

## **A Possible Response to the Actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly**

The Social Statement, *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, was adopted by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Moreover, four resolutions pertaining to the eligibility of gay and lesbian persons in committed relationships for service on one of the four ministry rosters of our church were also approved.

What does all this mean for us in the Evangelical Lutheran in America? The implications of these actions will unfold more fully over time, but we do know the following. Persons in committed same-sex relationships formerly were barred from serving on any of the official ministry rosters of our church, a way is now being opened for them to serve in such ministries, if they are otherwise qualified (as determined by a synod candidacy committee) and if a congregation chooses to call them. Over the coming months, policies to implement this decision will be worked out by churchwide leaders and staff, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops.

This change in our rostering policies, while bringing joy to some in the ELCA, is unsettling, even troubling, to others who may view the actions of the recent Churchwide Assembly as contrary to the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. Some may feel conscience-bound to oppose these changes and disallow partnered gays and lesbians from serving in ministry in their congregations. One of the provisions approved by the Churchwide Assembly states that in this matter we must "bear one another's burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all" (from Resolution #1 of the Ministry Policies approved by the Churchwide Assembly).

Congregations, which feel conscience bound to oppose the Churchwide Assembly actions, may wish to consider revising their constitution by adding the following paragraph as a by-law.

Any pastor called to serve this congregation shall prior to accepting the call subscribe to *Vision and Expectations* of 1990. This congregation also understands that Christian marriage is the union of one man and one woman blessed by God and recognized by the state. It is understood that married pastors shall be faithful to the spouse and unmarried pastors shall be abstinent.

In a congregation's by-laws, there may be an existing section on "The Pastor" that expands on particular issues relating to calling a pastor that are not included in the unamendable Chapter 9 of the ELCA Model Constitutions for Congregations. If there is no existing by-law referencing pastoral issues, a new section would have to be written.

Amending the constitution by inserting a by-law defining the expectations of the pastor may be an appropriate and satisfactory congregational response to the actions of the Churchwide Assembly.

*Vision and Expectations* defines many expectations of a pastor. Among other things, the 1990 edition says that pastors who are homosexual in their self-understanding must be abstinent. The 1990 edition will now be changed following the recent Churchwide Assembly so it is important to reference the 1990 edition.

Congregations desiring to amend their constitution should:

1. Form a small committee to review the congregation's current constitution, and bylaws. Chapters 16, 17 and 18 of a congregation's constitution define the process on how a

congregation may adopt bylaws, and amend its constitution. By-laws require congregational approval for adoption.

2. Prepare the format for presenting revisions to the congregation: use underline for additions and ~~striketrough~~ for deletions to show how the current document may change.
3. Contact the synod office for clarifications on the process.

**Here is an example of an amended by-law from a congregational constitution.**

The Pastor

B.1.01.

- a. Only a member of the clergy roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or a candidate for the roster of ordained ministers who has been recommended for the congregation by the synodical bishop may be called as a pastor of this congregation, as in C.9.02.
- b. Any pastor called to serve this congregation shall prior to accepting the call subscribe to Vision and Expectations of 1990. This congregation also understands that Christian marriage is the union of one man and one woman blessed by God and recognized by the state. It is understood that married pastors shall be faithful to the spouse and unmarried pastors shall be abstinent.