

Mission Statement

WordAlone is a Lutheran grassroots network of congregations and individuals committed to the authority of the Word manifest in Jesus the Christ as proclaimed in Scripture and safeguarded through the work of the Holy Spirit. WordAlone advocates reform and renewal of the church, representative governance, theological integrity, and freedom from a mandated historic episcopate.

Third sexuality study responses due by Nov. 1

It is important that the ELCA sexuality task force hears from ELCA members who uphold Biblical norms for sexuality. Group and individual responses to "Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor: Lutherans Talk about Human Sexuality" are strongly encouraged. You may order printed copies from Augsburg Fortress (800-328-4648) or download the study at <http://www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/pdf/study03.pdf>

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NETWORK NEWS



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Lutheran CORE calls post-churchwide assembly meeting for Sept. 28 in Chicago

by Mark Chavez, director

No matter what actions are taken at the 2007 churchwide assembly, planning for the next Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Churchwide Assembly will begin this Sept. 28 in Chicago at a national gathering convened by Lutheran CORE, a coalition for reform, according to Pastor Paull Spring, chairman of CORE's steering committee.

The purpose of the gathering is two-fold: 1) review the decisions of the 2007 churchwide assembly and 2) begin preparations and planning for the 2009 churchwide assembly, including the elections of the 2009 churchwide assembly voting members, which take place in spring 2008.

Pastor Spring said recently the meeting is for CORE members, supporters and any others who are concerned about the

ELCA's future. The meeting will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on a Friday. The location will be announced soon.

Dr. Robert Benne, Roanoke, Va., Dr. James Nestingen, St. Paul, Minn., and Spring, State College, Pa., will be the main presenters. Workshops are planned on how to organize and network within synods.

The coalition membership comprises individuals, churches and reform groups in the ELCA. The groups include Call to Faithfulness in Northeastern Iowa, Evangelical Lutheran Confessing Fellowship in the northeast U.S., Fellowship of Confessional Lutherans in the western states, Lutheran Churches of the Common Confession (LC3), Lutherans Reform! in central Pennsylvania and the widespread WordAlone Network. ♦

Institute offers its first course this fall

by Betsy Carlson, editor

WordAlone's institute for renewing Lutheran theology is offering its first course this fall at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Fridley, Minn.

Index

- page one—Lutheran CORE calls post-churchwide assembly meeting for Sept. 28 in Chicago
- page two—Institute offers its first course this fall
- page three—'Sexuality not up for vote,' says WA board
- page four—Pastor in same-sex relationship is removed from ELCA roster
- page five—Replacing the center with the periphery
- page eight—Lutheran Clergy Connect
- page nine—A battle fleet, not a luxury liner
- page twelve—Third sexuality study responses due by Nov. 1



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Jim Nestingen, professor emeritus of Church History from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., and guest lecturers will teach "Scripture and Interpretation: A Confessional Hermeneutic for Preaching and Teaching." The course is offered 5 to 8 p.m. on Mondays from Sept. 10 through Nov. 19. Registration and cost information will be available on the institute's website, www.irlt.org, which will be live soon.

The institute is being developed as a multi-site, internet-based program in partnership with other Lutheran educational institutions, according to information published earlier.

Laypersons, clergy and seminarians are invited to take the course, said institute associate director Randy Freund. For more information, please contact the Institute for Renewing Lutheran Theology, 910 4th St. Suite 7, Brookings, S.D. 57006, phone 605 692-9337 or email to wordalone_institute@mchsi.com.

The course will be offered online or available later on DVD through the institute's website.

"Our web delivery will allow current pastors and teachers to help mentor and teach small classes virtually anywhere in the country," said Prof. Dennis Bielfeldt, director of the institute and professor of philosophy and religion at South Dakota State University in Brookings.

Institute activities kicked off this summer with a banquet co-sponsored by Mt. Carmel Ministries, Alexandria, Minn., and the institute. More than 130 persons attended the dinner at the retreat center and Bible camp on Lake Carlos. Key speakers were Nestingen, Bielfeldt and former WordAlone Board Chair Al Quie.

Almost 100 individuals attended the three-day theological conference that featured Prof. Steve Paulson of Luther Seminary

(Continues on page eleven)

'Sexuality not up for vote,' says WA board

by the WordAlone Network Board of Directors

In 2005, the churchwide assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America voted on three recommendations from the ELCA Church Council dealing with homosexual behavior. Two were approved and the third defeated. While the meaning of the approval of the second was ambiguous, the defeat of the third clearly affirmed the present ordination standards. Apparently not wanting to wait for a social statement on human sexuality to come before the 2009 churchwide assembly, those who advocate for radically revising the standards have pushed hard this year in their campaign to overturn ELCA teaching and practice. They have made a concerted effort at synod assemblies this spring to pass memorials seeking such changes, so the issues "decided" in 2005 likely will be raised again at this summer's churchwide assembly in Chicago.

However, all of the resolutions, interpretations and analyses miss this crucial point: God's will is not determined by assembly vote. If the sexual revisionists' campaign to overturn the teaching and practice of the ELCA were to succeed one day, could we possibly conclude that God's will for the faithful use of sexuality had suddenly changed because a 51% or 67% majority vote finally was achieved in some assembly? In this battle over sexuality, which has been going on for the entire life of the ELCA, we have been asked repeatedly to vote on matters that simply are not up for votes.

Discerning God's will is a constant struggle for sinful human beings, which is precisely why Lutherans have always insisted that the only reliable basis for such discernment is God's Word, incarnate in Jesus Christ and recorded in the Bible. "We believe, teach and confess that the **only** rule and guiding

principle according to which all teaching and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments **alone.**" (Formula of Concord, "Epitome," emphasis added.) "This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life." (ELCA Constitution, 2.03.) Those convictions are based on the Bible's own witness to its authority and function as God's Word:

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, . . . so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:10-11) *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."* (Mark 13:31) *"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."* (John 17:17) See also Psalm 119:105, Matthew 7:24-27, Romans 10:17 and 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

The Bible's uniform witness is that, because of the power and purpose of sexual intercourse, the only appropriate arena for it is the marriage of one man and one woman. In setting that boundary, God forbids and protects us from sexual activity with those who are too young (pedophilia), too close to us (incest), too different from us (bestiality) and too much alike us (homosexuality). What is left in the center is man and woman as sexually complementary beings, united into one flesh in an enduring and exclusive bond of marriage.

This structure for the use of sexuality is

(Continues on page eleven)

three

Pastor in same-sex relationship is removed from ELCA roster

by Betsy Carlson, editor

An appeal from a homosexual pastor not to be removed from the ordained roster because of his same-sex relationship was rejected in early July by the Committee on Appeals of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Former Pastor Bradley Schmeling of St. John's of Atlanta, Ga., in the Southeastern Synod was brought before a discipline committee last winter after he told his bishop, Ronald Warren, that he was in a relationship with another man. The discipline committee ruled in early February that Schmeling was in violation of ELCA Visions and Expectations for Ordained Ministers and of Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline because he was a non-celibate homosexual.

However, the discipline committee stayed his removal from the roster until Aug. 15, which is about a week after the Churchwide Assembly to be held in Chicago, Ill. The national appeals committee overruled the stay and said that Schmeling was to be removed July 2.

In addition, the discipline committee suggested that the present standards might be in conflict with the ELCA Constitution and—apparently with an eye to this summer—asked synods across the country to pass memorials to the churchwide assembly to start a process to change the standards for ordained persons so that practicing homosexuals could be ordained.

“The decision by the committee on appeals to remove Schmeling from the roster is welcome news in this present time when ministry standards of a denomination are confused with stories of personal experience,” Pastor Jaynan Clark Egland, president of the WordAlone Network, said recently. “We have entered into a losing

battle regarding all the debates and discussions about sexuality, definition of marriage and expectations of our clergy because we've put up for a vote that which we don't have any authority to act on or change.

“When the Word of God is considered to be the source and norm for all matters of faith and life, then one has to wonder how such matters of personal lives and faith have become the source of such confusion. We need clarity and we need sometimes to make difficult decisions such as the committee on appeals has done because we have no authority to decide otherwise.”

The committee on appeals ruled the discipline committee acted beyond the “scope of its authority” in delaying Schmeling's removal from the roster. The discipline committee also exceeded its authority by its statements on the constitutionality of the present ordination standards and its call for local synod memorials to the churchwide assembly, according to the appeals committee.

Some observers have suggested these memorials may bring the question of ordaining non-celibate homosexuals to this year's churchwide assembly even though the 2005 assembly rejected a proposal to allow non-celibate homosexuals to be ordained through a special application and review process.

With regard to actions by local synods, only 22, about one-third of the ELCA's 65 synods, supported one or all of the discipline committee's memorial proposals. Fourteen others rejected the committee's proposals or voted not to change the present standards. One synod tabled them, in two others they were withdrawn and in a

(Continues on page ten)

Replacing the center with the periphery

The misplaced focus of liberal Protestantism and of the ELCA

by Robert Benne, Jordan-Trexler Professor of Religion Emeritus, Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia

In his classic book, “Christ and Culture,” H. Richard Niebuhr suggests that Christian traditions often begin with a Christ **against** culture stance—their leaders reject secular concerns and values—but gradually accommodate to their worldly environments. In time they are tempted to become Christ **of** culture bodies because they want to be comfortable and influential in the very societies they earlier rejected. As they accommodate more and more, they often jettison essential convictions and practices of the orthodox Christian tradition. Think, for example, of Unitarians who once affirmed strong beliefs in the Bible and Jesus and practiced classical Christian prayer. For contemporary Unitarians the Bible is now at best one source of religious ideas just as Jesus is one source of religious wisdom. Unitarian prayer, if practiced at all, would have little affinity with Christian intercessory prayer.

Much of this accommodation is unintentional and sometimes unconscious. The temptation to “be at home in the world” is very great. Frequently, worldly beliefs and practices become more important to the religious group in question than their traditional ones, even though they continue publicly and formally to adhere to their earlier beliefs and practices. But the life and spirit depart from the traditional beliefs and practices. The real enthusiasm has shifted to the worldly beliefs and practices. This shift can be quite subtle because, for these groups, worldly beliefs and practices are viewed as having a direct connection to the traditional ones.

One can see this process go on before our very eyes in the trajectory of liberal Protestantism. The central theological beliefs of classical Christianity are still formally adhered to by the elite of these

denominations, but the focus of attention and enthusiasm has been shifted to social and political ethics, as well as to the concrete policies that follow from those ethical construals. If one visits the websites of any of the liberal Protestant churches, one is likely to find that attention is focused on global warming, the Iraq war, inequality, the dangers of the Religious Right, racism and sexism.

These churches would argue that the social and political ethics they are adopting—and the public policies that follow from them—are the direct implications of their central religious convictions. Indeed, they draw a straight line from those central convictions to their favored implications and often countenance little deviation from those implications. They are utterly confident that the central convictions lead directly to their favored social-ethical judgments and the policies that follow from those judgments. For them the implications at the periphery follow smoothly and inconspicuously from the core.

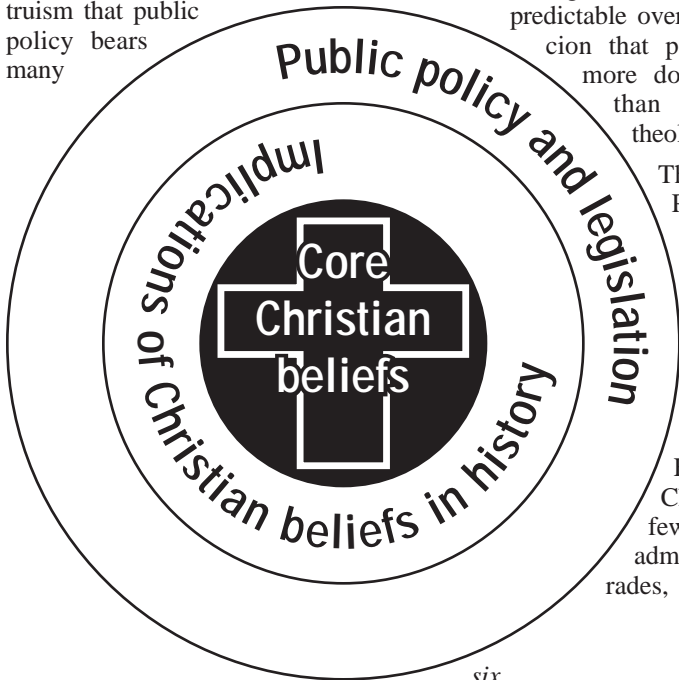
On the other hand, there are far less certainty, enthusiasm and discipline applied to classic core Christian convictions—the absoluteness of the revelation of God in Christ, salvation through Christ alone, the Trinity itself, traditional Christian teaching on sexual morality—than to the social and political implications of those core doctrines at the periphery. This uncertainty shows up in liberal Protestant attitudes toward claims of salvation through Christ alone and the morality of same-sex sexual relations. They are less certain about them than, say, the immorality of the Iraq war. Where they ought to be clear and certain they are uncertain; where they ought to have a bit of hesitation they are clear and certain.

(Continues on page six)

("Replacing the center..." Continues from page five)

In short, liberal Protestantism is squishy in the center and dogmatic at the periphery.

One can visualize this as a series of concentric circles. The central circle contains essential Christian claims—the Triune God, His commandments, salvation by grace alone through faith on account of Christ, faith becoming active in love in the Christian life. The next circle represents the implications drawn from these central claims as the church meets new challenges in history. Over time, for example, the church decided that an implication of those central convictions meant the overturning of slavery. In the contemporary world the church struggles to apply Christian convictions to stem cell research, evolutionary thought, poverty in the world and a host of other issues. The third concentric circle represents concrete public policy, which is far more specific and “worldly” than Christian social and political ethical thought. Public policy is the direct responsibility of legislatures, who often bargain with each other to make legislation feasible politically. It is a truism that public policy bears many



unintended consequences and is notoriously difficult to craft well.

As one moves from the central affirmations of the Christian faith to its social and political ramifications, one passes through several stages of argument that involve different assessments of the current situation, different analytical judgments, different philosophical principles, different ordering of Christian principles and very different applications of those normative principles. For example, arguments about whether or not we should have invaded Iraq involve all those complex steps, and Christians of good will and intelligence differ about them.

But one would never come to that conclusion if one examined the social and political proclamations of liberal Protestantism. They move with utter confidence directly from the central affirmations—or from selected biblical passages or theological themes—to highly debatable public policy. They are joined in this “straight-line thinking” by some of their counterparts among religious conservatives. As this “straight-line thinking” becomes politically predictable over time, one gets the suspicion that political commitments are more dominant and more prized than those of a theological nature.

The fact that liberal Protestantism is more enthused and certain of its social ethics and public policy commitments suggests a thorough accommodation to “the world”—in this case to the world of left/liberal elite opinion. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is but a few steps behind our much-admired liberal Protestant comrades, but is catching up fast.

(Continues on page seven)

("Replacing the center..." Continues from page six)

The “new” church got off to a fast start when it opted for quota systems to insure “inclusivity,” an instrument of policy adapted directly from the left wing of the Democratic Party. Combined with the ELCA’s horror of being a dominantly middle-class, white church of northern European immigrant stock, quotas have moved the church leftward in social ethics and public policy propensities by over-representing minorities. The “spokespersons” for these minorities are inevitably expected to speak for “progressive” social teachings and public policy. The restructuring of the ELCA churchwide organization in 2005 gave amazing authority to the Multicultural Ministries program unit: “This unit has the responsibility to coordinate the churchwide implementation of ethnic-specific strategies and has the authority to review and monitor all churchwide programs to maintain and enhance the ELCA’s central commitment to become an antiracist, multicultural church.”

Fueled by the liberal Protestant tacit conviction that social teaching and action against racism, sexism, heterosexism and imperialism—the second and third circles in our model—constitute the central mission of the church, ELCA elite have become more enthused with that agenda than with the advancement of the central set of claims—the Gospel. While formally holding to its constitutional mandate to advance those central claims, its working theology exhibits a commitment to those liberal Protestant convictions. And those convictions have a startling resemblance to the left/liberal elite culture of the universities and highbrow media.

The ELCA Washington Office for advocacy, for example, takes positions on scores of public policy issues, claiming that these judgments flow directly from the social statements of the church, which in turn are claimed to flow directly from our fundamental theological convictions. Oddly, or not so oddly, almost all the public policy

positions lean toward the liberal side. Yet, no position is taken on numerous abortion-related issues, about which the church has a social statement, and about which conservatives would like the church to take a stand.

A recent visit to the ELCA website indicated that three of the five featured topics had to do with global warming, the Israel/Palestinian conflict, and the “bold women’s” tour to Germany. Nine of the church’s early spring press releases dealt with social and political issues, six with organizational matters and four with “core” concerns. One organizational release had to do with the possibility of having “outside experts” monitor churchwide Church Council meetings for racist and sexist speech and action. (Note that there was no monitor for theological orthodoxy proposed. Perhaps there would be too little theological discourse to monitor.) One release contained Bishop Mark Hanson’s sermon at a deceased bishop’s memorial service. Nearly all his compliments had to do with her social and political convictions and actions, few with the classic duties of a bishop. In another, the bishop argues that Israeli and Palestinian leaders should adopt the amicable negotiating style of a group of religious leaders of which he is a part, not for a moment showing awareness about the different levels of accountability and responsibility carried by the two sets of leaders.

In these actions the ELCA elite reveal their non-negotiable commitment to a liberal construal of social ethics and public policy. Commitment to these items cannot be shaken: quotas (to fight racism, sexism, clericalism and “monoculturalism” – the view that the primarily northern European composition of the ELCA is wrong); unqualified access to abortion (to fight sexism); blessing of gay unions and ordination of partnered gays (to fight heterosexism); relentless purging of masculine images of and pronouns for God from worship

(Continues on page eight)

("Replacing the center..." Continues from page seven)

materials, for example, the newly translated Psalms in "Evangelical Lutheran Worship" (to fight sexism); left-wing foreign policy positions on Iraq and Israel (to combat imperialism); and centralization of power in the church (to fight the benighted masses of the church who are infected with all the above "isms.")

All this is not to say that the church should not be concerned about the social, political and economic implications of the Gospel. But those implications are not nearly as clear or settled as the ELCA makes them out to be. There needs to be far more fair discourse about them, as well as far more

input from those laypersons in vocations more deeply involved in the issues than an ecclesiastical elite can possibly be. Further, there has to be genuine "inclusivity" of the spectrum of theological and political opinion on these matters, not just those of those on the left-hand side of that spectrum.

But, far more importantly, the implications of the Gospel should never challenge the Gospel itself for priority in the life of the church. When they do, suspicions rightly arise that the church wants to be so influential in the world that it downplays its own unique mission. It replaces the center with the periphery. ♦

Lutheran Clergy Connect

Clergy Connect is a way for churches seeking a pastor or other leader to connect with 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. A full list, including more listings and detail, is posted at: www.wordalone.org/clergy.shtml

To list your search on Clergy Connect, 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. Include: title, church's name (city and state), contact person with phone number and e-mail address. Please inform us when you fill the position.

First Evangelical Lutheran Church White Bear Lake, Minnesota

Position: Full-time senior pastor.
Contact: Robert Clemens, Call Committee Chair, at 651-776-1044, 159 Canabury Court, St. Paul, MN 55117-1503

Water of Life Lutheran Church Newcastle, Maine

Position: Full-time pastor.
Contact: Pastor Tim Roser, New England Synod, 603-490-4446 or troser@nesynod.com

Oakland and Moscow Lutheran Churches (Rural Albert Lea and Austin) Minnesota

Position: Full-time pastor for two-point parish.
Contact: Joyce Erstad, Call Committee Co-Chair, at 507-438-1480 or jjerstad@smig.net

CrossWind Lutheran Parish Starbuck, Minnesota

Position: Full-time pastor for four-point parish.
Contact: David Johnsrud, Call Committee member, at 320-239-4372 or brosdjej@hotmail.com

Christ Lutheran Church Santa Clarita, California

Position: Full-time associate pastor.
Contact: Teri Gaudioso, Call Committee Chair, at 661-259-0200 or youth@come2christ.com

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church Burien, Washington

Position: Full-time associate pastor / church planting.
Contact: Pastor Herwick at 206-595-4969 or pastor@herwick.com

A battle fleet, not a luxury liner

by Mark Chavez, director

People who are disturbed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's present course often use the analogy of re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic in one of two ways. Some have used it within the WordAlone Network, commenting on the ELCA churchwide organization's attempts to make changes, such as restructuring the churchwide organization in 2005.

Others have used it to talk about WordAlone's work from within the ELCA at reform. Either way, what I've heard is, "Use a lifeboat and get off the ship while there is still time."

I've been giving the "Titanic" some thought and I don't think it is an apt analogy.

First, Christians are always caught up in spiritual warfare and are never frivolously sailing on a luxury liner's maiden voyage.

Secondly, denominations do not sink rapidly. The United Church of Christ has been the fastest declining denomination for decades. Even at its rapid rate of decline, it will last for a couple more decades. The Episcopal Church, which has declined almost as fast as the UCC, has sufficient financial resources to perpetuate its existence for many decades, even if there are hardly any members left in its parishes.

Finally, the ELCA churchwide organization is not a vessel that "transports" the 10,000 ELCA churches and 4.8 million members. The truth is just the opposite.

If the churchwide vessel sinks, the only churches that are at risk are a very small number of mission churches that are heavily dependent upon the churchwide budget for financial support. I'm confident that ELCA congregations in their locales would quickly move to support those churches.

However, if all the local churches were to

go under, the supply ships for the churchwide vessel, the churchwide organization would be cut loose, lost and empty.

Here's a different analogy. Believers are in Jesus' battle fleet, near his flagship. They're in battleships, aircraft carriers, submarines, supply ships and even tugboats. As dangerous as it is, there is no better place to be than with Jesus' flagship. There will be torpedoes, incoming fire and minefields, and perhaps some ships and boats will hit icebergs, but Jesus' fleet isn't going to be destroyed – ever. No Pearl Harbor here. So why would believers rearrange the deck chairs, look for the lifeboats or for a different course or fleet?

Tragically, some are jumping ship or changing course.

ELCA leaders, members and churches who depart from the historic Christian faith are sailing away from Jesus' fleet and attempting to find courses other than the one set by Jesus. To the extent that the churchwide organization follows a course that leads beyond the boundaries of the orthodox faith of the Church, then it too is at risk, but not because it's sinking like the Titanic. It's at risk of losing its bearings and drifting away from the flagship Truth.

Denominations that reject the authority of God's Word in all matters of faith and life are the ones who are changing course from the unsinkable battleship towards what they think are faithful fleets or safe harbors. The further that some denominations move away from Jesus' flagship, the more they are at risk.

Denominational leaders will insist that they are following Jesus Christ as they sail boldly into new and uncharted waters. God is doing a new thing they tell us. I believe that they sincerely believe they are faithfully

(Continues on page ten)

("A battle fleet..." Continues from page nine)

sailing with Jesus. But sailors can get off course and be deceived by the conditions around them or by broken compasses. Sincere belief is not an automatic course correction.

The deception that results in vessels, with their sailors, being way off course isn't new. It has been with us for a long time. In one way or another it begins with "Did God say . . . ?" Questioning what God said and meant is an entry point for deception and confusion. It is as foolish as a sailor not believing the signals from a Global Positioning System.

Much of the ELCA churchwide leadership, which supported the sexuality recommendations in 2005, is on record in support of blessing that which God declared sinful – homosexual behavior. Should the churchwide organization keep pushing this agenda, it will have turned into uncharted and dangerous waters.

[the churchwide organization] is at risk of losing its bearings and drifting away from the flagship Truth.

Maybe it will be deadly for ELCA membership numbers. It probably is not a coincidence that the two most rapidly declining denominations are the two whose leaders have pressed the hardest for the approval of homosexual behavior – the United Church of Christ, which formally approved of the ordination of practicing homosexuals in the 1980s, and The Episcopal Church, which confirmed the ordination of a practicing homosexual as a bishop in 2003. Can ELCA leaders not see that the steady decline of the ELCA probably would accelerate if it follows the same course as its full communion partners?

It will be deadly for the ELCA's ecumenical relationships. It is curious that after making ecumenical relationships the highest priority in the denomination's first two decades, many ELCA leaders seem determined to sail away from Jesus' fleet and cut themselves off from most of the Christian Church. They seem blind to the fact that The Episcopal Church is cutting itself off from not only the Anglican Communion, but also the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox churches, not to mention evangelical churches, because of its stance supporting a practicing homosexual bishop. Some ELCA leaders seem determined to sail away from most of the churches in the Lutheran World Federation.

What do we do when we see others abandoning the flagship? We warn them. We speak the truth in love to them. We signal them in every way possible to let them know they are at risk. They are heading for dangerous waters of personal experience, sociological statements and today's culture rather than for the River of Life.

Jesus' battle fleet must bear witness to Him in our churches and our communities, and stay on course right behind his flagship. ♦

("Pastor in same-sex..." Continues from page four)

third not allowed to come to the floor. Another seven voted to hold off dealing with ordination of practicing homosexuals until after the social statement on sexuality, which is to come up for a vote at the 2009 assembly. Four referred the proposals to the human sexuality study task force, which is preparing the social statement. The proposals were not considered in 17 synods. ♦

("Sexuality..." Continues from page three)

grounded in the very framework of creation in Genesis and is affirmed by Jesus himself: "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Matt. 19:4-6, in which Jesus quotes Genesis 1 and 2); and consistently taught by the apostles: "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and the sexually immoral." (Heb. 13:4; see also 1 Cor. 6:15-20)

Sadly, this good gift from God has been a source of much confusion, pain and harm throughout human history.

Moreover, unlike other contentious issues such as slavery or women's ordination, it is not possible to make a positive Biblical case for approving other forms of sexual expression. Many people have tried to explain away or dismiss the Bible's witness, but that very effort betrays its attempt to overcome what is the Bible's clear, consistent proscription of homosexual behavior.

It is important to acknowledge that living sexually in accord with God's will also has been a constant struggle for sinners. Sadly, this good gift from God has been a source of much confusion, pain and harm throughout human history. However, the appropriate response to those struggles is surely not to reject the Bible's witness. The most loving approach Christians can possibly take is to hold one another accountable to God's will for sexuality, with deep compassion and in all humility.

To ask synod or churchwide assemblies to vote on these or other matters of God's will that simply are not up for votes creates a lose-lose situation for everyone involved. It creates confusion in the minds of believers. It distracts the Church from its mission of proclaiming God's justification of the ungodly and of helping those in need. Most of all, by undermining the Bible's authority as "the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teaching and teachers are to be evaluated and judged," it leads down a dangerous path of pride and unbelief, placing ourselves over and against God and His Word. It would be wise and faithful for the members and leaders of the ELCA to reject all attempts to bring matters of God's will to a vote.

All of us come before God confident of the promised forgiveness of our sinful human condition. Because of that forgiveness, we can open the door to constructive, faithful discussion of God's call to all people, of all sexual orientations, to live in obedience to the Word of God. United in that call, we can support and encourage each other daily in proclamation of God's Word and in living out God's commands. ♦

("Institute offers..." Continues from page two)

speaking on "categorical preaching." Categorical preaching claims that since God is the "I am," "we are not," said Freund.

Bielfeldt said, "The group of participants included lay leaders, pastors and seminarians, ranging from age 20 to 80. This clearly models what the institute envisions for future theological education." ♦