



Introduction

August 8-14, 2005, at the biennial Churchwide Assembly in Orlando, Florida, the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (ELCA) has an opportunity to rescind its standing policies that uniquely discriminate against lesbian and gay people in our church, and to do justice by the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (lgbt) community.

The *Alliance for Full Participation* is united in its effort to work for justice for lgbt people in Orlando at this Churchwide Assembly. For this effort, our *Alliance* includes all of the members and leaders of lgbt advocacy and activist organizations:

Lutherans Concerned/North America
Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries
Extraordinary Candidacy Project
Network for Inclusive Vision
Wingspan Ministry
Soulforce

Goodsoil.org is the name of this coordinated effort.

We are agreed on the following:

- We recognize the unconditional love of God for all persons and respect the intention of all lgbt people to affirm their baptismal covenant and claim their rightful place within this church.
- We find unacceptable any attempt to delay a decision beyond Orlando 2005. Delays beyond 2005 will be regarded as a breaking of trust between the ELCA and the lgbt and allied communities.
- We will be visibly present in Orlando to make our perspective known through negotiation, leafleting, conversations and direct action. Through these actions, we seek to expose the injustice and violence perpetrated by current ELCA policies that exclude lgbt persons, couples, and our families.

Regarding Ordination/Commissioning/Consecration

We believe:

“So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted.” (Article 5 of The Augsburg Confession, Latin Text, Kolb/Wengert edition).

"We have explained why we are unable with a good conscience to agree with the opponents when they defend the pontifical law concerning perpetual celibacy. It conflicts with divine and natural law; it disagrees with the canons themselves; it is superstitious and very dangerous; and, finally, the entire thing is a fraud. The real purpose of the law is not religion but domination, for which religion is just a wicked pretext." ("Article XXIII: The Marriage of Priests," in the "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," edited by Kolb/Wengert, p. 256)

“Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.” (1 Cor. 4:1-2)

1. Lgbt people are among those called by God to serve the church as ordained, commissioned and consecrated leaders. The church in its various expressions is invited to affirm God’s call and to find concrete ways to support the professional aspirations, as well as the spouses, families, personal health and security of lgbt ordained pastors, commissioned and consecrated leaders. Congregations of the ELCA are already affirming the call of God to lgbt persons. Lgbt persons are presently serving with authenticity and integrity in all expressions of the church’s rostered ministries.

“But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use?” (Romans 9:20-21)

2. We oppose the church’s current policy against gay and lesbian persons called to serve in ministry as defined in the documents of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America entitled “Vision and Expectations”¹ and “Guidelines for Discipline.”² We call for the immediate abolition of these policies.
3. The church’s policies discriminate unjustly and are enforced inconsistently against gay and lesbian persons and families. These policies have bound the conscience of our church. These policies have been elevated above our Confessional documents themselves, even above the Gospel for which we stand. These policies inhibit the church from fulfilling its mandate to proclaim the gospel and to live by “grace for Christ’s sake through faith alone.”

¹ "Ordained, commissioned and consecrated ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships." ("Vision and Expectations" - page 13)

² "Practicing homosexual persons are precluded from the ordained ministry of this church." (Guidelines for Discipline, page 4) and "Practicing homosexual persons are precluded from the rostered ministries of this church." (Guidelines for Discipline, page 8)

4. These policies are flawed in conception and content. Their enforcement has been arbitrary and harmful. These policies and their enforcement have inhibited evangelism and are contrary to the church's best understanding of our Gospel mission.
5. These policies discriminate against, trivialize and violate the sacred worth of all our relationships in the body of Christ. They must be abolished. For the sake of our life together the church must reclaim the center of our faith which is justification by grace through faith. We are reminded by the witness of Scripture:

"In Christ Jesus you are all people of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26-28)

"It is through Jesus Christ that all of us, Jews and Gentiles, are able to come in the one Spirit into the presence of God. So then, you Gentiles are not foreigners or strangers any longer; You are now fellow citizens with God's people and members of the family of God." (Ephesians 2:18-19)

"I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd." (John 10:16)

Therefore:

6. We seek the immediate and unequivocal abolition of the current policy of discrimination against lgbt persons with regard to ordination, consecration and commissioning to rostered ministries in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as articulated in "Vision and Expectations" and in "Guidelines for Discipline."
7. We seek a policy that equitably treats all people, including lgbt persons.
8. We seek a policy that proceeds from and is consistent with the vows made at the time of ordination/commissioning/consecration.
9. We view these changes in policy to be the first step in a process that leads to repentance of the whole church, and reconciliation and restoration for those individuals and congregations most affected by the church's discriminatory practices.
 1. We seek rostered status in the ELCA for those persons currently rostered with the Extraordinary Candidacy Project, and those persons who lost their rostered status as a consequence of the ELCA's policies.
 2. We seek the full restoration of congregations that have been removed from the ELCA's roster or disciplined for calling otherwise qualified but non-rostered gay and lesbian pastors
 3. We seek to have a declaration from the ELCA that states the harm done to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people through the ELCA's policies of exclusion.

Regarding Marriage and Covenanted Same-Gender Relationships

We believe:

10. The God of creation is relational. Human beings reflect the image of the Creator through relationships based on justice, respect and mutuality with God, self and other.
11. We affirm that sexuality is part of God's good creation. We acknowledge, honor and affirm the diversity, mystery and wonder of sexual orientation and gender identity. We are not required to understand this mystery in order to accept and love one another as God intends.
12. As a community of faith, the church is called to bless, affirm, honor and support covenanted relationships between two persons, which are based on mutuality, fidelity, and respect, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.
13. It has been the duty and responsibility of the church to develop rites and set occasion for the blessing of covenanted relationships for the purpose of the public exchange of vows and the promise of community support. This duty and responsibility should apply equally to persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

Therefore:

14. The same rights, responsibilities and privileges shall be afforded by the ELCA to the covenanted relationships of persons of all sexual orientations.
15. Pastors and congregations are authorized and encouraged to perform blessings of covenanted relationships of mutuality, fidelity and respect for couples of all sexual orientations.
16. With the participation and leadership of gay and lesbian Lutherans, the ECLA shall develop or adapt rites of the church for the blessing of covenanted relationships for the purpose of the public exchange of vows and the promise of community support.

Regarding those of us who are bisexual and transgender

17. We stand in solidarity with bisexual and transgender people.

1. Bisexual and transgender individuals are not currently specifically precluded from ordination within the ELCA. Any change in policy will encompass both bisexuals and transgender individuals and therefore no further specificity is required in our legislative language.
2. Proposals affirming the blessing of same gender relationships will likewise encompass both bisexuals and transgender people and therefore no further specificity is required in our legislative language.
3. Should legislation precluding bisexual and transgender people from either ordination or blessing be adopted, we would strenuously oppose any such proposed action.
4. The ELCA's upcoming Social Statement on Sexuality shall include a broad range of issues, including but not limited to, bisexuality and transgenderism.
5. As the Task Force prepares to draft the Social Statement on Sexuality, we affirm the ELCA Constitution's stance that the people most affected are to be included in the process and therefore call upon the Task Force to include bisexual and transgender persons. We can serve as a resource to this end.

Regarding Direct Action and Civil Disobedience in Orlando 2005

1. In terms of our organizing for Orlando 2005, we agree that the term direct action includes negotiation, vigiling, leafleting, visible presence of our Alliance and Soulforce at the Assembly, and the possibility of civil disobedience in response to the Assembly's actions.
2. In terms of our organizing for Orlando 2005, we agree that the term civil disobedience describes non-violent action in which one or more persons violate the civil law and/or a rule of the Assembly resulting in potential arrest by civil authorities.
3. We agree that direct action and the possibility of civil disobedience are integral to the success and effectiveness of achieving our goals in Orlando.
4. We agree that civil disobedience shall be undertaken only if Assembly action or inaction does not satisfy the standard agreed to by the representatives of the Alliance on the Consensus Circle. The Consensus Circle, at the beginning of our work, shall carefully delineate such a standard together. Said standard may be refined and revised by the Consensus Circle during our work together.
5. We invite Soulforce to partner with us as full member of this effort as a part of the Consensus Circle and as leaders on the Strategic Leadership Circle.
6. Soulforce members will be invited to participate in all actions and events at the Assembly.
7. Unless otherwise deemed more effective by the Consensus Circle, we shall not make a distinction between Lutherans and non-Lutherans as regards our direct action and/or civil disobedience.
8. The Consensus Circle shall lead negotiations with the ELCA.
9. As a part of the Strategic Planning Circle, we invite Soulforce to lead the team that shall create, direct and implement the direct action (except for negotiations) as well as any civil disobedience. It is understood that the Consensus Circle will have significant representation on that team and shall approve in advance the scope.
10. The partners in this effort agree to the Soulforce Principles of non-violence to govern all direct action and civil disobedience.