

A pastoral statement in response to the Churchwide Assembly decisions this past August.

After extensive conversation, deliberation and prayer the following conclusions have been reached:

- We feel that Zion Lutheran Church would not support a call to a gay or lesbian person to be a pastor at this time.
- Neither The Church Council nor the pastoral staff is in full agreement over the several issues of same-sex relationships. This reflects the diversity of the congregation.
- We will not pursue a congregational vote to withhold financial support to the ELCA, nor vote to leave the ELCA. We believe such a vote would serve only to polarize the congregation and tend to cut off significant biblical study and prayer.
- We, as leaders of Zion, agree that this is a critical time to stay focused on our mission: to proclaim the Gospel and to meet the needs of our neighbors, while searching for and calling our next senior pastor.

If you have questions, comments or concerns you are welcome to contact members of the Church Council or any of the pastors.

What we are hearing from Zion members:

Zion is a diverse congregation. Some people feel that they cannot in good conscience remain in the ELCA, and possibly Zion, either. If some people determine to leave Zion they leave with our heartfelt prayers that God will bless them in their new congregation. There are some people who are pleased with the openness to all that the statement now allows.

We are hearing differing approaches to understanding the Bible. Careful, prayerful Biblical study is crucial in informing our faith, but Biblical study of select verses will most likely not give us a complete and satisfying resolve to the question of homosexual expressions nor what our response might be to the ELCA decision of this past August. It seems most Zion members are content to “wait it out” in prayer and conversation as they seek God’s direction and wait to see guidelines that will be issued for the selection of pastors in the future.

What is the response of Zion’s leadership?

At this time neither the pastors nor the congregation council have determined fully God’s intent for Zion. Our leadership is very aware of the diversity of our membership. This is not an attempt to simply ignore the situation or simply think it will go away. It will not. One of Zion’s strengths is that we seek to be a congregation of passionate disciples of Jesus Christ. We hope and pray that our unity and focus as a congregation is rooted in Christ and united by Christ’s love. This enables us to live in love and respect for one another. We pray that the tension some are feeling will motivate us all to study, converse, and pray about our future together. Answers to the questions raised do not always come easily. God has brought us together through the Gospel to share the Gospel with each other and beyond.

Uniformity is not the sign of a perfect church.

There is a yearning in the hearts and minds of each of us to find comfort and agreement. However, people vary in their life experiences, Biblical understanding, and in what they hold dear and sacred. We have life together in Jesus Christ and that is paramount. Our neighbors, and even members of our own family, do not always agree with everything we do or say. This diversity, when guided by God's Spirit, helps each of us to understand and grow in our faith.

What is the background for this statement?

Biblical study, reflection, and conversation played a major role in the decision-making process. Since 2002, two documents were developed from studies that were conducted over the past two decades. (See FAQ sheet from the ELCA Website) The first Study came in two parts, entitled "*Journey Together Faithfully: ELCA Studies on Sexuality*". This was a broad and extensive study on the issue of homosexuality from a biblical, historical, ethical and sociological perspective. Released in September of 2003, the document "*Background Essay on Biblical Texts.*" was written by two highly respected biblical scholars who, together, wrote a study on the biblical texts dealing with homosexuality. These two theologians came to different conclusions on the issue as a result of their studies. It is no wonder we have strong, Biblically astute members of Zion who differ in their opinions as well. We all have let our personal experiences and our Biblical interpretations influence our opinions. People are seeking to be faithful to what they believe God is saying through the Bible. We do not all agree in our understanding of Scripture. Therefore, it is essential that we respect each other as children of God seeking to be faithful to what God is saying through the Bible.

In April of 2009, the document "*Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*" was released to congregations of the ELCA. This document:

- Has a very high view of marriage between a man and a woman;
- Is passionately against any type of sexuality where abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation are condoned and supported;
- Speaks against sex outside of marriage between a woman and a man; and
- Does not acknowledge the relationship between committed gays and lesbians as marriage.

"The social statement is a theological and teaching document that builds on the key Lutheran principles of justification by grace and Christian freedom to serve the neighbor. It emphasizes that central to our vocation in relation to human sexuality, is the building and protection of trust in relationships. It therefore affirms that we are called to be trustworthy in our human sexuality and to build social institutions and practices in which trust and trustworthy relationships can thrive. The social statement addresses, among other topics, marriage, same-gender relationships, families, protecting children, friendships, commitment, social responsibility and moral discernment. Regarding same-gender committed relationships, the social statement recognizes that members of this church are not in agreement and identifies the different perspectives that are present among us."

(Taken from: Brief Summary of Actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA)

This statement was the basis of the resolutions that were presented at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly of August 2009. It can be read, reviewed, downloaded and printed off the ELCA website (www.ELCA.org).

What did the resolutions at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly actually say?

Resolution 1: “Resolved, that the ELCA commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support and hold publically accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.”

Resolution 2: “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.”

Resolution 3: “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.”

Resolution 4: This resolution called upon members to respect the bound consciences of those with whom they disagree; declared the intent to allow structured flexibility in decision-making about candidacy and the call process; eliminated the prohibition of rostered service by member in publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationships; recognized and committed to respect the conviction of members who believe that the ELCA should not call or roster people in committed same-gender relationships; called for development of accountability guidelines; directed that appropriate amendments to ministry policy documents be drafted and approved by the Church Council; and urged that this church continue to trust congregations, bishops, synods and others responsible for determining who should be called into public ministry.

What does this mean for Zion?

The pastoral leadership and the Church Council believe that Zion Lutheran Church would not support a call to a gay or lesbian pastor at this time. Although the leaders are not in agreement over the several issues of same-gender relationships, this reflects the diversity of the congregation. We will not pursue a congregational vote to withhold financial support to the ELCA, nor vote to leave the ELCA. We believe that such a vote would serve only to polarize the congregation and tend to cut off significant biblical study and prayer. We all agree that this is a critical time to stay focused on our mission: to proclaim the Gospel and to meet the needs of our neighbors, while searching for and calling our next senior pastor.

We need to be more aware of the good, solid Gospel ministry that the ELCA, Minneapolis Area Synod and Zion are doing. By withholding financial support we are hampering with and possibly eliminating those ministries that we know to be God-pleasing and very significant. We, as Christians, want to

support missionaries, start new churches, train leadership, advance justice for the disadvantaged or people devastated by war or disasters. Less than 4% of our financial offerings are contributed to all ELCA ministries and mission. In other words, over 96% of our financial offerings are used for local and non-ELCA ministry.

What will happen in the future?

We are in God's hands! God is in control. Thank God! This is a time for faith in the Triune God who calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies God's Church. Zion needs to keep focused. We have a Life Together in Christ. It is ministry bringing God's salvation in Christ to the world and each other. The bringing and sharing of the Gospel is far too important to let argumentation over sexuality take us off God's mission. This is an important issue, but not as important as our faithfulness to God. Zion is and needs to continue to be strong in prayer and Biblical study. We are in a very significant and quite lengthy process of selecting the next Senior Pastor who will guide us into our future. Pray for our call committee. Pray for our present leadership. Pray for those you agree with. Pray for those with whom you disagree. We all need more conversation to respect the integrity of others. And continue supporting financially and prayerfully the powerful and meaningful ministries that keep our faith growing and bring the Gospel to others.

Revised: December 13, 2009