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NETWORK NEWS

Volume 10, Issue 3

MAY - JUNE 2009

ELCA Church Council rejects pleas for 2/3 majority at churchwide assembly

by Mark C. Chavez, WordAlone vice president

In spite of requests from 15 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America synods and a significant majority of ELCA bishops asking for a two-thirds majority vote, the ELCA Church Council voted to stick with its November decision to propose rules of procedure for the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly that would require only a simple majority vote on resolutions about changes in church teaching and policy to allow practicing homosexuals to serve as ELCA ministers. The church council met March 27-30 in Chicago.

The council's Legal and Constitutional Committee presented a proposed rule for the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly that was nearly identical to the rule it had recommended in November. The church council had voted 19-10 to delete the two-thirds majority requirement at its November meeting. In presenting the rule at the March meeting, the committee made no recommendation for approval or disapproval. Ten council members voted for the two-thirds majority rule for the ministry policy resolutions, 21 opposed it and two abstained in the Saturday, March 28, vote.

In recent weeks, 15 ELCA synod councils had asked the church council to propose a two-thirds majority rule on all the sexuality matters to be considered by the church-

wide assembly. Three synod councils had supported a simple majority rule.

The ELCA Conference of Bishops voted by a two-to-one margin in support of a two-thirds majority rule at their meeting in early March. Because it was a closed session, the ELCA had not reported the bishops' vote. However, when a council member requested that the council hear the Conference of Bishops' advice on this matter, the bishops' views were made public.

Some council members said that if they changed their minds on the rule, it might look like the council was succumbing to pressure from "a few synods." One member suggested that perhaps all of the other synods agreed with the simple majority rule.

Some council members also said that by making the decision in November—prior to the release of the task force report—their decision was neutral with respect to the content of the task force report. If they changed their minds now, it might look like they were commenting on the content of the task force report.

The 2009 churchwide assembly will adopt its rules of procedure at its first session and could amend the rules to reinstate the

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(2/3 majority...¹ Continues from page one)

two-thirds majority requirement for changes in ministry standards.

ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson set the tone for all of the council's discussions with his report at the start of the meeting on March 28. He said, "We are at the intersection of fear and hope," and went on to say that the council and the ELCA should not let fear keep them from doing what they ought to do and be who they ought to be. He urged them to move forward boldly in hope.

Sunday, March 29, the council dealt with the proposed social statement on human sexuality and the ministry policies resolutions from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Human Sexuality.

The Rev. Steve Loy, chair of the council's Program and Services Committee, which had reviewed the proposed social statement, Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust, before the meeting, said that the committee considered the proposed social statement to be credible and therefore recommended that the church council pass it along to the churchwide assembly with minimal changes.

When the churchwide staff and leaders presented the social statement to the church council for consideration, they praised the task force for its work.

The Rev. Roger Thompson, chair of the Church in Society Program Committee, said the task force accurately reflected the diversity of views in the ELCA and that the social statement is a "very admirable document."

The Rev. Roger Willer, director of the ELCA Department of Studies, Church in Society, reported that the task force took seriously the feedback to the 2008 draft social statement on human sexuality and made significant revisions in the proposed statement including: writing a shorter statement (1,000 words less); placing sexual ethics within the doctrine of creation;

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Network News is published six times yearly by the WordAlone® Network.

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WA leaders say church council actions reveal direction council wants for ELCA

by Betsy Carlson, editor

"Despite their attempts to appear neutral, some within the leadership of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a majority of the churchwide Church Council members and some churchwide staff have played their hand."

WordAlone Network President Jaynan Clark Eglund made the above comment in an email interview after the council voted recently to send a task force recommended social statement on human sexuality and separate resolutions that would establish a local congregational option for persons in same-sex relationships to serve as ordained or lay ministers to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly for consideration.

Clark Eglund also said, "Churchwide leaders may say they're 'transmitting' a 'process' and not 'recommending' a 'change,' but that doesn't wash. They've made a play that clearly favors a change in ministry policies."

WordAlone Vice President Mark Chavez said after he had attended the council meeting: "The council's decisions to send the task force documents to the churchwide assembly are disappointing, but not surprising. What else would you expect from a system heavily stacked in one direction?"

"Only three of 30 people (task force members, advisors and staff) who worked on the documents in the task force process since

2005 were willing to uphold the biblical norms for sexuality."

In other action, the church council reaffirmed a vote from its November meeting to propose only a majority vote at this summer's churchwide assembly to allow persons in same-sex relationships to serve in ministry positions. Fifteen synod councils and a huge majority of bishops recently had asked the council to propose a two-thirds majority for approval of task force resolutions on non-celibate homosexuals serving as ministers.

Clark Eglund wrote, "For a handful of people to think that a larger handful of voting members of one declining denomination at one point in time, by simple majority vote, can change the teaching of the Christian church regarding marriage, family, sexuali-

"Churchwide leaders may say they're 'transmitting' a 'process' and not 'recommending' a 'change,' but that doesn't wash. They've made a play that clearly favors a change in ministry policies."

ty and natural created order as taught for more than two millennia is either the epitome of arrogance in this day and age of unbridled hedonism or it is just plain crazy."

Proponents of homosexual behavior agreed that the church council actions favored a change in policy, but expressed a different view of the potential impact. Comments by Emily Eastwood, executive director of

the pro-gay Lutherans Concerned/North America, evidently written during the council meeting, appeared in a post on a

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“Who created marriage in the first place? That would be God, of course, so how is it that some have become so presumptuous that they believe they can change that in the church?”

web site of a group known as Goodsoil.

Goodsoil is a collaboration of organizations working for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their families in the life of the ELCA.

Eastwood said on the web site, *“Our thanks are due to the council for upholding the fairness of a simple majority for elimination of the ban against ministers in same-gender relationships.”*

“As at CWA07 [churchwide assembly 2007], we expect an attempt to amend the rules on opening of the CWA09 to include a two-thirds requirement, but such an amendment would itself take two-thirds of the assembly to pass.”

Clark Eglund asserted, “With this bold move by the church council, which ignores the pleas of 15 synod councils, the ELCA may be headed for an across-the-board policy change at the churchwide assembly in August with local option being sold as the middle ground, compromise decision.”

“Local option is not an option,” Clark Eglund wrote, “if it is ‘okay’ with one couple, one local church and one pastor, it is

only a matter of time before what is practiced becomes what is taught, preached and confessed. Practice will change faith.”

Other comments on the Goodsoil site stated, *“While [the] document still fails to provide a right or rite of marriage for same-gender couples, we want the social statement to pass. All in all, this was a very good day for Goodsoil, our allies and the church we love. There is a sense in the council room that this may well be the time for change. Thanks be to God.”*

Clark Eglund looked at the gay marriage issue differently: “Who created marriage in the first place? That would be God, of course, so how is it that some have become so presumptuous that they believe they can change that in the church?”

“In these chaotic and turbulent times as a nation and across the globe, people are grasping for an anchor to grab on to. The church should be providing that anchor through the Word of God, but instead it has hauled in the anchor, drifted away and will soon run aground unless it changes course.”

Eastwood of LC/NA said of the course the church council took: *“Today’s momentous actions by the ELCA Church Council guarantee that for the first time in the history of our church a recommendation for the elimination of the policy of discrimination against ministers in same-gender relationships will come to the floor of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly from the churchwide organization itself. The Church Council has acted for justice.”*

Clark Eglund commented on the proposed social statement on sexuality and ELCA decisions, “An added problem we have here is that many changes in teaching would be made that will go undetected by many, such as a totally different definition of a ‘bound conscience,’ ‘being captive to sin’ and ‘freedom in Christ.’ Everything has been cut down and tailored to the individual and self.” ♦

Statement by three dissenting members of the ELCA Task Force on Human Sexuality

by Scott Suskovic, Corinne Johnson, and Carol S. Hendrix — March 28, 2009

[Reprinted by permission from: www.lutheranforum.org/sexuality/the-dissenters-speak/]

We begin with a word of thanks and gratitude for the opportunity to serve on the ELCA Task Force for Human Sexuality. Even though the three of us often disagreed with the other 27 members and advisors of the task force on traditional biblical interpretation and theological principles, we were treated as the minority voice with great kindness, dignity and respect. Because we firmly believe the current policies of the ELCA, when enforced, are consistent with the biblical witness, Christian moral tradition, and the view of the vast majority of Christians in the world, we refused to sign off on both the social statement and the recommendations and are submitting our dissent. Changing current policies would sever the ELCA from the ecumenical church and the Christian consensus down through the ages. These policies include:

1. People who are homosexual in their orientation must live a celibate lifestyle in order to serve on the roster of the ELCA. (Vision and Expectations and Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline)
2. The 1993 Statement of the ELCA Conference of Bishops states that “there is basis neither in Scripture nor tradition for the establishment of an official ceremony by this church for the blessing of a homosexual relationship.” However, this statement by ELCA bishops acknowledged that local pastors within their contexts are to “provide pastoral care for all to whom they minister.”

Of critical importance when considering sexuality is the role of God’s commandments—his Law—in the moral ordering of

the Christian life. We are convinced that God’s intention for marriage—life-long covenant of fidelity between a man and a woman—established as the First Institute in Genesis 2 and reaffirmed by Jesus in Mark 10:6-9, serves as the center around which all Christian sexual ethics are defined. That original design, echoed throughout scripture and even depicted as the ideal relationship between Jesus and his bride, the Church (Revelation), has been shattered due to human sin (the Fall; see Genesis 3). Because of sin, humans have turned away from God’s intent for their sexual lives, bringing into the world such behaviors as polygamy, divorce, abuse, adultery, homosexual acts, pornography, etc., that no longer reflect the established pattern and ideal set forth by God.

However, by focusing on trust, freedom, and love of neighbor, the social statement, Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust, strains forward to see what God might be doing anew within the community of faith, particularly in regards to conduct of persons who are homosexual, rather than building on the foundation depicted in the creation accounts of Genesis. The concept of freedom of the Christian, while helpful in our understanding of salvation by faith alone, cannot be the justification for a lifestyle and behavior contrary to the biblical witness and the moral tradition. From Galatians (5:13) we heard often, “For you were called to freedom.” However, we did not hear often enough the next line, “Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the self-indulgence.” By centering on justification by faith, the social statement minimizes the role of the Law in Christian life, contrary to Luther’s exposition of the Christian life in the catechisms, and is at

(Continues on page six)

(‘Dissenting members...’ Continues from page five)

odds with the Lutheran Confessions—Article VI of the Formula of Concord. Justification by faith does not nullify the commands of God; to argue thus is to fall into “antinomianism.”

We contend that the recommendations proposed in Report and Recommendations, which advocate same-gender unions and the ordination of non-celibate homosexual persons, have little biblical, historical or traditional support. The proposed recommendations advocate a radical departure from long-held moral tradition and biblical interpretation, thus distancing us further from the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox churches, evangelical churches and most of the churches in the Protestant mainstream. We believe this is a very serious step that should not be taken by a sharply divided church, particularly without passage by a two-thirds vote at the 2009 churchwide assembly.

Because of these theological and pragmatic concerns and because the proposed recommendation threatens to fragment the ELCA as a church by allowing synods and individual congregations to determine their own practice, we felt compelled to draft Dissenting Position #1 (found in the Appendix). Recommending broad change

The recommendations of the majority of the task force represent a radical change that not only is contrary to Scripture and the apostolic faith, but is one that will splinter our congregations, alienate many of our members, further divide the unity of this church . . .

in the present policies is extremely unwise and unfaithful. There may come a day in which a new consensus in the Church might mandate a change in teaching and practice, as was seen with slavery and Apartheid. Or, over time, this church might

find that its resolve grows even stronger to maintain its foundational core beliefs, such as with the authority of scripture (II Timothy 3:16), justification by faith alone (Romans 3:28) and the primacy of Christ (Acts 4:12). Lack of consensus does not mandate change. In fact, it argues for the opposite: maintaining current policies.

Because longstanding biblical interpretation and teachings of the apostolic faith, all of which are shared with ecumenical church partners and partner churches of the Lutheran World Federation, argue against changing the current ELCA policies, we recommend the following to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

1. Affirm and uphold the current policies of the ELCA, including both rostering and discipline, as stated in Vision and Expectations and Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline.
2. Affirm the pastoral guidance of the 1993 Statement of the ELCA Conference of Bishops, that “there is basis neither in Scripture nor tradition for the establishment of an official ceremony by this church for the blessing of a homosexual relationship.” However, pastors within their local contexts are to “provide pastoral care for all to whom they minister.”

The ELCA is a church deeply divided on the issue of human sexuality. The recommendations of the majority of the task force represent a radical change that not only is contrary to Scripture and the apostolic faith, but is one that will splinter our congregations, alienate many of our members, further divide the unity of this church and, we believe, grieve the heart of God. We pray this tragedy will not occur.

Submitted in the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Rev. Dr. Scott Suskovic; the Rev. Corinne Johnson; the Rev. Carol S. Hendrix. ♦

(‘2/3 majority...’ Continues from page two)

clarifying the role of the Law; using less technical language; locating sexuality in God’s left-handed ruling; and noting that disagreements on sexual ethics are not matters in which salvation is at stake.

The church council unanimously approved amendments to the proposed social statement, which the task force regarded as friendly amendments that further the intent of the social statement. Then the council voted by a strong majority to “transmit” the social statement to the churchwide assembly as amended.

The church council also voted to transmit implementing resolutions related to the proposed statement, with some amendments, to the churchwide assembly. Some council members opposed this action.

The amended social statement and implementing resolutions as they will be presented to the 2009 churchwide assembly are available online at www.elca.org/faithfuljourney.

The church council then took up the Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies resolutions from the task force. The Rev. Rebecca Larson, head of the Church in Society Unit said that, contrary to some news reports, the ELCA is not proposing a change in rostering policies but proposing a process by which the ELCA will decide if it wants to consider a change in policies.

The task force recommended a series of four resolutions that would allow ELCA pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships.

The Rev. Peter Strommen, chair of the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality, repeated that the task force had not proposed what the ELCA ought to do, but rather a process for how to proceed when there is no consensus on the sexuality issues.

The Rev. Stan Olson, head of the Vocation and Education unit, said that “structured flexibility” is a shorthand way to refer to what already exists in the ELCA candidacy

process. He said that “structured flexibility” is not a proposal for local option because the ELCA does not currently have a local option. If the ELCA already had a local option then it would be accurate to say the task force recommendation is a proposal for local option.

Later in the meeting, Olson clarified that resolution 4 would allow for different practices among ELCA synods and congregations.

The church council voted overwhelmingly to transmit resolutions 1 and 2 to the 2009 churchwide assembly.

Resolution 1 asks the ELCA to “commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.” The council amended this proposal to delete a reference to synods.

Resolution 2 asks “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.”

The church council also voted overwhelmingly to transmit resolutions 3 and 4, but after much more discussion.

Resolution 3 states that “in the implementation of these resolutions, the ELCA commits itself to bear one another’s burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all.”

Questions were raised about the definition of “bound conscience” — prominent in the third resolution. Is it a proper definition? Is it a new definition?

Pastor Willer said that the church in society unit was preparing a document that would show that the definition of “bound conscience” used by the task force is longstanding in Lutheran and Christian teaching. He said it hadn’t been used in recent years, which was why it appears to be new. Willer asserted that Martin Luther understood “bound conscience” to apply not only

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to central matters of salvation but also to other matters, and that Luther understood it to mean the ability to judge moral doctrine. The document was to be made available in April.

Resolution 4 details the policy changes necessary to current ELCA teaching and policy to enact the previous resolutions.

After much discussion, resolution 4 was substantially amended and shortened. One council member said that the amendments are more transparent in that they make it clear that the resolution allows a congregation to introduce a practice in a synod that might otherwise not accept the practice.

Throughout all of the discussions on the sexuality issues, only a few people spoke in opposition to the content of the task force documents.

The church council made its decisions on the sexuality documents after hearing grim news about the financial situation of the ELCA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

Canadian Bishop Susan Johnson was first to report its grim financial situation. She has had to cut her staff by 30 percent. There are now only 10 full-time employees in the ELCIC national office. She is trying to run the office with one-third the real funds they had in 1986. Individual income in Canada has kept pace with inflation, but giving to congregations and giving to synods and churchwide has not. She believes they will need to reduce the number of synods or to downsize them.

“We’re running out of runway,” Johnson said. She added they still have some time to make choices, but they soon won’t.

When the ELCA’s financial condition was reported, the Rev. Wyvetta Bullock, the executive for administration, said that the ELCA is close to being on the edge like the Canadian church.

The ELCA has had a significant decline in mission support from synods thus far this

year. January 2009 was the second lowest January in the ELCA’s history, February was down, and March was reported down. In fiscal year 2008 the churchwide unit received 95.8 percent of planned mission support. The estimate is for only 93 percent in 2009. The ELCA treasurer reported that factoring for inflation, mission support is down 42 percent from 1989.

Because of the revised income estimates, 35.5 churchwide staff positions were eliminated in recent weeks—23.5 occupied staff positions and 12 vacant positions. All churchwide units have made reductions, a partial hiring freeze is in place, and salaries for the highest pay grades will be reduced by 3 percent.

In another action the church council approved, with no discussion, the ELCA bishops’ response to the 2007 churchwide assembly resolution that called for a report from the bishops to the 2009 churchwide assembly on their accountability to ELCA policies. The bishops concluded that no new document was needed for the 2009 assembly because they had been regularly reviewing accountability all along and the current ELCA documents were sufficient.

The church council used process observers throughout the meeting to report on the freedom in the meeting for all to express themselves and for all voices to be heard. Ironically, at the very end of the meeting when advisers to the council were making reports, the Rev. Khader N. El-Yateem, chair of the Multicultural Ministries Program Committee informed the council that none of the Arab or Middle Eastern ELCA congregations had participated in the sexuality studies and feedback in the past several years. The leaders of those congregations did not present the sexuality studies and documents in their congregations because it would have been unhelpful and troublesome. He said many other ethnic congregations had also not participated for the same reasons. He warned the church council that it does not have the input or participation of many of these congregations. ♦

Lutheran CORE to start ‘new endeavor’ within ELCA

by Betsy Carlson, editor

Lutheran CORE, Coalition for Reform, is inviting lay people, pastors, congregations and partner reform movements to become part of a “new endeavor,” a new ministry within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

“As a matter of urgency, Lutheran CORE will work for the outreach of the Gospel,” the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee stated in an open letter in March (the letter is at: lutherancore.org/pdf/L-CORE-steering-committee-letter-3.09.pdf). The committee plans to develop new congregations, revitalize existing congregations and provide support for global missionaries in pioneer evangelism.

To initiate this new enterprise, a proposed constitution will be presented for adoption at the coalition’s post-ELCA-Churchwide-Assembly meeting Sept. 25-26 in Indianapolis, Ind. To date, Lutheran CORE has functioned with minimal organization as an association for reform minded groups and churches.

The new ministry will be based on the principle of selective participation, according to the letter.

The committee wrote that participation in the ELCA will become even more discerning should ELCA decisions—whether at this summer’s churchwide assembly or in the future—go against the Christian convictions of members of the movement.

Since its founding in 2005 Lutheran CORE has worked to uphold biblical authority and the Christian doctrine of marriage, and to maintain the use of the biblical names for the persons of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The group also has sought to reassert making disciples for Christ the priority for the ELCA.

Lutheran CORE has used, admittedly with mixed results, the constitutional structures of the ELCA—assemblies and the election processes for synodical and churchwide offices—in its attempt to reform the

denomination, according to the steering committee.

However, coalition leaders showed hopefulness in their March letter inviting all who share the coalition’s goals and intentions and who agree with the Common Confession (lutherancore.org/com_conf.shtml) to:

- Participate in the hope that God has given, Jesus Christ crucified and risen, with the help of the Holy Spirit;
- Affirm the authority of Holy Scripture as God’s Word of Law and Gospel, led by the Holy Spirit;
- Renew their commitments to the confessions of the Lutheran Church, with the Holy Spirit as their guide;
- Strengthen the ministries of local congregations and to spread the Gospel to all people, impelled by the Holy Spirit;
- Be partners in a confessional movement within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with the Holy Spirit by their sides; and
- Seek personal renewal under the Word of God and with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The new Lutheran CORE will cooperate, “whenever possible” with synods and the churchwide organization and will support “faithful ministries,” according to the invitational letter.

In other cases, the letter notes, the group will provide alternative resources for congregational life in worship, Christian education and youth ministry.

With its partners, the coalition plans to develop a design for theological education; recognize the candidacy and calling processes and disciplinary procedures as synodical functions, but “in ways to be determined” will assist synods, congregations and ministers, lay and ordained in those functions; and to work with all Lutherans in North America who desire to maintain a confessional Lutheran witness on behalf of the Word of God. ♦

‘Exceptional’ pastors will continue to come your way

by Jaynan Clark Eglund, WordAlone president

In the past few months, I have discussed with Luther Seminary leadership and faculty the current status of the 2001 bylaw amendment for ordination, the allowance for seminarians who request exceptions from being ordained by a bishop, the opinions of individuals at Luther about the provisions for such ordinations and what they see or hope for in the future for exceptions.

I also had conversations with Stan Olson, executive director for Vocation and Education, the churchwide program unit that monitors use of the bylaw. He said, “Consistently, about 2 percent of ordinations each year are done under provisions of the bylaw. From our point of view, the bylaw is functioning as intended.”

Called to Common Mission, the full-communication agreement between The Episcopal Church and the ELCA, approved in 2000, required that bishops must ordain pastors. Prior to that either pastors or bishops had ordained pastors in the ELCA.

Many in the ELCA, including the WordAlone Network, believed the mandatory imposition of this Episcopal Church practice conflicted with Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession. Article 7 says human rites need not be uniformly observed throughout the church. In response to the confessional opposition to the Episcopal practice, the 2001 church-

Make your evangelism constant

by Giles C. Ekola, retired Lutheran pastor, Garfield, Minn.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only son John 3:16. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me ... and gave Himself for me. Galatians 2:20. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. I John 4:11. NKJV

This past summer the editor of “Connections” asked if I had a Christmas reflection to share. I told him of a wartime experience of a family in Finland. He asked

wide assembly approved the bylaw amendment, which provided a process for graduating seminarians to ask to be ordained in a traditional Lutheran manner by a pastor.

Richard Bliese, president of Luther Seminary, supports the bylaw exception as a part of the system of the ELCA. He said, “Calling it an exception does not do justice to what this option within the ELCA really means confessionally and ecumenically.”

Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., the largest of the eight ELCA seminaries, providing 25 to 30 percent of new rostered leaders, informs its students about the confessional implications of Called to Common Mission and the options they have as graduating seniors.

Dean of Students Patricia Lull has been in conversation with senior students at Luther Seminary regarding the bylaw exception and stands ready to help students understand the process and how best to be in relationship with synodical staff and leadership in their new synods.

President Bliese went on to explain, “At Luther Seminary we work hard to prepare all our seniors for their transition into service in the church. We support and shepherd students as they prepare for first call in the ELCA, including those ordained via this church’s bylaw exception.” ♦

me to write it.

The article appeared in the 2008 Christmas issue. It centered on an authentic, evangelical Christmas experience. Here it is in a condensed version.

The onset of the vicious war was best summarized in Finland’s Marshall Carl Mannerheim’s memoirs. “November 30, 1939, opened sunny and clear Early in

(‘Evangelism...’ Continues from page ten)

the morning the streets (of Helsinki) were crowded with children and grownups on their way to school and work. Suddenly bombs fell in the center of the town spreading death and destruction.”

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was determined to crush and claim Finland in a week or two.

It became a great risk to remain in Helsinki and in other bombed towns of southern Finland. It was also great risk for those with summer cottages in the far north to travel to them. The family of whom we write chose the latter. They fished. They hunted game for food. Made stove-wood for heat and found materials to dry for insulation – all to survive sub-zero temperatures.

Christmas was fast approaching. Both parents and children thought and spoke of it, remembering past gifts of clothing and winter wear. Now they had no gifts to give. However, the idea came to them with energy and joy! “We will give the Gift of

Christmas to one another.”

And so they did. “In and through Jesus Christ I give myself to you. (Or) In Christ I give myself to you.” Their thoughts? Jesus Christ is the living Gift of Christmas. Since we live in Him, and He lives in us, let us give ourselves, as Christs, to one another.

In 1985 my wife, Sally, and I went to Finland to visit relatives. Later we met a man who is a member of this story’s family. He said, “Our family agrees that it was the most beneficial experience of our lives. Every year since we have gathered to give the Gift of Christmas. In addition many other families of relatives and friends join with us annually. It keeps expanding.”

God gives and imbues His redeeming salvation to us through many voices. Let us consider, adopt and use this two-way evangelical expression: “In and through Jesus Christ I (we) give myself (ourselves) to you.” It is an energizing and winsome expression that encourages and nurtures consistent and constant evangelism. ♦

Lutheran Clergy Connect

Clergy Connect is a way for churches seeking a pastor or other leader to connect with candidates who believe that the Word of God is the authority for the church. More listings and details are posted at:

www.wordalone.org/clergy.shtml

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The Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Monroeville, Pennsylvania

Position: Lay Parish Worker

Contact: Pastor Eric Ash at pastoreric@goodshepherdlife.org or 412-372-2934.

Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church Salt Lake City, Utah

Position: Pastor

Contact: Dave Mulder, Call Committee Chair, at dwmphd@msn.com or 801-485-9683 or 1755 East Stratford Ave., Salt Lake City, Utah 84106.

St. Paul Lutheran Church Bulverde, Texas

Position: Associate Pastor

Contact: stpaulcallcommittee@gvyc.com or send resumé to Lori Romain, Call Committee Chair, at 4848 Elm Creek Drive, Bulverde, TX 78163 or call at 210-473-7190.

St. Paul’s Lutheran Church West Falls, New York

Position: Pastor

Contact: Ron Both at RBoth@roadrunner.com or 716-941-3656, or Ken Cox, call committee chair, at 716-652-6835 or 716-912-0241.

Bethesda Lutheran Church Dresser, Wisconsin

Position: Half-Time Pastoral Position

Contact: Laurie Johnson, Call Committee Chair, at Laurie.Johnson@thrivent.com or 1947 110th Ave, Dresser, WI 54009.