or called to public ministry in this church.

WHAT WAS THIS BASED ON?

A Social Statement on Sexuality was first adopted with many topics covered; the portion on homosexuality had within it this statement on four ways that ELCA members view such relationships.

This church recognizes that, with conviction and integrity:

- *On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that same-gender sexual behavior is sinful, contrary to biblical teaching and their understanding of natural law. They believe same-gender sexual behavior carries the grave danger of unrepentant sin. They therefore conclude that the neighbor and the community are best served by calling people in same-gender sexual relationships to repentance for that behavior and to a celibate lifestyle. Such decisions are intended to be accompanied by pastoral response and community support.*
- *On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that homosexuality and even lifelong, monogamous, homosexual relationships reflect a broken world in which some relationships do not pattern themselves after the creation God intended. While they acknowledge that such relationships may be lived out with mutuality and care, they do not believe that the neighbor or community are best served by publicly recognizing such relationships as traditional marriage.*
- *On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that the scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and lifelong loving and committed relationships that we experience today. They*

believe that the neighbor and community are best served when same-gender relationships are honored and held to high standards and public accountability, but they do not equate these relationships with marriage. They do, however, affirm the need for community support and the role of pastoral care, and may wish to surround lifelong monogamous relationships or covenant unions with prayer.

- *On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that the scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and committed relationships that we experience today. They believe that the neighbor and community are best served when same-gender relationships are lived out with lifelong and monogamous commitments that are held to the same rigorous standards, sexual ethics, and status as heterosexual marriage. They surround such couples and their lifelong commitments with prayer to live in ways that glorify God, find strength for the challenges that will be faced, and serve others. They believe same-gender couples should avail themselves of social and legal support for themselves, their children and other dependents, and seek the highest legal accountability available for their relationships.*

Although at this time this church lacks consensus on this matter, it encourages all people to live out their faith in the local and global community of the baptized with profound respect for the conscience-bound belief of the neighbor. This church calls for mutual respect in relationships and for guidance that seeks the good of each individual and of the community. Regarding our life together as we live with disagreement, the people in this church will continue to accompany one another in study, prayer, discernment, pastoral care, and mutual respect.

FURTHER COMMENTS FROM PASTOR KATHY;

This issue is on the forefront of church life because it is at the forefront of society. We are not shielded because we are the church! A welcome to all people, gay and straight, has long been the policy of the ELCA. But the issue of who should be pastors and other rostered leaders is a different issue in many people's minds. In these actions, based on the social statement, we have essentially "agreed to disagree" and to respect all views. However, we also find ourselves having to make new decisions about who can be pastors and other rostered leaders. Now comes the issue of implementation of the new policy, which will most likely start happening in the spring of 2010.

Ordination to the pastoral office has never been assured for everyone who is in the master of divinity (pastoral preparation degree) program. Since the ELCA began in 1988, a careful process of candidacy has been happening through synods of the church, with ordination only happening and being maintained upon a call to a specific congregation or other ministry (like hospital or military chaplaincy). So synods will most likely be the center of implementation issues. One synod, N.E. Iowa, has voted its intent to follow the previous policy of "chaste in singleness, faithfulness in marriage" (with marriage understood as a heterosexual union). Congregations maintain the right they have always had, to accept or reject any candidate based upon the needs of the congregation. (A pastoral vote needs 2/3 of those at the meeting to pass.) However, remember that pastoral ministries in communities always overlap somewhat, especially within the same denomination and sometimes among denominations. We are affected to a certain degree by leadership decisions in a neighboring churches because we desire to function in a collegial way.

So how do we respond as individuals, and as a congregation? We are of differing minds, even at Immanuel. Some rejoice with the new policy, feeling that the time has come for such a change. Some are neutral – not necessarily happy about the change but not wanting this issue to be church-dividing. Some want to register their disagreement by making decisions to reduce financial support for the synod and national expressions of the church, or by adopting a policy of non-acceptance of homosexual candidates for pastoral ministry even if they are in a committed lifelong monogamous relationship. Some throughout the ELCA are upset enough to have set in motion, or desire to explore, the process for leaving the ELCA. This is an extremely serious decision with many far-reaching ramifications, and the process is lengthy, difficult, and usually very divisive. I have a strong sense that I am meant to listen and learn through the next few months and even years, though I assume that most of you know that I continue to have a negative reaction to the new policy and its possible effects.

Please pray about your own response. There will be times in January for further discussion – several Sundays between services and some other times as well – which will be announced early in the month. Thank you for taking the time to read this!
Pastor Kathy