

Thoughts from Bishop Gary Wollersheim



Northern Illinois Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Five Affirmations About the Churchwide Assembly Decisions

1. *There are good and faithful Lutheran Christians on both sides of the issue and lots of folks who are somewhere in between.* Here are a few examples: The former Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Dr. Herbert Chilstrom, is in favor of the ministry policy changes, while the former Presiding Bishop of the Lutheran Church in America, Dr. James Crumley, is opposed. Retired Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago professor, Dr. Ralph Klein, is in favor of the changes, while retired LSTC professor, Dr. Carl Braaten, is opposed. Two members of the ELCA Task Force on Sexuality came from our synod. Erin Clark was in favor of the changes and Dr. John Prabhaker was opposed. Two voting members from our Northern Illinois Synod delegation spoke on the Churchwide Assembly floor in close proximity to each other. Alan Wold spoke in favor, and Mary Howe was opposed. In each congregation in our synod, there are good and faithful people on both sides of the issue and many in between.

2. *Those people who, by bound conscience, are opposed to the ministry policy changes do not hate homosexuals.* They do not want to exclude gay and lesbian people from attending their congregations. They are not bigots. They are not homophobic.
3. *Those people who, by bound conscience, favor the ministry policy changes have not rejected God's Word.* They do not reject the Bible. They are not heretics.
4. *If you are in a congregation that does not see the need to change your practices in response to these decisions, no one will force you to do so.* This will be true of many of the congregations in the Northern Illinois Synod. Specifically, this means you will not be required to interview or extend a call to a gay or lesbian pastor in a faithful committed relationship. You will not be expected to bless same gender covenant relationships.
5. *If you are in a congregation that sees aligning with these changes as an opportunity to grow your ministry, no one will prohibit you from doing so.* I only ask that you wait until the implementing guidelines are developed by this church and approved by the ELCA Church Council. This probably will not be completed until sometime in 2010.

My staff and I will respect the varieties of views represented in our synod, whether opposed to change, in favor of change, or somewhere in between.

I conclude by reflecting on an image from a story I heard long ago,* and it still rings true for us today. ***The Lutheran Church is a big old boat. There is room for all who want to come aboard:*** reformers, evangelicals, traditionalists, land lovers, and all those who are cast away. Yes, the old boat creaks, lists, and leaks. And sometimes, frankly, the rising and falling can literally make one sick. But the old boat is faithful and gets her passengers to where they are supposed to go. Always has. Always will. Thanks be to God.

* Adapted from: "On the Church," in J.F. Powers, *Wheat That Springeth Green*