

Bishop Craig Johnson Letter regarding policy change
2009 Churchwide Assembly
August 22, 2009

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” (John 14:27a)
Our Lord Jesus said to his disciples and speaks now to us.

As many of you know, our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has been in a 20 year process of Biblical study, theological reflection conversation, and prayer centering around issues concerning human sexuality and more particularly, homosexuality.

A vote has now been taken and this vote approved a policy change so that those persons in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship who have gone through the candidacy approval process, may serve as ordained pastors in this Church. What this means is:

1. If a congregation in a regular call process determines that a candidate who happens to be in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship, is their candidate of choice to serve as pastor or rostered lay person in their congregation, and if that candidate has been approved in our candidacy process, that candidate may be recommended to the congregational council for ratification and subsequently to the congregation for at least a 2/3 majority vote for approval.
2. Candidacy committees may choose not to preclude a candidate from becoming rostered in this Church simply because the candidate is in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship.
3. As always, the congregation has the authority in our polity to select the candidate they would like to call. So the same process of calling a pastor or rostered lay person will be in place as before. Candidates will continue to go through the same rigorous vetting process that has been a part of our calling of a pastor or rostered lay person by congregations which has been in place for many years.
4. I ask for your patience as our churchwide organization will work diligently this fall to make sure that these policy changes will be carefully designed for synodical, candidacy, and congregational use. By early winter, the design should be in place. But nothing will happen immediately and I ask for your understanding for this important delay.
5. This vote means that many in our Church will be bitterly disappointed and angry. I ask everyone to remember the words of the Apostle Paul, “Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.” (Colossians 3:14-15a) Let us strive to live together as the Holy Scriptures call us to live together even amid our disagreements. Our Church has gone through very difficult votes before in our history. I believe if respect is given for bound consciences, prayers for peace are offered to God, and the Scriptures are the central, authoritative norm for our life together, we will also find our way together with God’s help.