



# NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD

## EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

Office of the Bishop

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August 27, 2009

Dear Friends in Christ,

I have recently returned from the ELCA Churchwide Assembly. It was a week filled with worship, conversation, prayerful discernment and decision making. I realized again the depth and breadth of the ministries and mission of our church. I also recognize the complexity of difficult decisions and the implications of these decisions on the congregations and ministries of this church.

The series of decisions about human sexuality were the most challenging decisions that this assembly faced. After many years of study, prayer and conversation, our church has made provision:

- “to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships;”
- for a synod’s candidacy committee, if it so chooses, to approve a candidate for ordination who is in such a relationship;
- for a congregation to call a pastor in such a relationship, if a congregation makes that choice.

The assembly accepted the Human Sexuality Task Force’s recommendation to use the Lutheran theological category of “bound conscience” as the foundation for these decisions. The assembly acknowledged that there are those in our church whose “bound conscience” compels them to provide for the recognition of publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships and to allow for a person in such a relationship to be eligible for ordination in the church. The assembly also affirmed the “bound conscience” of those who seek to maintain the historic tradition and interpretation of scripture that does not recognize publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships or provide for the ordination of someone in such a relationship.

These decisions seek to uphold the “bound conscience” of all members of our church, respecting one another in love and honoring each member’s conscientious decision. A voting member from our synod suggested that this would be what it means to “submit in love to one another” for the sake of the Jesus Christ.

During the next few weeks I will be in conversations with the Conference Deans, Chaplains and Synod Council, as well as with our rostered leaders at the Tri-Synodical Fall Conference. We are also adding times of conversations prior to the three Mission Support Gatherings that have been scheduled for this fall. You are invited to attend one of these opportunities that will be held on September 3 at St. Peter, Denver; September 10 at First, Cresco; or September 15 at St. John, Nashua from 4:30-6:00 p.m. You may attend a conversation even if you are not a part of that Conference.

The official actions of the assembly and Presiding Bishop Hanson's comments are available on the ELCA website, [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org).

As we reflect on this year's assembly, I will continue to give thanks for our church and its ministries. I will be sharing with enthusiasm the actions of the assembly that advocated for immigration reform, approved our full communion agreement with the United Methodist Church, the Malaria Initiative that seeks to eliminate that dreaded disease from the face of the earth, and expansion of our response to the scourge of HIV/AIDS. I will continue to celebrate the most comprehensive Christian network of social service agencies in the country as well as the colleges and seminaries of the church that are admired by Lutherans and non-Lutherans alike. Add to that list the outdoor ministries, missionaries, new congregations, the inspiring Jesus, Justice, Jazz Youth Gathering and the exciting *Book of Faith* initiative. We are a part of a church whose witness to the love of Jesus Christ is vibrant and full.

God continues to use us to make Christ known and to do God's work with our hands. I am grateful to be your partner in ministry.

In Christ,



The Rev. Dr. Steven L. Ullestad  
Bishop