

NETWORK NEWS



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Convention urges churches to join in 'confessing' association

by Betsy Carlson, editor

The WordAlone sixth annual convention voted April 19 to urge WordAlone and other churches to join together in an association to publicly state their "unwavering" faith and to reach out to neighboring churches in "witness, support and mutual service."

In its resolution the convention stated: "The WordAlone Network is in a unique position to help congregations articulate a confessional witness that can shape the future of North American Lutheranism."

The churches were also encouraged to support a new task force in its planning for a "Lutheran Theological House of Studies." The convention had just voted to create such a task force, which is to report back to a future WordAlone gathering with a proposal for what could become an alternative to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's eight seminaries.

A house of studies would educate pastors and other church leaders and ministers by offering classes using various models. One model might be classes by extension, much like a teaching model used in African nations where ministerial candidates come to a central location a few weeks a year to work with professors. The rest of the year, they study on their own and learn by working

with active pastors, according to WordAlone Network president Jaynan Clark Egland.

The board of directors meeting later selected Dennis Bielfeldt to chair the task force for the Lutheran Theological House of Studies and Randy Freund to chair the task force for the new association of churches.

These resolutions and a third passed by the WordAlone members and church representatives expressed serious concerns about the direction of the ELCA in its theology, governance and proposal to allow non-celibate gays and lesbians become pastors and ministers.

For information, documents and recordings from this year's convention, go to www.wordalone.org/conferences/annual2005/index.htm

Both the resolution on homosexuality and on forming an association refer to ELCA views on the unity of the church. In the former: "Some have asserted that with regard to the homosexuality questions there are two 'valid and irreconcilable' approaches to Scripture, as though some believers may rightly believe that homosexual activity is sin and others may believe it is not sin. Both beliefs cannot be true. Either homosexuality is sin or it is not. Jesus is not saying to some, 'Repent,' and to others,

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Some transcripts (including James Nestingen's address), resolutions, Bible Marathon, and other information can be downloaded from the website as well (www.wordalone.org/conferences/annual2005/index.htm)

Convention urges churches to join *(Continues from page 1)*

"You are okay just the way you are."

And the latter addresses the governance of the denomination. It states that the ELCA's constitution has discarded Lutheran confessional theology of the true church as a hidden body of believers. Instead, the resolution states the ELCA's emphasis on the unity of its visible, hierarchical "three-fold" structure of churchwide, synod and local church minimizes the importance of the local church and Lutheran notion that the

true church is manifest when believers gather around Word and Sacrament.

This year's convention focused on "The Authority of Scripture," and featured scholars and theologians speaking on different ways of reading and studying the Bible.

Professor Dennis Bielfeldt, Brookings, S.D., and Pastor Paul Andell, Philadelphia, Penn., were both reelected to a second term on the board of directors at the annual convention. New members to the board are Irvin Aal, Surprise, Ariz., and Professor Mary Jane Haemig, St. Paul, Minn.

The WordAlone board elected officers for 2005-2006 at its meeting following the convention. Pastor Jaynan Clark Egland, Spokane, Wash., was reelected president; elected board chair person - Pastor John Beem, Alexandria, Minn.; vice-chairperson - Pastor Fred Baltz, Galena, Ill.; treasurer - Irvin Aal; Prof. Gracia Grindal, St. Paul, Minn., was re-elected secretary.

Also on the board are: Doug Bahr, M.D., McQueeney, Texas; Diane Eaton, Deephaven, Minn.; Pastor Randy Freund, Hutchinson, Minn.; and Stephanie Olson, Manitowoc, Wis.

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Church leaders meet with President Bush

by Betsy Carlson, editor

Some leaders of renewal movements within mainline denominations and of three U.S. denominations met with President George W. Bush Tuesday, May 3.

The leaders, who have orthodox views on Christian beliefs, included five United Methodist bishops; four bishops of The Episcopal Church USA; Dr. Gerald Kieschnick, president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod; and executives of six denominational renewal groups and the secretary of a national pro-life organization.

Pastor Mark Chavez, director of the WordAlone Network, which is a nationwide renewal movement within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, said he received a phone invitation the week before from the Office of Public Liaison to meet with the President.

Chavez said three things stood out to him from the meeting: 1. President Bush said it was important to know what one's beliefs are and to act on them consistently; 2. President Bush showed his earnest beliefs in the importance of freedom and that the U.S. can help other nations to achieve their own freedom; 3. The President's own, personal faith. He added that the President touched on several foreign and domestic issues.

President Bush likes to meet with groups of different leaders to discuss what is on his mind and to hear what is on theirs, Chavez said he was told when invited. The group's time with Bush was less than expected, according to Chavez, because Bush met privately with the Methodist bishops first and then had to leave early to catch a plane.

Bush is a member of the United Methodist Church.

Other than Chavez, the renewal leaders were Rev. David Anderson, president of the American Anglican Council; Georgette Forney, an Episcopal layperson, and President of NOEL, a life-affirming ministry in the Anglican Communion, and secretary of the National Pro-Life Religious Council's board of directors; Sharon Stockdale Steinmiller, an Episcopal layperson and head of Anglican Global Mission Partners, an alliance of more than 15 missionary organizations and the missions arm of the Anglican Communion Network; Doug Harvey, executive director of Disciple Heritage Fellowship and pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Others were David Runnion-Bareford, executive director of the Biblical Witness Fellowship and pastor in the United Church of Christ; Dr. Brad Long executive director of Presbyterian Reformed Ministries International; and Dr. Scott Gibson of the American Baptist Evangelicals.

The United Methodist bishops were Peter Weaver who is president of the Methodist Council of Bishops, Janice Huie—president-designate, Ernest Lyght—secretary of the council, and host bishops John Schol of the D.C. area and Charlene Kammerer of the Richmond, Va., area.

The ECUSA bishops were Keith Ackerman of the Diocese of Quincy, Ill.; James Stanton of the Dallas, Texas, diocese; Peter Beckwith of the Springfield, Ill., diocese; and Daniel Herzog of the Albany, N.Y. diocese.

Council members say 'blessings happening'

Churchwide assembly to vote on ordination exceptions for homosexuals in relationships

by Betsy Carlson, editor

WordAlone leaders expressed disappointment but not surprise that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Church Council voted in April in Chicago, Ill., to ask the national churchwide assembly this August to allow persons in homosexual relationships to be ordained through a process of exceptions to present policies and standards.

WordAlone president, Pastor Jaynan Clark Eglund, Spokane, Wash., commented later, "Someone needs to ask the church council, 'By what authority do you do these things?' Certainly they don't believe they can un-sin sin for certain people in specific places. Do we really want to make room for that kind of practice? Talk about setting a precedent."

Under current rules, homosexuals are expected to remain celibate as pastors or professional rostered laypersons. The denomination does not have services for and does not give permission for the blessing of same-sex relationships. But, during the council's consideration of the homosexuality issues, it became clear that such blessings are already occurring and may have been for sometime based on a 1993 pastoral statement from the Conference of Bishops.

Council members Ellen Maxon of Chelan, Wash., asserted several times that same-sex relationships are already being blessed. Others indicated that the 1993 Conference of Bishops' pastoral statement on same-sex relationships had opened the door to blessings.

Pastor Jonathan Eilert, chairperson of the council's program and services committee,

and council members Judy Biffle and Earl Mummert each said the 1993 bishop's statement had been understood by some to allow blessings of same-sex relationships.

Continued respect of this Conference of Bishops statement was the second of three recommendations from the church council's program and services committee. The committee based its recommendations on a report of an ELCA task force three-year study of homosexuality. The first two were approved by the church council for submission to the churchwide assembly.

The first called for the ELCA to preserve unity by finding ways to live together in the face of disagreement.

Clark Eglund responded in written comments later, "I've always believed that to 'have no other gods before me' was all-inclusive, meaning even the unity of a mainline denomination. When unity becomes the trump card at every table then we 'fold' on the truth and idolatry becomes the name of the game."

Regarding the second recommendation Maxon told the church council it would do nothing but "puts into words exactly where our church is."

"The reality is, as Ellen has said, there are blessings taking place, however that is defined in this particular context," said council member Biffle, "and they are taking place because of the sentence in the Conference of Bishops that gives that ambiguous allowance, if you will."

Council member *(Continued on page 5)*

Churchwide assembly to vote on ordinations *(Continues from page 4)*

Mummert disagreed with Maxon on one point: "I would just like to clarify. Ellen said recommendation two as the original proposal does nothing. This is true for people who understand the action of the Conference of Bishops, but I submit that the church at large doesn't understand that, or didn't understand that and that by the churchwide assembly taking this action, this recommendation affirming the action of the Conference of Bishops, does something significant for the church.

"It makes the church aware that there is this position and that...we express and affirm the desire to explore the best way to provide pastoral care...for all to whom they minister."

Committee chairperson Eilert agreed with Mummert that "this church even as far as the bishops had gone, that the church has not been totally aware, until we got into this process, of where this church has been in terms of blessing" and that presenting recommendation two was as far as the church could go in recognizing where the church is at this time.

When it came to ordination matters, the program and services committee altered the sexuality study task force's third recommendation by calling for creation of the exceptions process.

The task force's third recommendation had not gone as far in officially allowing ordination of persons in same-sex relationships as the church council's action did. The task force had recommended maintaining current policies, but not disciplining individuals and churches who violate denominational policies on ordination, thus providing an unofficial but possibly acceptable procedure, especially if the synod in which the candidate was ordained and called was in favor of ordaining non-celibate gays.

The council's recommendation to the churchwide assembly, while also not changing policy, provides an official denominational process for persons in committed same-sex relationships to be ordained or listed on the denomination's professional roster.

The difference would be that neither the new pastor nor the church that called him or her would be subject to any discipline.

"The ELCA leadership and church council are gambling with the future of the ELCA and any hope of being a mainline denomination that will move forward and yet stand firm for a faithful future," said Clark Eglund later.

Maxon had tried with substitute motions and amendments to get the council to recommend to the assembly to vote simply on blessing same-sex relationships and ordaining persons in such relationships. Council members, however, rejected her proposals, saying they wanted to forward a document to the assembly that had a chance of passing and that would provide "space" for ordination of homosexuals in same-sex relationships.

This summer's vote, Maxon said, will tell the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community whether the ELCA is ready to change its ordination policies or not, or whether 40% or 35% are ready. She made it clear, several times, that the GLBT community is not going to leave the denomination if the vote goes against them. She said that they could come back until the denomination is ready to change.

Clark Eglund commented further on the council's votes, "Jesus often asked his followers if they had ears to hear. Perhaps the same question needs to be directed at the church council and *(Continued on page 6)*

Churchwide assembly to vote on ordinations *(Continues from page 5)*

elected leadership who seem to be deaf to both the Word of God and the clear voice of the majority of ELCA members, churches and synods. They have responded clearly and consistently, 'No change.' Is anyone in the churchwide organization listening?"

Clark Eglund evidently was referring to the task force's report, which noted that 57 percent of those responding to the "Journey Together Faithfully" study booklets were opposed to changing current ordination

policies and standards. And, while synod council votes on these issues were mentioned several times at the church council meeting, it wasn't reported that, as of that weekend, 20 synod councils had voted in one form or another for ordaining gays in same-sex relationships and 18 had voted against it. Another 10 decided to either continue the dialogue on homosexuality issues, to make no comment or to take no action.

Reaction to sexuality recommendations is mixed

by Betsy Carlson, editor

In the weeks between the church council meeting and this newsletter's deadline, several synod assemblies have taken up the issues of blessing same-sex relationships and ordaining persons in such relationships.

The Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod voted in late April to ask the ELCA Churchwide Assembly to clarify the second recommendation of the Church Council on sexuality, if the 1993 Conference of Bishops statement or the local blessing of same-sex unions are now policy. Some church council members indicated at the council meeting that the statement was ambiguous enough to open the door to such blessings.

The assemblies of the Southeastern Pennsylvania, Oregon and Pacifica synods endorsed all three council recommendations. The Minneapolis Area Synod which met close in time to the church council endorsed the task force recommendations and passed a resolution giving congregations the go ahead to bless same-sex relationships. The Northwestern Minnesota and Florida-Bahamas synods voted for recommendations one and two and against three. Florida-Ba-

hamas asked for enforcement of current policies.

Also supporting the current Vision and Expectations standards were Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana, Southern Ohio and Northeast Minnesota synods. Voting for dissenting position one to the task force report were Eastern North Dakota, Northeast Ohio and Southwestern Minnesota synods. Dissent one calls for enforcing current standards and disciplining those who disobey them. The Southeastern Minnesota Synod defeated a resolution for dissenting position one and for taking straw polls on the three recommendations.

The Sierra Pacific Synod tabled resolutions both for and against the recommendations.

In March, the Conference of Bishops endorsed recommendations one and two of the task force calling for unity and continuing pastoral guidance on blessing same-sex relationships and took no stand on recommendation three on ordaining non-celibate gays and lesbians owing to the disagreement about it within the denomination and among the bishops themselves.



A house divided against itself will not stand

by Dr. Robert Benne
Director of the Center For Religion and Society
Roanoke College, Salem, Va.

One can certainly appreciate the hard work the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Church Council performed April 9-11 in Chicago in trying to strike an acceptable compromise in a church conflicted over homosexuality.

The council recognized that a large portion of the church firmly believes in the traditional moral teachings of the church that proscribe homosexual behavior and that another smaller portion believes that homosexual sex in the context of committed relationships is morally acceptable. Given that reality, the council tried to strike a balance—by giving the traditionalists their due by apparently maintaining the official teachings and practices of the church for the time being and by giving the revisionists their due by allowing for the ordination of gay and lesbian clergy in committed relationships through certain carefully defined processes. The council strived mightily to strike an acceptable compromise.

But can such a compromise be acceptable in a church that is grounded in Biblical and Confessional authority? Indeed, can such a compromise be faithful? I think not, for a number of important reasons. Each reason below corresponds to one of the three major recommendations of the council. Contrary to general opinion, the first recommendation that we "concentrate on finding ways to live together faithfully in the midst of dis-

agreements," is the most difficult to accept. Why is this so?

I.

It is the most difficult to accept because a church that stands on Biblical and Confessional authority cannot maintain its identity and mission with two opposing views on an issue of such importance. The fact that it is recommending that these two opposing viewpoints co-exist in the church means that the ELCA has no authoritative teaching on homosexual behavior. A compromise in such a situation is already a movement toward revision of classical Christian teaching.

For many this is an intolerable situation, although the task force, bishops and church council would have us think otherwise by asserting that this disagreement over homosexual conduct is not church-dividing. They all assert that our "unity in Christ" far transcends our disunity or diversity on this issue. Indeed, the council goes so far as to deem this diversity as "God-given." This is perhaps the end result of the ELCA's



Dr. Robert Benne

celebration of diversity and inclusivity. This emphasis on inclusivity—which is the doctrine upon which the ELCA has taken its stand—goes beyond race, ethnicity, class and gender. The ELCA has also carelessly invited—even promoted—diversity in Biblical and theological perspectives. That diversity has now under- *(Continued on page 8)*

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(Continued from page 7) mined authoritative teaching in the ELCA. And it pronounces that diversity is both non-church-dividing and even "God-pleasing."

The ELCA claims a false unity by isolating the doctrine of justification (our "unity in Christ") as not only the doctrine "upon which the church stands or falls," but as **the only doctrine of importance.** It has moved toward a "Gospel reductionism" in which the Father's Commandments

and the Spirit-inspired life of obedience are reduced to second-order importance. It is as if we could have the true Gospel and at the same time revise the commandments against adultery or murder. Or it is as if, as it once was proposed in the formation of the Lutheran Book of Worship, we could change the wedding vows from "until death us do part" to "until love ends." Or it is as if, as

it almost came to pass in the deliberations of the Committee for a New Lutheran Church, the name of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be banished in favor of Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.

Would such tinkering with Christian teaching be church-dividing? Of course, even though these revisions do not deny that we are "reconciled in Christ." Would we consider such tinkering "God-pleasing?" Of course not. Orthodox Christianity is a Trinitarian faith that holds Law, Gospel and discipleship together. It does not elevate a docetic Gospel beyond the necessity of repentance and amendment of life. (By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments. 1 John 5:2) Lutherans above all

should know that the Gospel makes no sense without the Law, including, as Luther taught, its guidance for the Christian life.

[A docetic gospel in the early church maintained Jesus did not have a real body but was a spiritual image and did not suffer and die, which was later adjudged a heresy.]

Orthodox Christians throughout the world from New Testament times until now have held that homosexual conduct violates the

clear commandments of God. Traditional Lutherans within the ELCA hold that belief with great intensity. They cannot "live faithfully in the midst of disagreements" when those disagreements involve matters essential to the faith. Appeals to unity amidst such disagreements are not persuasive. The church will have to come down on one side or the other.

II.

A second reason why the council's proposal is not an acceptable compromise is that its second recommendation is not sufficiently clear. The second recommendation urges that we should respect the guidance of the Conference of Bishops (which finds no scriptural or traditional grounds for an official ceremony of this church for the blessing of homosexual relationships) but "trusts pastors and congregations to discern ways to provide faithful pastoral care to same-sex couples." Although this recommendation has been understood by some as proscribing any formal blessing at all, it can and has been taken by others to mean that though there is no official churchwide rite sanctioned by the ELCA there is plenty of room for

local rites that could be either private (in the home) or public (before the altar). Such local rites are already being performed in the ELCA and this recommendation seems to open the door for many more. Indeed, how could partnered gays and lesbians presenting themselves for ordination under the council's third recommendation certify their formal commitment except by pointing to such a rite of blessing?

In order for this compromise to be acceptable, there would have to be clear guidelines for "faithful pastoral care." These guidelines would have to set limits and offer stipulations for such pastoral care. Without adequate guidelines the door is open to whatever local pastors and congregations decide is "faithful pastoral care."

III.

The third reason that the council's recommendations are not acceptable is that the "exceptional ordinations" in its third recommendation would soon become normal. The third recommendation would "permit implementation of this limited process for exceptions to the normative policies of this church." This process would allow for non-celibate, partnered gays and lesbians to be ordained through a carefully defined process involving various levels of authority, including the Conference of Bishops itself.

Oddly enough, it is under this recommendation that the council outlines the church's two opposing perspectives on homosexual conduct. By setting up a careful process for allowing exceptions the council seems to be bowing to those who hold to the traditional Christian teaching on homosexual conduct. But by allowing exceptions at all it is bowing to those who believe that the traditional teaching should be revised. It

uses the acceptance of divorced and remarried clergy as a parallel to the acceptance of partnered gay clergy. (This is a dubious analogy because divorced clergy do not argue that divorce itself is right and therefore keep divorcing.) And such exceptions might well lead, as the recommendation ominously suggests, to the "opportunity for continued discernment of where the Holy Spirit is leading this church."

However, this approach temporarily will set up two tiers of ordained ministry in the ELCA. (Would the ordinations of these "exceptional candidates" be recognized throughout the ELCA? How painful would it be to go through such a process?) But such an arrangement would only be temporary. Once the ELCA provides for this process, few bishops are likely to resist pastors and congregations who request such ordinations. Few gays and lesbians will tolerate "exceptional status" for long. In time the limits and processes will become perfunctory and then all distinctions will dissolve. The distinction between the marriages of heterosexual pairs and the blessings of gay unions will follow a similar trajectory.

All this hard striving after compromise is beside the point until and unless the fundamental disagreement is definitively addressed—whether or not homosexual conduct is consonant with the will of God. Until the ELCA clarifies its mind on this matter all these compromises are distractions. "No city or house divided against itself will stand." (Matthew 12:25) And, of course, the mind of the ecumenical church throughout the ages is clear on these matters. The only question is whether the ELCA will recognize that and properly set its house in order.

Prospects and Alternatives

An address given by Dr. James A. Nestingen, Professor, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. WordAlone Network Annual Convention, April 18

There have been a couple of developments recently which indicate that WordAlone's standing in the ELCA is even more precarious. Because of this, we need to start thinking about some provisional steps to serve our witness to Christ Jesus.

First, when the Theological Advisory Board challenged Called to Common Mission, the full communion agreement with The Episcopal Church USA, we asked the ELCA to clarify its position on ordination. Appealing to the historic interpretation of the Lutheran Confessions, one still held by other Lutherans throughout the world, we asked that the exceptions bylaw passed at Indianapolis be freely interpreted to provide an open option.

To this date, the ELCA has not replied to the Theological Advisory Board appeal, either formally or informally. Apparently, the church leadership is convinced that dignifying us with a reply would give us a standing they can't allow. In the meantime, however, the bishops have answered in another way, by moving in the opposite direction to make the exceptions all the more difficult to obtain.

The Theological Advisory Board has not yet formally considered this development. But we did agree in drafting the statement that if the ELCA failed to clarify its position, its breach of the Lutheran confessions would effectively push us out of the denomination. Things are clearly

moving in that direction. As usual in the ELCA, what was advertised for the unity of the church—the exceptions bylaw—has in its actual use become church dividing.

The second development came recently, with the church council's lopsided endorsement of the kind of exception we are being denied, this one for practicing homosexuals.

After the CCM battles, the proceedings appear depressingly familiar. Then the Lutheran confessions were ambiguous, now it's the Holy Scripture that doesn't speak plainly. Then a small group of favored theologians opened up a new, unprecedented interpretation of the confessions; now the sexuality commission, with two brave dissenting votes, has offered an alternative reading of the Bible. Then, though it took two tries, the national assembly of the ELCA ratified the new interpretation of the confessions, practically eliminating the historic interpretation. Now, though by the sexuality commission's own count, 57 percent of the membership of the ELCA opposes any change in current practice, 92 percent of the church council voted to recommend the new exception. The next step is already being taken, the marginalizing and effective elimination of those of us who disagree.



Dr. James Nestingen

There's one important difference this time around. A lot of us didn't realize until after the fact how divisive the church's enforcement of the CCM would be, and so even though some saw it coming, many of us weren't prepared. This time around, we all saw it coming. So the (Continued on page 11)

Prospects and Alternatives (Continues from page 10)

Theological Advisory Board has been hard at work on a statement on the authority of Scripture. But more importantly, Solid Rock Lutherans has worked effectively for a couple of years hoping to maintain the church's Biblical loyalties and to make sure that there would be a fair discussion at Orlando this summer. Maybe that labor will still produce enough votes to stop the juggernaut. But the church council's nearly unanimous support of the exception for practicing homosexuals certainly has to sober our hopes.

So with these two developments registered, this is our situation. Following the seventh article of the Augsburg Confession, Lutherans since the Reformation have held that in the light of the freedom of the gospel, the office of the bishop is one option among many. In the ELCA, you're welcome to believe that, just as long as you don't try to practice it. Since its beginnings, the Christian church has held—as 98 or 99 percent of Christians now officially teach—that the Scripture prohibits homosexual activity under any circumstance. Now, even in the face of such a massive consensus, through its presiding bishop, the ELCA has declared that the Scripture is ambiguous on the matter. So, having taken our church beyond the historical interpretation of the Lutheran confessions, the national leadership is now voting to take us beyond the Scripture into an ecumenical corner where the only other residents are Episcopalians under discipline by their own communion.

Given these developments, we have to ask a very painful question. With the ELCA surrendering its Lutheran and ecumenical identity within the Christian church, what

do we do now? Where do we turn? Let me make some suggestions.

First, our calling remains what it has always been, the faithful proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the words of the book of Revelation, the ELCA has abandoned its first love. As a result, every wind that blows through popular culture claims the ELCA's agenda. If the good Lord has preserved a remnant, if there are some of us left who still proudly bear the name Lutheran and so stand within the catholic consensus of the church, it can only be for this purpose: to preach and bear witness to his word in Christ, to faithfully tend and

Our only power is the Gospel. If any other word, if any other power, if any other agenda claims our first loyalty, we fall into the same captivity we deplore.

bestow his sacraments and so to gather the sinners that come under his claim. Our only power is the Gospel. If any other word, if any other power, if any other agenda claims our first loyalty, we fall into the same captivity we deplore.

Secondly, there are others in this remnant, both within the structures of the ELCA and at the margins, who share our confessional and Biblical priorities. While they may disagree at some lesser points, even some of the bishops hold with us at the center and oversee synods that are more hospitable. Solid Rock has demonstrated what can be achieved as WordAlone allies with Evangelical Catholics and others who have been pushed to the margins. Further alliances may be possible with the Society of the Holy Trinity and like-minded organizations. Seeking the support available within, working with other groups being pushed out, WordAlone can join in creating networks big enough to provide viable alternatives. That is a hope I share with friends promi- (Continued on page 12)

Prospects and Alternatives *(Continues from page 11)*

ment in other movements within our church.

Thirdly, as much as many of us abhor the prospect of leaving our church, the fact of the matter is "this church," as the bureaucrats call it, is leaving us, in the process stripping us of the standing within the body that we have long cherished. As it now appears, there is little or no prospect within the current structures of our church to substantially change this fact. So we have to talk about taking some provisional steps for the sake of our witness and congregations. They are provisional in this sense, that even in the adversity, we try to stay within the structures of our church but are prepared to move if the ELCA will no longer have us.

One provision should be for seminarians. Though attempting to maintain even tighter supervision, the ELCA has basically given up funding the seminaries. The constitution commits the church to funding 50 percent of the cost; now, they are providing 13 percent. Over the past years, the faculties have moved steadily to the left both politically and theologically. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's experience demonstrates conclusively the trouble that comes with trying to address this problem in an authoritarian way. The freedom of the Gospel can't be enforced. But WordAlone can provide ways to make sure that the historic witness of the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions is maintained in the faculties, even if as a few voices among many.

Audio and video recordings of Nestingen's address may be purchased from the WordAlone Office.

Further provision can also be made for congregations. WordAlone and LCMC have already been finding ways to provide for parishes that have encountered problems in the structures of the ELCA. Sometimes, we have to acknowledge in repentance, our own advocacy has contributed to these problems. But it is also clear that the hostilities of most of the bishops to WordAlone, their unwillingness to credit us, honor our standing within the structures and work with us in partnership has also exacerbated the difficulties. Given this situation, it is important to think together about ways that we can keep our witness to both law and Gospel at the center of our life together and provide further support for the congregations that have been sent to the margins. Then working with others who share our hopes at the center, even if there are some salutary disagreements at the periphery, we can begin to build the kind of larger movement that could make us salt, light and leaven in the catholic tradition and in American public life.

While making such provisions, there is still reason for hope. We know this about the Lord Jesus: he loves sinners and enjoys nothing more than raising the dead. He is always at his best when there appears to be no human possibility. Our Lord loves fresh graves. Maybe now we are approaching the turning point, where he is going to move things to the good. Maybe this is the beginning of the resurrection after the long crucifixion we have endured in our church.

"We know this about the Lord Jesus: he loves sinners and enjoys nothing more than raising the dead. He is always at his best when there appears to be no human possibility. Our Lord loves fresh graves."

1993 bishops statement: 'No ambiguity,' no blessings, says then-chairperson Sauer

by Betsy Carlson, editor

Conference of Bishops, Oct. 5-8, 1993, statement on "Blessing of Homosexual Relationships." "We, as the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, recognize 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. We, therefore, do not approve such a ceremony as an official action of this church's ministry. Nevertheless, we express trust in and will continue dialogue with those pastors and congregations who are in ministry with gay and lesbian persons, and affirm their desire to explore the best ways to provide pastoral care for all to whom they minister."

Jan. 13, 2005, Recommendation Two "The Task Force for the ELCA Studies on Sexuality recommends that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America continue to respect the pastoral guidance of the 1993 statement of the Conference of Bishops."

The Conference of Bishops did not intend to open the door to blessing of homosexual relationships in its 1993 statement according to Pastor Kenneth Sauer who was chairperson of the conference then.

He disagreed with ELCA Church Council members who asserted that the document had been ambiguous and had opened the door to blessing same-sex relationships. The council voted at its meeting in April to pass along Recommendation Two of the Task Force on Sexuality Studies for an ELCA Churchwide Assembly vote in August in Orlando, Fla. (See article on page 4.)

There was "no ambiguity," said Sauer in a recent telephone interview. He said the bishops came to a consensus on what they meant and they did not approve of blessing any homosexual relationships.

The mention of pastoral care, he added, was simply to encourage pastors to give

pastoral care to homosexuals, just as they would to any other congregation members.

Pastor Jonathan Eilert, chairperson of the council's program and services committee, and council members Judy Biffle and Earl Mummert each said the 1993 bishops' statement had been understood by some to allow blessings of same-sex relationships.

Biffle serves as an advisor to the sexuality task force.

Sauer's reaction to assertions of ambiguity was that a couple of bishops had put that "spin" on the 1993 statement. He said, "obviously some bishops had changed" their opinions from what they had voted in 1993. The vote had been 64 to 1 for the statement, Sauer added.

The former bishop, who retired in 1996, said it was "almost a surprise" to him how the Conference of Bishops has changed since 1996, as seen in their division this year over whether or not to ordain gays and lesbians in same-sex relationships. The bishops endorsed the first two recommendations of the sexuality task force on unity and on pastoral care for persons in same-sex relationships, but essentially agreed to disagree on the third on ordination of non-celibate homosexuals.

He sees the division as partially a generational matter. Sauer said the younger generation doesn't feel the need to be together in the Word, which he called a major problem in the church.

"Unity is seen as a feel-good thing, a human unity, not as a unity in faith and confession," said Sauer, of Columbus, Ohio. He said he consults with congregations and does some interim ministry. He was Ohio bishop in the Lutheran Church in America from 1973 to 1987 and bishop of the Southern Ohio Synod from 1987 to 1996 in the ELCA.

Homosexual issues beleaguer Anglicans

by Betsy Carlson, editor

Leaders of both the Anglican Church of Canada and The Episcopal Church USA agreed this spring to abide by a February request from primates of the worldwide Anglican Communion to "voluntarily" withdraw from the Anglican Consultative Council.

The U.S. and Canadian churches are to remove themselves from the meetings for three years until the Lambeth Conference of bishops meets again. The conference meets every 10 years and is the primary governing body of the communion.

But the North Americans made it clear they expect to send people to the consultative council's meetings to listen to reports and to be available for consultation and conversation, even if they can't officially take part. The consultative council includes, laypersons, clergy and bishops. It initiates programs and makes recommendations to the Anglican Communion.

This request, which came in a "communiqué" from a regularly scheduled meeting of the primates, was seen by some primates as a step towards restoring unity within the Anglican Communion, which was fractured after the ECUSA ordained as bishop a man in a same-sex relationship.

Some observers saw the primate's communiqué as a rebuke to the North American churches. The North Americans did not take it that way but saw it more as being given more time to defend their actions.

With a traditionalist take on the meeting, Archbishop Henry Luke Orombi of Uganda issued a statement on the primates' communiqué in which he said the primates "suspended" the ECUSA and Canadian Church until they repent. The archbishop said Uganda continues in a state of "broken communion" with the two North American provinces.

Withdrawing from the consultative council was not the primates only request. They also asked the North American churches to place a moratorium on blessing same-sex relationships and ordaining as a bishop someone in such a relationship. The ECUSA House of Bishops decided in response to refrain from consecrating any new bishops for a year, until the church's next General Convention in 2006.

The U.S. bishops also said they would not approve any rites of blessing for same-sex relationships or do any blessings themselves, leaving a loophole for other clergy to bless such relationships.

The primates also asked the two North American churches to send representatives to explain the thinking behind their liberal actions on homosexual behavior to a hearing to be held at this June's meeting of the consultative council.

The North American primates reacted to the communiqué as a very positive outcome of the February meeting that would give them opportunities to sway their opponents' outlook. Both Canada's Archbishop Andrew S. Hutchison and ECUSA Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold initially expressed satisfaction with the primates requests, which also called on all primates not to meddle in the affairs of the North American churches.

Hutchison said the outcome of the primates meeting was to "create the space for further discussion and dialogue." Griswold called it a "space for listening," a chance to "slow down a bit, reason together, explore more deeply." Neither has mentioned repentance nor backing down.

Hutchison admitted in a Webcast that, fundamentally, what was at issue was the Anglicans' understanding of Scripture. Griswold and Hutchison each have asserted at different times that their churches minister in different contexts when compared to the other world primates.

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).

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

Old Zion Lutheran Church
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 Contact: Helen Davis, Call Committee Chair, 610-827-7183
A full-time pastor for bilingual congregation (English and German) English congregation uses Service Book & Hymnal.

siastic, organized, creative communicator who enjoys working with children and older people alike. Interest/experience in outreach, small group and children's ministries. Musical ability and sense of humor a big plus!

Calls are listed starting with the most recently received.

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.

Cross and Crown Lutheran Church
Montebello, California
 Contact: John D. Ottesen
 Chairman of the Call Committee
 809 W. Beverly Blvd.,
 Montebello, CA 90640
 323-721-0926

A Lutheran pastor for a former American Lutheran Church congregation, independent since the formation of the ELCA. We have been without a pastor since the end of December, 2004. We offer a 3 bedroom parsonage along with the regular salary. The parsonage is located within 2 miles of the church.

St. Stephen's Ev. Lutheran Church
East Schodack, New York
 Contact: Cathy Teeter/Charles Senrick
 Church Council President/Vice Pres.
 518-477-6950 (c)

A permanent part-time pastor - 20 hours per week. We are a small congregation, looking to grow - open to change - with the desire to one day again be able to support a full-time minister. We are searching for an enthu-

Trinity Lutheran Church
 of Minnehaha Falls
Minneapolis, Minnesota
 Contact: Lisa Engstrom
 Call Committee Chairperson
 5212 41st Ave. South
 Minneapolis, MN 55417
 phone: 952-891-1738

A full-time senior pastor with strengths in preaching God's Word and in Church Staff Administration. Trinity is a Missions and Outreach minded church committed to the transformation of lives through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our vision is to be an Acts 2 community of believers impacting the world for Jesus, one person at a time.

Trinity Lutheran Church
Sharon, North Dakota
 Contact: Keith Johnson
 Call Committee Chair
 R R 1 Box 24a
 Sharon, ND 58277-0128
 phone: 701-543-3907

A full-time pastor to serve a two-point parish.