



August 3, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Minneapolis Area Synod,

As we approach our Churchwide Assembly on August 17, please know that I covet your prayers for the voting members of our assembly that God's wisdom may be imparted to our Church as we discuss and try to come to conclusions on difficult issues.

As all of you know, we have been in a study, conversation and discernment mode over a constellation of questions surrounding human sexuality for at least 20 years. Particularly we have been divided over the issue of ordaining persons living in publically accountable lifelong same-gender relationships and whether or not these persons could be called to a congregation seeking such a candidate.

Over the years, as I have spoken to our congregations, I've not found one that is not open to all people. Although the type or focus of care may be different, our churches are properly open to all people, just as Jesus welcomed all sinners (which is everyone).

What I know is that if a change in ministry policy is approved, there will still be no change in the policy of the autonomy of our congregations. Call committees and congregations will still be able to call whom they wish to lead their congregations. There will certainly be no rush nor ever an intention to push a person living in a lifelong committed same-gender relationship onto a call committee or congregation. Lutherans allow congregations to prayerfully select and call their own leader and nothing will change that policy in the proposed amendments.

I know there are many anxious members of your congregations who are expressing that anxiety to you over this potential change. Whenever I am in a conflicted situation in a congregation (which is often) where anxiety is high, I am always conscious that I must not allow peoples' anxiety to become mine or poor decisions emerge.

Instead, I would bring you to the word of our Lord used over and over again in the Scriptures. "Do not be afraid." Anxiety before an event seems always to be worse than the reality that ensues. Whatever happens in these votes, we will still be the Body of Christ with faithful people on both sides of this issue and we will be called to constantly reach out to each other and work for peace between us.

May God bless you this year.

Bishop Craig E. Johnson