

# NETWORK NEWS



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## False presuppositions and questionable assumptions

*A Critical Analysis of the Recommendations from the ELCA Church Council to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly On Sexuality Studies dated April 11, 2005*

by the Rev. Karl P. Donfried, Amherst, Mass.

### Introduction

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, meeting in assembly this August, is being asked by the church council to vote on matters of enormous Scriptural and Confessional import as well as issues that will affect both the future of Lutheranism and all of the ELCA's ecumenical relationships. It is therefore imperative that all enter this assembly solemnly, prayerfully, with humility and full knowledge of the assumptions and, often false, presuppositions contained in the recommendations from the ELCA Church Council on sexuality issues dated April 11, 2005 so that all decisions will be grounded in Scripture as interpreted by the Lutheran Confessions.

The fundamental premise of the recommendations from the ELCA church council is that same-sex sexual conduct in a committed relationship is morally defensible for those who are of homosexual orientation and that such persons—following the process outlined by the church council—may be ordained into the ministry of the ELCA. Since the Scriptural and theological foundation for such a premise has neither been provided by the Task Force for the ELCA

Studies on Sexuality nor by the ELCA church council, one is, therefore, obligated to examine the presuppositions and assumptions implicit in the latter's recommendations since the Lutheran reform movement from its origin has insisted that all ecclesial and ethical decisions can be made only in accordance with a warrant from Scripture as interpreted by the Lutheran Confessions.

### Recommendations 1 and 2

The following **assumptions** and **presuppositions** are related to recommendations 1 and 2:

1. That this church is "united by love of Jesus Christ" and that "within this unity is also a God-given diversity..." Two issues require discussion.
  - a. Does love create the unity of the Church or is it the Holy Spirit that unites the Church in the truth of the Gospel through faith of which love is a primary manifestation? "Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11). The Apostle further reminds *(Continued on page 8)*

## Pastor grew up Unitarian, sees trend to similar attitudes in ELCA

By Betsy Carlson, editor

Pastor Curtis Baker, who has a two-point church near Flaxville, Mont., grew up as a Unitarian Universalist in Ohio. He converted to Christianity after Army Reserve boot camp as a teenager. Now, he says, he sees attitudes in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America similar to those he learned in the culture of his youth.

He describes them as "morally superior" attitudes: "I know more than you because I'm educated. I know better than you what's right and wrong."

Baker said that by the ninth grade, he firmly told a teacher that he didn't believe in God. Sunday school lessons he remembers included Origami and weaving. Talks during worship services ranged from Buddhism to ecology to philosophy, such as Emerson's and Thoreau's.

"If we knew anything about Jesus at all," said Baker, "he was a teacher and maybe even a prophet. I knew that some believed he died on a cross and maybe rose again.

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Jaynan Clark Egland: President,  
Mark C. Chavez: Director, Betsy Carlson: Editor  
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I had a dim notion of the cross—that it stood for Christianity and it was how Jesus died. Was there any rising? No."

His first realization of his own attitudes of superiority came during boot camp.

"I joined the U.S. Army Reserve when I was 17," he said in a recent interview. "Why? I have no idea. Here at boot camp, I was meeting groups of different types of people that I had never known before: high school drop-outs, guys off the streets of Detroit, off the farm. It opened my eyes to a different way of looking at the world.

"There I was: Mr. Liberal, Mr. Intellectual, trying to survive boot camp, thinking my enlightened way of looking was going to help me. In fact, it hurt me. I was made fun of, yet, I had a big degree of self-righteousness. I never had fired a rifle before, I was so scared of that. And, conjugating French verbs doesn't help when you're digging a foxhole!"

After boot camp, Baker went back to high school in 1980. That December, he went to a Christian bookstore and bought a Bible. He started reading it, the Gospels first.

"I knew just from reading that it was the Word of God. This was unheard of in my family," he said. "I couldn't dare ask my parents because I knew what they thought."

He had a supportive teacher whom he had known and respected for some time. "I went to him and told him I'd read this and I was really turned on by it and asked, what did he think. He said, 'I think you need to look at this.' He was a very gentle soul. His encouragement at the time was perfect."

Baker hadn't known the man was a Christian because the (Continued on page 3)

## Pastor grew up Unitarian (Continues from page 2)

teacher had never talked about his faith. This teacher directed him toward "a high church setting, more ritualistic," Baker said, because he was interested in languages. He joined a Roman Catholic catechumenate (study) program at 18 and was baptized at 21.

This ELCA pastor added, "I probably craved the structure of the Roman Catholic Church."

After high school, he attended college a couple of years and then enlisted in the Navy, "to see the world." He served for five years as a Russian linguist. After the Navy, he finished college then attended graduate school for a short time in Russian literature.

After 10 years as a Catholic, he joined the ELCA. His first wife was a Lutheran and he had attended church with her and learned about the Lutheran tradition that way, he said.

He added, "Lutheranism, when it's correct and right and puts the church in its proper context, allows God to be God and church to be church."

He went to seminary, first to Trinity in Columbus, Ohio, and then to an internship in Chicago and to the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. He was ordained in 1997.

Baker said he first encountered familiar attitudes toward knowledge and superiority in seminary.

"In seminary, right off the bat, we were taught to read the Bible from a historical critical approach of, say, 'sources,' the approach of what it was 'historically,'" he said. "But in my point of view, we never learned the message of Scripture. We spent a lot of time debating. It was accepted that Adam and Eve weren't real.

"Okay, I can accept that. But, the way I see it, the story—the Creation—has something

to teach me. There was a similar understanding to that which I was raised: we, as white liberals, know best. The attitudes were frighteningly similar to how the Unitarian Universalist sees things.

"And we had the same attitude toward the people in the pews. It wasn't much different. It was an unspoken, yet self-evident truth: 'we know more than you because we're better educated.'" As in the Unitarian experience of his youth, he said he has heard ELCA pastors and members use "everything except the Bible" to support their beliefs and opinions.

He cites a synod assembly, at a previous synod, where he heard what he called a "basically New Age presenter." He said he came away with the idea that what he needed to do to get new people into his congregations was to subscribe to "Oprah" magazine. He said it was "incredible, just incredible."

At an ELCA conference meeting Karl Jung and psychology were cited in a discussion.

"It reminded me of my past because everything besides Scripture was being cited to make the case in the sexuality discussions," Baker said. "I can respect positions if Scripture is used to make a case. We fail to get out our Bibles. So many of my colleagues approach it from a psychological or cultural point of view, not from what Scripture says."

Baker said the bottom line is the ELCA is relying on other things than theology and Scripture.

"The Bible accuses us of our sin, which many of us don't like to think about. The Bible convicts us as well as uplifts us. But we (in the ELCA) usually are talking about cheap grace. We've forgot about repentance. We all need this." He concluded, "We are called to respond in some way to the grace that is given us. That way is repentance."

## ELCA officials have 'blank check' for Renewing Worship plan

by Betsy Carlson, editor

Even though the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has been working for five years and has produced new worship materials, including services, prayers and hymns, the 2005 Churchwide Assembly Aug. 8-14 in Orlando, Fla., will not be voting on any of them.

Rather it will vote on continuing a process of developing worship materials "...trusting in the guidance and gifts of God," and directing the Office of the Presiding Bishop through the worship staff to get the work done on new worship resources. (Under a restructuring plan, the worship staff is to be moved from the Division of Congregational Ministries to the office of the bishop.)

"As I read this, we are supposed to trust the process," said WordAlone Network director Mark Chavez recently, "In other words, 'just trust us, we'll handle the important details.'"

WordAlone hymnal task force member, Pastor M. Luther Johnson of Donnelly, Minn., asked rhetorically in a recent interview, "How long will the process last? What exactly will the final product be? These are the big questions that remain unanswered in the proposal.

"The voting members are being asked for the signature on a blank check, and the Renewing Worship team gets to fill in the amount after everyone goes home."

WordAlone is proposing that a vote on the process be delayed until the next churchwide assembly in 2007 so the main resources can be completed and reviewed throughout the church by congregations, synods, teaching theologians and other leaders.

The Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly in June passed a memorial to the churchwide assembly asking that the present "Lutheran Book of Worship" be retained, that the Renewing Worship process be ended and that materials to supplement the LBW be created. Read more about the ELCA's proposed worship materials and the memorials at [www.rkthorell.50megs.com](http://www.rkthorell.50megs.com)

Initially the Renewing Worship development process was endorsed and funded up to \$1.2 million by the ELCA Church Council in November 2000. A 2000 ELCA news release about that council meeting quoted Rev. Wyvetta Bullock, then executive director of the ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries as saying development of new worship resources, "is a multi-phase process for developing new and exciting resources for consideration by the 2005 ELCA churchwide assembly."

The division for congregational ministries and Augsburg Fortress, the ELCA's publishing house, worked together as a "Renewing Worship" team on the development of new worship materials. In April this year, the team recommended to the church council that, among other things, the process continue.

At the April meeting, the church council voted to forward to the churchwide assembly a resolution based on the Renewing Worship recommendation. It commits the ELCA "to continuing steps toward the renewal of worship, trusting in the guidance and gifts of God for the ongoing life of faith through the means of grace."

The resolution also *(Continued on page 14)*

## What is ELCA central commitment?

By Pastor Oliver Brown

*(Editor's note: Pastor Brown serves as a chaplain at the Federal Correctional Institution Schuylkill. His address is P.O. Box 700, Minersville, Pa. 17954. He notes that he is writing on his own behalf as an ELCA rostered pastor, not as a federal chaplain.)*

A "central commitment" of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is "to become an antiracist, multicultural church," according to a 2005 restructuring proposal for the ELCA departments, divisions and offices.



Pr. Oliver Brown

The restructuring plan was created after the 2003 Churchwide Assembly authorized it and asked Presiding Bishop Hanson to come back to the 2005 assembly with recommendations including possible constitution and bylaw amendments to act upon.

To keep the new structure's "central commitment", the Multicultural Ministries Program Unit will have "authority and power to *act on behalf of this church*" (italics mine), to implement multicultural programming and to review, monitor and hold accountable all churchwide programs. The goal of this unit will be zero tolerance for racism in the church. Presently a Multicultural Ministries Commission has little power or authority.

The inference made from this proposed manner of reorganization is that racism is the greatest threat to the ELCA, and you ordinary pastors and lay people cannot be trusted to deal with it. A specially empowered unit will act on your behalf, because it seems that the Bible and the sacraments

have not sufficiently equipped you. The following questions ought to be considered by the churchwide assembly.

1) **What happens when one sin is elevated in gravity above others?** If any sin is the greatest, it is unbelief; for that is why this commandment is first: "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" Any church that would restructure itself to implement a no tolerance policy of, say, adultery, would be the subject of less-than-complimentary comments. Why? Because while adultery is sinful (and so is racism) its elevation above the sin of unbelief would appear to be a symptom of a malady in that church's teaching and life.

Therefore we must ask: What is the malady, for which the elevation in gravity of the sin of racism is a symptom? Could it be political correctness, the dogmatic refusal to acknowledge even the most obvious truths due to their potential to outrage those who over-identify with their sense of victimhood? If we encourage a continual sense of grievance, in what way is our "Gospel" setting people free?

2) **What is meant by "racism"?** A common definition of racism includes both the concepts of racial prejudice combined with the power to act on that prejudice. By this definition, only white persons can be racists because whites are more powerful than minorities, in the U.S.

3) **Zero tolerance policies in general** produce unexpected results by causing inadvertent infractions to be punished at the same level as the most intentional ones. God has a way of being, and making, holy without using secular models of zero tolerance policies. Can we? *(Continued on page 14)*

## First meeting of association of churches set for Nov. 7 & 8

By Betsy Carlson, editor

Letters of invitation to join a new association of confessing churches are being sent to all churches in the ELCA according to Pastor Randy Freund, chairperson of a WordAlone task force spearheading formation of the association.

He said in a phone interview in mid-July that the first meeting of the association is scheduled Nov. 7 and 8, during the WordAlone annual theological conference, this year Nov. 6-8 at Brooklyn Park Lutheran Church, Brooklyn Park, Minn. The theological conference focus is to be "ecclesiology" or the meaning, function and structure of "church".

Freund, pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, Hutchinson, Minn., said, "The new association will be an alliance of Lutheran churches anchored by a common confession of faith and a commitment to work together in practical ministry. It will not be a denomination or synod, but a functional coalition working together within and across the synods."

Churches may join the association after an official congregational vote to adopt and abide by "The Common Confession," he said. The Common Confession is on-line at [www.wordalone.org](http://www.wordalone.org).

A copy of the Common Confession should be downloaded or requested from the WordAlone office at 888-551-7254, then signed and dated by an official representative of the congregation and sent to the WordAlone Network at 2299 Palmer Dr. Suite 220, New Brighton, Minn. 55112.

A WordAlone board member, Freund was named to head up the effort to establish the association by the WordAlone Network board after this year's WordAlone conven-

tion, in April, called for formation of the association.

"The association is first and foremost an alliance of churches, rather than a network of individuals," Freund said. "It is for churches who see a need for renewal in the ELCA because of the persistent theological drift from our confessional and biblical foundations. The hope is to draw together those who have been a part of many Lutheran reform movements in North America, including the WordAlone Network, Solid Rock Lutherans, Dorado Covenant signers, the Fellowship of Confessional Lutherans and Solid Ground of Canada."

Churches joining the association do not have to join WordAlone, he stated emphatically. They don't have to leave the ELCA and can remain part of their current geographic synods or districts.

Freund explained WordAlone's involvement saying, "During the initial stages of formation, the WordAlone board and the WordAlone association task force will have primary roles in giving direction and support. That's because of the organizational capacities already in place through the WordAlone Network. Eventually the work will be supported by the contributions of congregations and individuals who include it as a part of their benevolence giving."

One reason for forming an association is to shape a faithful Lutheran witness for the future, Freund said. Training leaders and pastors through seminary education is part of the vision for the association. Thus, the WordAlone convention also called for a study of setting up a Lutheran House of Studies, which would provide orthodox Lutheran theological education for present and future pastors.

## For the record

By Pastor Steven E. King  
Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Maple Lake Minn.

As a member of the WordAlone Network, I have been impressed by the faithful work of my colleagues and friends in the movement who do the work of the Lord, remaining steadfast in the Bible and Confessions, and are truly making a difference in the Church. Having gone through the congregational statistics of my own Southwestern Minnesota Synod, I was even more impressed by the data that demonstrates the positive ministry of WordAlone members.

The following summarizes information from the public record, published in the SW MN Synod Handbook for 2004-2005. It is not only an affirmation of faithful ministry, it addresses some of the false assumptions that have been made about the movement:

### Is WordAlone a "pastor-driven" movement?

Every conference in the SW MN Synod is home to either a WordAlone Network congregation, or an actively serving WordAlone pastor. However, only 40% of the WordAlone congregations in the synod are actually served by a pastor who is a member of WordAlone. Conversely, only 31% of the active pastors of the synod, who are WordAlone members, serve a WordAlone congregation.

This shows the significance of lay leadership in WordAlone—with or without the sponsorship of a pastor. It also shows that WordAlone pastors do not appear to bully their congregations into joining the network, but have been able to maintain their convictions, while serving in a way that has been respectful of the congregation.

### Are WordAlone congregations negligent in benevolence?

There are 45 congregations in the SW MN Synod that are either members of the WordAlone Network, or are served by a pastor who is a member of WordAlone. They represent 16.3% of the total congregations of the synod. Yet these same congregations gave 25.1% of the total benevolence dollars recorded for the synod in 2004-2005:

- Congregational benevolence giving (percentage of total benevolence vs. total expenses): For all congregations of the synod = 14.0%; for congregations served by a WordAlone pastor = 17.2% (+3.2% above average).
- Total benevolence dollars given per member (total benevolence divided by the number of baptized members): For all congregations of the synod = \$31 per year; for congregations served by a WordAlone pastor = \$39 per year (+\$8 per member above average).

Contrary to what is often assumed, congregations that are blessed with the leadership of a WordAlone pastor actually give more in total benevolence than the average congregation—both as a percentage of total giving, as well as on a per member basis.

### Do WordAlone concerns distract from real mission?

On many occasions, I have heard WordAlone's concern about confessional issues described as a "distraction from real ministry." It is said, "if we only spent as much time on mission and evangelism as we do on questions of theology" how much more could the Church (Continued on page 14)

## False presuppositions and questionable assumptions

(Continues from page 1) those in Christ to "be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." (Phil. 2:2). Love is the manifestation of unity in Christ, not its basis.

sciences and "weak" consciences. Whenever conscience severs itself from faith in Christ and fidelity to the Word, it is no longer conscience in the true sense. Indeed, some in the Corinthian church wanted to solve their disagreements by applying precisely such a therapeutic model of conscience, an approach that Paul unequivocally rejected.

whole with regard to sexuality and not to remove isolated texts from this canonical context.

that Jesus, in fact, does make an important exception with regard to divorce: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery" (Matt. 19:9; see also Matt. 5:31-32). To refer to this as a "most instructive parallel" is grossly misleading. The entire and unanimous witness of Scripture is against the practice of homosexuality in all of its manifestations; this is **not** the case with regard to divorce where there is a limited exception. One might add that the church's laxity in properly assessing the

b. Since the word "diversity" is an ideological term popular in secular culture and does not appear in Scripture, we have to assume that "variety of gifts" is meant. Paul, however, intentionally links this phrase with the adjective "same." "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the **same** Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the **same** Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the **same** God who activates all of them in everyone" (1 Cor. 12:4). Reconciled diversity can never function as a substitute for the simultaneous embrace of contradictory moral positions within the church.

4. That the ELCA "trust pastors and congregations to discern ways to provide faithful pastoral care to same-sex couples." The use of the term "same-sex couples" goes beyond all previous statements of this church that explicitly refer only to

b. Different and conflicting interpretations of the Bible often result from a non-Trinitarian, ideologically driven set of hermeneutical assumptions. Because some scholars, for example, argue that Jesus' crucifixion is irrelevant for Christology or because some argue that Jesus' resurrection is non-historical, these are hardly grounds for renouncing the basic confessional principles of Lutheran theology.

c. It is the Lutheran, Trinitarian hermeneutic that must judge the appropriateness of the interpretations of individual texts based on the canonical whole. This principle is neither in evidence in the work of the task force on sexuality nor in the deliberations of the church council.

**"...the church's laxity in properly assessing the appropriateness of divorce and remarriage can never serve as a foundation for an ethic of sexual laissez-faire."**

appropriateness of divorce and remarriage can never serve as a foundation for an ethic of sexual laissez-faire. *Abusus non tollit usum!* [Abuse does not preclude proper use]. And, then, finally to argue that the "remarriage of divorced people" is a process that "provides the opportunity for continued discernment for where the Holy Spirit is leading this church" smacks of theological naiveté. Even if Lutherans are

**"Whenever conscience severs itself from faith in Christ and fidelity to the Word, it is no longer conscience in the true sense."**

### Recommendation 3

The following **assumptions** and **presuppositions** are related to recommendation 3:

2. That the ELCA "be urged to concentrate on ways to live together faithfully in the midst of disagreements..." What these words seem to suggest is that the ELCA will be asked to make a decision on blessing same-sex relationships in August based on neither Scripture nor the Confessions and then to urge the majority of its members to subsequently live faithfully with the decisions imposed by a minority that is flagrant in its opposition to faith standards held by the Church catholic always, everywhere and by all.

5. That "within this church we continue to share a profound commitment to the authority of Scripture as the norm for faith and life" and "we recognize there are deeply held yet different interpretations of Scripture [with regard to homosexuality] to which consciences are bound." In light of these assertions the following concerns need to be considered:

3. That "we respect the integrity of convictions of conscience and faith..." Both Scripture and the Confessions unmistakably distinguish between "good" con-

a. If the ELCA indeed holds Scripture as normative, it is necessary to maintain the Lutheran hermeneutical emphasis of viewing the canonical

6. That the "most instructive parallel for this moment may be clergy who are divorced and remarried, a condition specifically condemned in Scripture by Jesus. Without contradicting Scriptural teaching, this church examines such persons and their witness, and may endorse their call to ministry." This statement is both false and contains contradictory double-talk, that is, how is it possible to state a biblical principle (**incorrectly** in this case), blatantly contradict it and then say that this is being done "without contradicting Scriptural teaching"? Neither Scripture nor Jesus ever discuss the issue of "clergy who are divorced and remarried...." Scripture indicates

not aware of the guidance of the church fathers, they should at least be aware that Melancthon worked out precise criteria for divorce and remarriage.

7. That leaving the Scriptural "language reflective of the traditional view intact" but requiring "additional steps for granting exceptions respects what this church believes to be the extraordinary nature of these calls." This assertion both relegates Scripture to "language reflective of the traditional view" effectively excising Scripture as an authoritative Word for the post-modern world and overriding its authority (Continued on page 10)

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(Continues from page 9) with a non-canonical, ideological perspective.

8. That "within this church we confess that all people are sinful beings, including those who serve in rostered ministry." Does this declaration intend to suggest that because we acknowledge sinfulness that therefore all behaviors may be condoned, even those contrary to the Christian life? Is this assertion not remarkably similar to the one that the Apostle Paul had to reject unequivocally in Rom. 6:1-2? "What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?" This ELCA declaration confuses the biblical definition of sin as well as drastically divorces grace from the holiness and purity of the Christian life that is expected of all who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
9. That "there are those in this church who believe that the Holy Spirit is calling into public ministry persons who are in committed, same-sex relationships, and congregations are indicating a willingness to call such persons to service." Indeed, through the history of the Christian Church many individuals and groups believed that they were being led by the Holy Spirit to do things that the Trinitarian church labeled as heretical. The point is that the Holy Spirit does not simultaneously call the Body of Christ into contradictory paths. We find ourselves in a time when some biblical scholars driven by post-modern perspectives present us with fundamentally contradictory claims about Jesus and the authority of Scripture. The words of St. Paul are appropriate in this second millennium as well: "I want you to understand that no one speaking by

the Spirit of God ever says, 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). It is the **same** Spirit that assigns a variety of gifts and to "each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the **common** good" (1 Cor. 12:7). Again the Apostle Paul speaks to this issue: "we were all made to drink of **one** Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:12). To discern whether some in Christ are truly speaking for "the upbuilding and encouragement and consolation" of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 14:3) is indeed urgent since "all who eat and drink without discerning the body [that is, the church] eat and drink judgment against themselves" (1 Cor. 11:29). But for such a process of prayerful and theological reflection, serious discernment must take place before rather than after the fact of such a momentous decision. To date there is no evidence that such a process has taken place, only the assertions by some that they have been given direction by the Holy Spirit as to His leading. But once the ecclesiological decision has been made to ordain practicing gays and lesbians it will be irreversible and it will have been made on the basis of the alleged individual knowledge of some but not by the discernment of the Holy Spirit by all. We are all "made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:12), the Holy Spirit who is not the private possession of some but the Triune God's gift to His holy and apostolic church.

### Summary

Given the fact that the recommendations of the church council have no demonstrated Lutheran theological foundations and are based on questionable assumptions and a series of false presuppositions, their re-

commendations for action will result in a heterodox ELCA marked by:

1. The creation of enormous tensions at the local level and heightened political activity with regard to the election of bishops at both the synodical and national levels with a key litmus test being a given candidate's position on the "limited process for exceptions to the normative policies of this church" thus effectively undermining "ways to live together faithfully in the midst of our disagreements."
2. A church willing to do mission without a normative Trinitarian hermeneutic and willing to live with contradictory interpretations of Scripture derived from a hermeneutic alien to that confessed by the Lutheran reform movement.
3. A church that no longer believes in one and the same Holy Spirit that activates all His gifts for the common good, but rather a series of contradictory spirits that substitute ideological agendas of diversity.
4. A church that will operate on the basis of deception by maintaining one set of standards but simultaneously contradicting them. The normative principle of *sola scriptura* is maintained by creating contradictory exceptions to it thus, in effect, undermining its authority. Such deceit is further enhanced when one fails to recognize that—by authorizing the ordination of practicing gays and lesbians via the process of "exceptions"—the ELCA, in fact, has created a new norm in the life of the ELCA, one that will contradict Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, the one holy, catholic and apostolic church and the stated positions of its worldwide ecumenical partners.

Therefore, in order to avoid the dissolution of American Lutheranism as currently expressed by the ELCA, I urge that the

churchwide assembly recognize that serious failures of process and policy have been pursued to date and that the only appropriate action to be taken is to call for a completely new course of action. Such a renewed procedure would place all future deliberations in the context of the Lutheran Confessions and could mark them with careful theological, scriptural and scientific study and deliberation. Further, it is requisite that the ELCA follow the proper order of first emphasizing the Christian understanding of sexuality as a whole and only then its specific manifestations and aberrations. If this course is not followed the words of the eminent German Lutheran theologian, Prof. Wolfhart Pannenberg, may indeed be tragically prophetic:

"Whoever pressures the church to alter the normativeness of its teaching with regard to homosexuality must be aware that person promotes schism in the church. For a church that would permit itself to be pressured to no longer understand homosexual activity as a deviation from the biblical norm and to recognize homosexual partnerships alongside marriage, such a church would no longer be based on the foundation of Scripture, but, rather in opposition to its unanimous witness. A church that moves in such a direction would therefore have ceased being an evangelical church following in the steps of the Lutheran Reformation." (*Zeitwende*, 65/1, January 1994, *author's trans.*). [This article appeared earlier in *Lutheran Forum*.]



The Rev. Prof. Karl P. Donfried,  
Professor and doctor  
of theology,  
Smith College,  
Northampton, Mass.

## Changes proposed to include synods in nomination process for church

by Betsy Carlson, editor

Voters at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Churchwide Assembly Aug. 8-14 in Orlando, Fla., will have an opportunity to move church council elections a step closer to being representational of synods.

The ELCA church council is asking the assembly to allow synods to nominate candidates for the council. They now are nominated by the assembly's own nominating committee. The assembly still will elect the council members. The council wants church council membership to remain at 37, including the denomination's four officers and 33 other elected members, who serve six-year terms.

The new nomination process will have 11 different synods, on a rotating basis, each nominate two candidates for one church council seat every two years. Currently council members are nominated and elected at churchwide assemblies. About a third of its membership changes every two years. That pattern will continue.

Nominations from the floor of the churchwide assembly for church council will not be allowed.

The WordAlone Network has worked for several years to make national governance accountable to synods and local churches.

"We are gratified that the churchwide council is responding to efforts by WordAlone and some synods and some bishops to revise our governmental structures," said WordAlone Director Mark Chavez in July.

One such proposal is to enlarge the church council to 65 members, plus officers, with each synod nominating and electing its own representative.

WordAlone also suggested changing the assemblies to conventions and so voting

members would be seen as delegates representing and accountable to the people who elected them.

Neither objective has been achieved yet.

Assembly members are told usually that they represent no congregation or group and are to work on behalf of all the members of all the congregations in all the synods of the ELCA.

Pre-assembly materials assert that the church's governance system has served the church well in its 17 years of existence. However the information acknowledges that the system is perceived as confusing, complicated and unresponsive. To help change that perception, the governance proposal encourages church council members to visit their synod councils and to keep in contact with the synods.

The proposal adds several advisory members to the church council who will take part in council committee meetings, "where they will have the most opportunity to help shape the work and decisions of the council."

These new advisors include presidents of the ELCA's five ethnic associations, chairpersons from each program unit of the denomination, a person from Augsburg Fortress Publishers, one from Women of the ELCA. Also advising will be the chairperson from the consulting committee on the work on behalf of women and a representative each from the ELCA's colleges and universities, from seminaries and from social ministry organizations.

Present advisors are one bishop each from the nine ELCA regions and two youth advisors.

"The purposes of advisory members are to interpret to this (Continued on page 14)

ANALYSIS

## One synod questions unity, one gay blessings

By Betsy Carlson, editor

Memorials from synods to the Aug. 8-14 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Orlando show they supported unity in spite of serious disagreements and sent a mixed response on blessing of same-sex relationships, while opposing a proposal to ordain homosexuals in same-sex relationships.

These findings are based upon reviews of synod assembly news on the WordAlone and the Good Soil web sites as well as memorials on the ELCA site. (Good Soil is a collaboration of several pro-homosexual agenda Lutheran organizations and Soulforce, an interfaith group.)

Unity, blessing of same-sex relationships (based on a 1993 Conference of Bishops' statement) and ordination of persons in such relationships (through a process of granting exceptions to ELCA policies) are recommendations made to the churchwide assembly by the ELCA Church Council.

Though unity (at the cost of truth) and blessing garnered support, it appears that a single resolution from one synod, in the case of each topic, illuminated some smoke and mirrors. The West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod voted for "amicable dissolution" of the ELCA and asserts that differences over homosexuality are church dividing. Several theologians and church leaders also have disputed the assertion that the ELCA can be unified in the face of disagreements over Biblical authority.

The Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod wisely requested clarification of the 1993 Conference of Bishops' statement on blessings. Many persons see only the part where the bishops say that there is not basis for an official ceremony for blessing same-sex

relationships in the Bible or tradition. They do not know that the church council and others interpret the best ways to provide pastoral care to gays and lesbians as approval to bless relationships.

Raw calculations indicated that 32 synods favored unity while three voted against the recommendation; 46 synods were in favor of the recommendation on blessing same-sex relationships or of the 1993 bishops' statement, while 11 voted against.

On ordaining pastors in same-sex relationships, 19 memorials said yes and 13 said no. However the outlook changed with the addition of other resolutions on this question. Seven called for removing all barriers to blessing relationships or ordaining homosexuals, 13 requested discipline in cases of ordaining non-celibate homosexuals and 17 were for maintaining present policies against ordaining non-celibate homosexuals.

The number of memorials in opposition rose to 38. But the number favoring such ordinations grew to 26. However, some synods may have voted on more than one resolution on the same topic or in more than one year leading to some confusion in totals.

Four synods asked for a delay in voting on homosexuality questions until a social statement on human sexuality is finished, some said delay until 2009.

A few synods passed other memorials that include rescinding Called to Common Mission, calling for ratification by churches or synods of certain actions by the churchwide assembly and increasing the church council to four officers plus 65 members elected by their synods.

## ELCA officials have 'blank check'

(Continues from page 4)

directs the Office of the Presiding Bishop through the worship staff to complete a liturgical review of the proposed content of the new book of worship and to essentially continue developing worship materials while working "collaboratively" with synods, churchwide units and ecumenical partners. The Renewing Worship team has said it hopes to publish a book of worship in print and electronic form by October 2006.

The team is accepting comments and critique on the materials until this Aug. 15, the day after the churchwide assembly ends.

The presiding bishop and church council funded introduction of the new worship materials to the amount of \$950,000 in April from funds available due to under-spending in fiscal 2005 and designated funds that were released.

## What is ELCA central commitment?

(Continues from page 5)

**4) What will this program unit become if the ELCA approves same-sex marriage and gay ordination?** The unit would advocate for "the rights and privileges of people of color, including women, youth, churches and individuals living in poverty." Would it add the Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transsexual community under its aegis? Will mandatory "racial justice ed-

ucation" include propagandizing on behalf of the LGBT community as well? Is it meant to hold everyone to a higher standard, or would that standard be selectively enforced? A pastor who refuses to perform a same-sex marriage? Or a congregation that refuses to extend a call to a LGBT candidate?

## For the record

(Continues from page 7)

be doing? The statistics on activity and growth don't seem to bear this out:

- Percentage of worship attendance vs. baptized membership (one of the most commonly used criteria for congregational activity): For all congregations of the synod = 27.7%; for WordAlone member-congregations = 28.8% (+1.1% over average); For WordAlone congregations served by a WordAlone pastor = 29.8% (+2.1% over average).
- Growth or decline in overall baptized membership (total baptized membership

in 2005 vs. 2004): For all congregations of the synod = -0.82% (a net loss of 1,136 people); for WordAlone congregations served by a WordAlone pastor = +0.82% (a net gain of 81 people).

Congregations connected with WordAlone tend to have better worship attendance; and those that are served by WordAlone pastors have done better in avoiding the overall decline affecting other congregations. Perhaps this goes to show that concern about good biblical theology is precisely what is needed to serve the mission of Christ.

## Changes proposed in nomination process

(Continues from page 12)

church the policies, goals and outcomes established by the council; to shape the work of their committees, synods and organizations around those policies, goals

and outcomes and to bring ideas, issues and expertise to the council and its work," says the pre-assembly materials.

# Lutheran Clergy Connect

Lutheran Clergy Connect is one way for congregations seeking a pastor to connect with potential candidates who believe that Christ alone is sufficient for the unity of the church and that the Word of God is the authority for the church. Below are the most recent listings. A full list, which includes 17 additional listings, is posted on the WordAlone website. ([www.wordalone.org](http://www.wordalone.org)).

If you would like your congregation listed on Clergy Connect, please mail or fax your request on church letterhead, signed by an officer or call committee chair, to WordAlone Network, 2299 Palmer Dr., Suite 220, New Brighton, MN 55112 Fax: 651-633-4260. (Please notify us when the position's been filled.)

Give the following information:  
 Pastoral position  
 Congregation's name, city, & state (& website address if applicable)  
 Contact person  
 Phone number  
 E-mail address

*muters from the Bay area moving there. Located within a 2 hour drive from Yosemite area and the central Pacific coast.*

✦  
 Messiah Lutheran Church  
**Joliet, Illinois**  
 Contact: Dave Sylvester  
 Call Committee Chair  
 Messiah Lutheran Church  
 19901 S. Houbolt Road  
 Joliet, IL 60431  
 815-729-0436

*VBS children's church, after school programs, etc. Morningside is a large church with many programs in place that need oversight, expansion and management. Others need Christ-filled creativity. Must relate well to children and parents. See website "Job Opportunities" link for Job Description. Qualified candidates please submit resume and cover letter to church's postal address.*

Calls are listed starting with the most recently received.

✦  
 St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church  
**Los Banos, California**  
 Contact: Robert Mueller  
 Call Committee Chair  
 822 Jefferson Avenue  
 Los Banos, CA 93635  
 209-826-5466 - OR -  
 Brad Baumgartner,  
 Call Committee Vice-Chair  
 247 Stonewood Drive  
 Los Banos, CA 93635  
 209-826-7416 - OR -  
 church Email: [st-johns@sbcglobal.net](mailto:st-johns@sbcglobal.net)  
 [email accessed only by church administrator who is a member of the Call Committee]

*A full time Associate Pastor committed to a biblical and scholarly approach to teaching and preaching the Word who strongly believes in the Lutheran tradition. We are seeking an energetic and spirit-led individual to participate in the congregational life of our community of believers. Contemporary and traditional services are offered weekly. We are a 900-member congregation located in a growing area forty miles SW of Chicago.*

✦  
 A full time pastor who supports the 10 Affirmations associated with WordAlone. This person must have recognized abilities in preaching, teaching, pastoral care and worship leadership. All inquiries treated with strictest confidentiality. St. John's is a small congregation located in the Central Valley of California, averaging 61 people in weekly worship. Los Banos is a growing community with com-

✦  
 Morningside Lutheran Church  
 an LCMC/ELCA congregation  
**Sioux City, Iowa**  
 Contact: Pastor Paul Spaulding  
 Morningside Lutheran Church  
 700 S. Martha Street  
 Sioux City, IA 51106  
 712-276-2511  
*A full time Children's Ministry Director for children, birth through fifth grade. Responsibilities include Sunday school,*

✦  
 Christ the King Lutheran Church  
**Hutchinson, Minnesota**  
 Contact: Sharon Rostberg, call committee chair: 320-587-2684 or Jon Ross, vice chair: 320-234-9644, or send inquiries in care of: Christ the King Lutheran Church  
 PO Box 369, Hutchinson, MN  
*A WA congregation of 2,500 baptized in a growing community of 13,000 is seeking a full time associate pastor with an engaging preaching style, energetic and creative and a love for people, to work as a team with lead pastor in preaching and teaching the Word, leading and conducting worship and offering pastoral care, with specific responsibilities for adult education, small group ministries, family support, and youth. A strong scholarly approach to teaching Scriptures is a must; gifts for music and drama are highly desirable.*