



all things

NEW

Devotions, Stories, & Resources
for the ELCA Churchwide Assembly
August 12–17, 2013 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Welcome to

all things

NEW

In these pages, you will find devotions and stories written especially for the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, August 12–17, 2013. The devotions are offered by the Rev. Donna Simon, pastor of St. Mark Hope and Peace Lutheran Church in Kansas City, Missouri. The stories are provided by pastors and parishioners from the Lutheran community. The theme for this collection follows the Churchwide Assembly's theme for 2013, "Always Being Made New."

We invite you to read these pieces in the groupings indicated in the Table of Contents, one grouping each assembly day.

ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation (formerly Lutherans Concerned/ North America) invites you to join us in a number of activities this week.

ReconcilingWorks Central - OPEN DAILY

Convention Center, Room 408 Reach us at (651) 665-0861

“ReconcilingWorks Central” is the headquarters of ReconcilingWorks during the 2013 Churchwide Assembly. Please stop by often to say hello and pick up information and resources, including a detailed schedule of events hosted by ReconcilingWorks.

Understanding Transgender People

Convention Center, Room 407 Tuesday, August 13 5:00–6:00 pm

Speakers will provide information on definitions, common confusions, gender transition, workplace discrimination, social aspects of transgender lives, and transgender people in the church.

Marriage in the ELCA: What About Same-Gender Couples and their Families?

Convention Center, Room 407 Tuesday, August 13 7:00–8:00 pm

More and more, the states and federal government are making real the stated commitment of the ELCA to a just society, bringing us closer to the vision outlined in the ELCA’s 2009 social statement Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust, which declares the ELCA’s unified support for “legislation and policies to protect civil rights” for all people and its commitment to “attend to the need for equal protection, equal opportunities, and equal responsibilities under the law.” Session will include discussion about the memorial “Ministering to Same-Gender Couples and their Families,” which the 2013 Churchwide Assembly will be considering.

Reception with Bishop-Elect Guy Erwin

Convention Center, Room 408 Tuesday, August 13, 8:00 pm

The election of the Rev. Dr. R. Guy Erwin marks two historic firsts: the first openly gay and first Native American bishop of the ELCA. All voting members and visitors are invited.

Festival Worship

Omni William Penn Hotel, Grand Ballroom Wednesday, August 14, 8:00 pm

Join in festive worship with the Rev. Dr. R. Guy Erwin, bishop-elect of the Southwest California Synod, preaching, and the Rev. Dean Nelson, bishop of the Southwest California Synod, presiding. Hosted by ReconcilingWorks and Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries.

all things
NEW



All Things New3
Devotion on 2 Corinthians 5:17-214
 Yes, We Do!5

Devotion on Isaiah 56:7-86
 Why a Transgender-Inclusive ENDA Is Important7
 Safe T: Why We Need Workplace Non-Discrimination Laws8

Devotion on Ephesians 2:13-229

Devotion on Ruth 1:16-1710
 Missing Mountains, Missing Mom11
 Knots12

Devotion on John 15:9-1213
 Still Smiling14
 Know You Are Welcome16

Resources17

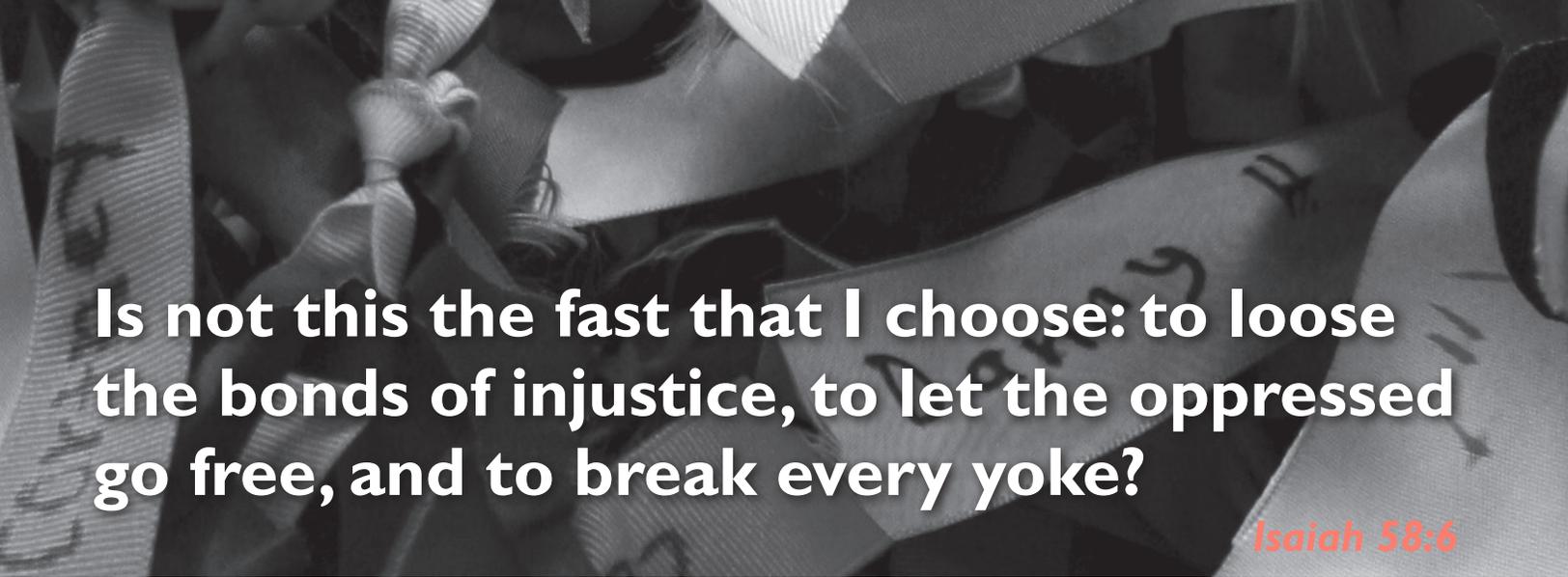
About ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation19

Contributors20



The devotions are offered by the Rev. Donna Simon,
 pastor of St. Mark Hope and Peace
 Lutheran Church in Kansas City, Missouri.





Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Isaiah 58:6

In July 2012, over 30,000 youth and adults participated in the ELCA National Youth Gathering held in New Orleans. Nearly 15,000 youth came to the interactive display booth hosted by ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation (formerly Lutherans Concerned/North America). As part of its anti-bullying theme, the ReconcilingWorks display space featured large nets made of military camouflage, symbolizing how isolation, social and family brokenness, and violence are often covered over, erased, or hidden in plain sight. The youth were invited to write their names on colorful ribbons and weave them into the camouflage webbing as a gesture of their commitment to ending bullying and discrimination in all its forms, to turn what was drab and lifeless into something new, colorful, and life-giving: a blanket of peace.

The image on the cover of this booklet shows a section of that blanket, and ribbons of hope and peace are woven throughout these pages. While the ELCA has made policy changes allowing for the greater inclusion of all God's people in the life of the church, there is still much work to be done to re-weave the strands of community that have been broken in countless ways. The devotions, stories, and resources you will find in this booklet are responses to the continuing need for reconciliation and justice among God's people—to find new life.

We believe God works through us not only in our individual efforts but also in our social and political structures. Martin Luther frequently described the Christian life as taking place in three "orders" or arenas of activity: the household, the state, and the church. Each has been established by God for the common good. We are called to be disciples of Jesus in working for reconciliation, in alleviating suffering, and in restoring wholeness and peace (shalom) to all of creation—everywhere, for everyone, all the time.

The materials in this booklet are gathered around three issues: immigration reform; employment protections for transgender, lesbian, gay, and bisexual workers; and marriage for same-gender couples. These issues are being discussed throughout our nation: in the halls of Congress and at the family table—but less frequently in our churches. Each of these issues affects people in complex, intersecting ways. Often, the effects are overlooked by the majority of society.

Each of these issues has to do with establishing equal protection under the law. Because we are called to address not only the painful symptoms of social problems but also to eliminate their root causes, ReconcilingWorks' activity at ELCA synod assemblies this spring has focused on advocating for concrete reforms on the national level. Twenty synods passed memorials calling for passage of the Uniting American Families Act (immigration) and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (transgender non-discrimination). Thirteen synods called for intentional conversations to be held throughout the ELCA on ministering to same-gender couples and their families. These memorials will be considered by the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

The full effects of the recent, historic decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court on marriage for same-gender couples, on racial diversity, and on voting rights are as yet unknown. However, it is clear that the defeat of the Defense of Marriage Act and the dismissal of Proposition 8 have provided new life, even as the striking down of a key part of the Voting Rights Act and the narrowing of commitments to racial diversity are steps backward.

There is still great need for reconciliation, so that all may live in God's peace. We are called to raise our collective voice, so that the most vulnerable, forgotten, and disenfranchised will know God's justice.

devotion

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21



So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, to whom we are reconciled through Christ, and God has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making an appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

A popular tale tells of a young woman who prepared a ham for her family one evening by cutting off the end and roasting it. Her husband, having watched her do this a few times, asked, “Honey, why do you cut off the end of the ham before you put it in the oven?”

“I don’t really know,” she replied. “I just do it the way my mother did.”

The next day, the young woman was visiting with her mother, and she asked her, “Mom, why do we cut the end off of the ham before we roast it?”

“I don’t really know,” her mother replied. “That’s the way your grandmother always did it. We should call her and ask her.”

So they did, and grandma replied, “Oh, I had to cut off the end. My roasting pan was too short.”

It is possible to do something a certain way without paying much mind to it, until we have no idea why we’re doing it that way. When we continue to do things “the way we’ve always done them,” we risk missing out on opportunities. Or ham.

Sometimes there are very good reasons to continue a practice. As Lutherans, we inherit beautiful worship forms which have been carefully preserved for us by many generations of leaders and worshippers. We are fortunate to have our rich tradition, and once you’ve heard a sanctuary full of Lutherans break into harmony, you feel the value of that tradition in your bones.

We are also inheritors of a tradition that teaches us we do not do church by rote. The Reformers were willing to sacrifice all that they had in order to continue to call the church into God’s new creation. We walk in the footsteps of those who taught us to cry out, “Semper reformanda!” in every generation. We are always reforming, because God is always reaching out to us with reconciling love. As our full communion partners in the United Church of Christ remind us in their motto, “God is still speaking.”

In the ELCA, we have recognized God’s voice speaking to us of the hope for reconciliation between lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Lutherans and their church. God has reconciled us one to the other in Jesus Christ, and God continually calls us to live into the fullness of that reconciliation. It is my fervent hope and prayer that God will continue to heal the brokenness we have experienced since the policy changes of 2009. While the change was received with gladness in communities like mine, such was not the case in other communities. In our congregation, we have continued to pray for those who feel differently than we do about full inclusion. We believe that if we can’t pray for those who disagree with us, we ought to stop praying altogether.

May God speak to us of love and reconciliation in these days together. May God teach us to be made new even as we love and value what is time-worn and beautiful. May God remind us to continue reforming as we continue valuing, and always to cook the whole ham.

— Rev. Donna Simon



YES, WE DO!

The Rev. Patt Kauffman

The calls come in—the callers a little hesitant, sometimes beating around the bush, not getting quickly to why they have called. When they finally ask whether we really solemnize same-gender weddings in our church, we answer enthusiastically, “Yes, we do! Congratulations!”

At our staff meetings, when we put a wedding on the calendar and speak a bit about the couple, we are always saddened by the fear that often accompanies those who call seeking what we at St. Peter’s in Port Jervis, New York, understand to be a sacred right to marry the person you love. We all remain humbled and honored, because we realize how much work the church still has to do to welcome, embrace, seek forgiveness from, and, in short, make a place for all God’s children.

When couples come in for premarital counseling and we start to study the Bible, and they look at the scriptures speaking of welcome and inclusion, love, and joy, many weep with the realization that God

Rev. Patt Kaufmann officiating at the wedding of Katie Bryant (left) and Emily Margolis.



desires that no one be left out, that there is space for all in God’s love for humankind.

And when the words of the marriage rite are spoken, when they hear themselves called “dearly beloved” and are prayed over with words that for so long didn’t include them, with vows they never expected to be a part of their reality, there are few dry eyes in the sanctuary!

I understand God to be good and gracious—in giving Jesus, and in Jesus’ message of radical inclusion for all who seek God. I see this as the central understanding of my call as pastor: to speak of this amazing, gracious love and to teach God’s people how to live in the reality of this love.

I am blessed to serve at St. Peter’s, a community that understands its calling to be one of welcome. When I accepted the call, I was asked to help the church grow in its understanding of welcoming the stranger. We started with Bible study, exploring how God spoke to our forebears and still speaks to us now. And when it was time to become a Reconciling in Christ congregation, there was no need for a vote; by overwhelming consensus, it was understood that this is how we wanted the church to be in a hurting and painful world.

In response to the vote, three families left, but we have grown by over forty families, and continue to grow. New faces are a weekly occurrence. This community understands God’s amazing grace isn’t just for some, but for all.

Weddings are announced in our newsletters and weekly updates and worship folder inserts, prayers are offered for the couples, and our youth sign on to serve as acolytes and crucifers. And all of us thank God for grace—the ability to see ourselves in everyone God calls us to serve, and a willingness to make this world better for Christ’s sake.

Soli Deo Gloria! ❖

devotion
ISAIAH 56:7-8



These I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

Have you ever been to a party or an event and felt truly out of place? You looked around and realized that you weren't quite sure what you were doing there. You probably couldn't wait to leave and go someplace that made more sense. It's a pretty uncomfortable feeling, isn't it?

Multiply the strength of those feelings by a dozen or so and you can begin to understand what our siblings in Christ who are transgender have experienced. Each person's experience is different, but there is a common thread running through the stories I hear from friends, colleagues, and parishioners whose gender identity doesn't match what was recorded at their birth. When your gender doesn't fit, you feel out of place. All the time. Everywhere.

Many people choose to live with the discomfort—to stay at the party even though they're not having much fun. Others find a way to claim the identity that has always been theirs. The rest of us have a simple choice: support them or turn away. We can reach out in love, recognizing the difficulty of their journey...or not.

Those who choose support—and there are more of us every day—choose to honor the God Isaiah told us about. The prophet teaches that God's reconciling love calls all peoples, all nations, to God's holy mountain. There God showers us with rich food and fine wine. More importantly, on God's holy mountain, all people are shown God's abundant love.

At the banquet on God's holy mountain, we enjoy a bountiful relationship with God, a relationship sealed by the covenant God made with our ancestors long ago. There, too, we lay down the enmity between us, and live together in harmony. Our swords are beaten into plowshares, and our spears to pruning hooks. God settles disputes, and draws us together, reconciled to God and to each other.

This is the vision our transgender siblings want to share with us all. It is a vision in keeping with the values of our nation and the values of our faith. Let us go up to God's holy mountain together. Let us be gathered into God's love, which continues to teach us how to love one another.

– Rev. Donna Simon

“A broad umbrella term for persons who have a self-image or gender identity not traditionally associated with their biological gender. Some transgender persons wish to change their anatomy to be more congruent with their self-perception, while others do not have such a desire. There is no absolute correlation between sexual orientation and transgender issues. A transgender person may claim a sexual orientation of heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.”

Why a Transgender-Inclusive EMPLOYMENT NON-DISCRIMINATION ACT Is Important

Stephanie M. Dykes

I am a life-long Lutheran, who also happens to be transgender. I first knew I was different when I was ten years old; forty years later, I was able to begin living my life as a woman. This has been a difficult journey, and I have lost much along the way.

While people in the transgender community have gained in acceptance and awareness by the larger public, we face a key issue in the employment arena.

I have been fortunate in my transition from male to female. In 2008 I transitioned at my full-time job at a bank headquartered in the Southeast, as well as at my two part-time jobs. Roughly three months later, I found myself out of work—a presumed casualty of the financial crisis of 2008. I couldn't help but wonder if I had been placed on the chopping block on account of being transgender.

Ten months later, my recession ended when I moved to the Midwest after receiving a job offer. Those who interviewed me later told me that they knew I was transgender before they even interviewed me because they had “googled” me. I felt so relieved that I had been hired based on my qualifications, and not rejected on account of my gender identity.

However, many of my brothers and sisters are not so fortunate. Many members of my community suffer through unemployment or underemployment. About sixteen percent of the transgender people taking part in a major survey reported feeling compelled to work in the underground economy, such as doing sex work or selling drugs, just to survive. [See citation for *Injustice at Every Turn* in the Resources section on page 17.]

I am now privileged to live in a state where it is illegal to discriminate in the workplace

against individuals based on their gender identity or gender expression. But in most states, it is perfectly legal to fire someone for being transgender. This often happens in the context of a work-place transition in which transgender employees make their employers aware of their desire to live as their true selves.

Even in cases where there is not an outright firing of the transgender employee, transgender people can find that their job responsibilities are gradually cut back to the point where they have no job left to do.

Many of us in the transgender community have families to support, so they too suffer when a member of our community experiences workplace discrimination.

We are your brothers and sisters. We sing in the choir with you. We build Habitat houses with you. We teach Sunday school with you. Some of us aspire to the ordained ministry.

I am therefore asking those gathered for the ELCA Churchwide Assembly of 2013 to support a transgender-inclusive Employment Non-Discrimination Act. (ENDA) ❖



SAFE T: Why We Need Workplace Non-Discrimination Laws

Mary Ann Horton

Lots of transgender people experience employment discrimination. I've been relatively lucky, myself, but there have been times when I feel I was discriminated against.

Once, I found an opening for a computer consultant position with a small consulting shop in Columbus, Ohio. The phone interviews went well. On a Friday phone call, the General Manager explained that I'd get paid only when I generated paid hours, and she suggested a specific dollar amount as a consulting rate per year, pro-rated hourly. I responded that the amount sounded okay. She promised to email me an offer letter, and we'd have our face-to-face the following Tuesday.

When I got the letter, it was addressed to "Mr. Mary Ann Horton" and quoted the asking rate as \$1,000 less than what we had discussed earlier. I figured she was testing me, wondering what I would do if a consulting client tried to mess with the rate.

So I replied by email. "This mostly looks good. Two little changes, however. Please address me as Ms. Mary Ann Horton. And the amount we discussed was different than what your letter states. Would you please send a corrected letter?"

I don't really know why, but apparently this infuriated her. She replied that I wouldn't like working there very much. I tried to reach her by phone, but she wouldn't take my calls. I thought she might calm down over the weekend, so I tried again Monday. She still wouldn't take my calls. Her assistant finally told me the Tuesday meeting was cancelled.

I found it hard to believe this was about \$1,000 of an asking price, which would presumably be negotiated down anyway.

Another time, I was contending for a management position. During the interview process, I spoke at length with the boss' secretary, a woman in



Memphis. The call went well. At the end, however, when we were wrapping up, she suddenly asked me, "So, how did you get a name like Mary Ann?" She must have assumed from my voice I was a man with a funny name. I did not get the job.

At another job, there was a woman—I'll call her Carol—who apparently had a problem with me. She made repeated complaints about my using the women's bathroom. She said she was offended that the company would hire someone like me, and she especially didn't want me using the same restroom as her.

My boss said upper management made it clear they supported me. However, eventually, a meeting was called with the director, three levels above me. A woman from

Human Resources was there, too. I was informed it was about Carol and her complaints about the restroom. The director proceeded to tell me a story about a man with poor vision who had trouble telling his twins apart. He'd make a face, and one twin would cry, the other would laugh. He said this situation was like that—when looking at the same thing, one sees a monster, the other sees a clown. He told me Carol was in tears when she came into his office to tell her story.

Management still supported me, but every time I passed Carol in the hallway, she gave me an even more pointedly cold shoulder. I know she wanted me fired, and she'd do anything she could to do it. I also knew Human Resources would tolerate her attempts. While I believe my job was safe, I didn't feel totally safe in my workplace after that. The situation was distracting and upsetting for me.

Our country needs stronger workplace protections against discrimination and harassment. Nobody should have to feel anxious about their life at work, or be afraid of being out of work, just because they are transgender. ❖



devotion

EPHESIANS 2:13-22

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For Christ is our peace; in flesh Christ has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. Christ has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, in order to create one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So our Lord Jesus Christ came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through Christ both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. In Christ the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

Those of us in the ELCA—even those of us who are transgender, bisexual, gay, or lesbian—may not know the life-changing effect of decisions made at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. You might remember that four years ago, the ELCA made some concrete policy changes regarding “persons in publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.” We agreed that churches who wanted to could call those persons. We are now allowed to marry them. Then there was some publicity and some were happy and some were not, and still many of us do not know the full effect of these decisions on the lives of those who reside in this body, this “dwelling place for God,” and on our neighbors.

Jake’s mom knows.

Jake was sixteen when he came out to his mom, Connie. In her own words, she “freaked out.” She knew how difficult it was to be a gay teenager. She loved her son and didn’t want him to endure taunting or physical violence. She was also afraid for the rest of her family. What would the other people in their small community say? She knew what her church would say: “Jake is going to hell.”

Connie tried to love Jake, but she couldn’t accept that he was gay. She signed him up for a ministry which promised to repair him, but he ran away and came home after three months of austerity and electroshock. They never talked about his experience, and

Connie continued to urge Jake to change. He began to buckle under the pressure. She didn’t know what she should do to help him. When she found him in his room one morning, dead from an overdose that may or may not have been intentional, she finally broke down and cried all of the tears she knew she should have cried with Jake.

Today Connie is part of a different church. That church and its pastor helped her grieve the loss of her beloved son. She travels the country telling Jake’s story, and reminding people at churches, temples, and mosques that they have children’s lives in their hands. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual teens are five times more likely to attempt suicide, according to a study published by the Journal of Pediatrics. That number is significantly higher for teens who hear negative messages about being gay at church. The number is even higher for transgender teens.

By reaching out to welcome God’s LGBT children into the fullness of our communion, the ELCA is showing young people that they are loved and accepted. Believe me, they are noticing. It is not an exaggeration to say that our welcome will save lives. We are continuing the work the Apostle Paul spoke about in his letter to the Ephesians, working to be reconciled to one another, “built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.” In that dwelling place there are many rooms. One of those rooms could have been for Jake. His mom is making sure that there are rooms for the others.

— Rev. Donna Simon

devotion
RUTH 1:16-17



But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!”

I think one of the most touching moments in all of the Bible is this moment at the beginning of the book of Ruth, when Naomi has determined to go back to Moab, and tells her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, that they should return to their own homelands and their own people. Orpah tearfully kisses Naomi goodbye, but Ruth refuses to leave her beloved mother-in-law, uttering the line perhaps most famous in the King James Version: “Whither thou goest, I will go.”

It is a lovely scene of devotion and faith, in which Ruth declares that she will not only remain true to Naomi, but also to Naomi’s God. She is faithful to both until death, and she lives on in the genealogy of our faith—her lineage extends through King David to Jesus of Nazareth.

I have witnessed the sort of devotion Ruth offers to Naomi and to God in my congregation, most notably within couples, both gay and straight. One such couple is Kathy and Heli.

Heli was our parish administrator. She came from Finland, and has a very direct manner of speaking. Heli greeted me at the door on my first day in parish ministry with “I need to talk to you! Come with me!” It turned out that there had been an emergency in her partner Kathy’s family—one being covered by

the local news. She was leading me to a television in our conference room. I was relieved to discover that I wasn’t in trouble before I even started. That incident was also a helpful glimpse into their relationship. They were joined together, and what affected Kathy, or her family, affected Heli.

Heli is back in Finland now. Kathy is still in Kansas. After nearly twenty years together, they were separated when our church could no longer afford to employ Heli. Her visa was set to expire, and she was unable to find work which fulfilled the visa’s narrow terms. Because the marriage vows she and Kathy had sworn to one another years ago were not recognized by the federal government, Heli was forced to return to Finland. Kathy stayed in Kansas to care for her ailing mother.

The Uniting American Families Act would afford couples like Kathy and Heli the opportunity to live together, just as heterosexual married couples are able to do. Currently, same-gender couples and their families may be torn apart when a non-citizen is forced to leave the country. In the preferred future, those couples and families will be able to look at one another and declare, “Whither thou goest, I will go.”

— Rev. Donna Simon

missing MOUNTAINS missing MOM

Julie Hass

Today I called my 92-year-old mother. When she heard it was me, her voice brightened, and she said, “How wonderful you called! I just finished breakfast and was feeling a bit lonesome!” She lives alone in Boulder, Colorado, while I live with my partner, Hilde, in Oslo, Norway. I am jealous of friends who can take a weekend trip to visit their families—I miss my mom and I think she misses me even more.

Thirty years ago this spring I met Hilde. We both fell in love for the first time. We’ve needed to figure out everything together; what love is, accepting ourselves as lesbians, coming out, creating a committed relationship. I grew up in the United States, Hilde in Norway. Figuring out how and where we could live together has been really hard. I think without our faith and believing that we always are embraced and held safe in God’s unconditional love, we could not have made it.

Hilde and I met on the ski slopes of the Swiss Alps. Over the last 30 years we have crossed the Atlantic many times, climbed mountains, and negotiated unknown landscapes together. Maybe the most difficult struggle for us has been the journey towards finding

a place to call home. We lived together for three years in Boulder while Hilde did her Masters degree in theology in the late 1980s. When her student visa expired, we had two choices. We could live on different continents or we could move to Norway. Had the option been available, we would have stayed in Boulder where I was running our family’s company together with my dad. Hilde and I had tried a commuting relationship earlier—we just couldn’t do it again. We loved each other too much to not be together, so I moved to Norway where we have slowly built a life together. I do not regret that choice, but I wish I hadn’t had to make it. And I also know I broke a bit of my parents’ hearts by leaving.

Today we live in Oslo. I have a good job at Statistics Norway and Hilde has, until this spring, been a minister in the Norwegian Lutheran Church. In 1994, Norway enacted its civil union law, which meant I could legally live in Norway as Hilde’s partner. With the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision striking down the Defense of Marriage Act, it appears that our marriage in Norway might provide the grounds for Hilde to apply for a green card. We are still stunned—it seems like a miracle!

As we celebrate 30 years together, I still miss my country, my mountains, and my mom. Reflecting on how immigration laws have made it impossible for me to live in the United States with my partner, I realize that perhaps the biggest price has been paid by my mom. While growing up, our family attended Trinity Lutheran Church where Mom still co-teaches three- and four-year-old Christians. She prays every Sunday that we might one day move back to Colorado. Now it looks like we can. The freedom to marry at the state level is now needed, but at least Hilde and I can move back when the time is right! ❖

Julie Hass and Hilde Raastad



Julie with her mother, Doris Hass



KNOTS

The Rev. Tita Valeriano

This is my testimony at the San Francisco Supervisors hearing on the Uniting American Families Act on May 16, 2013:

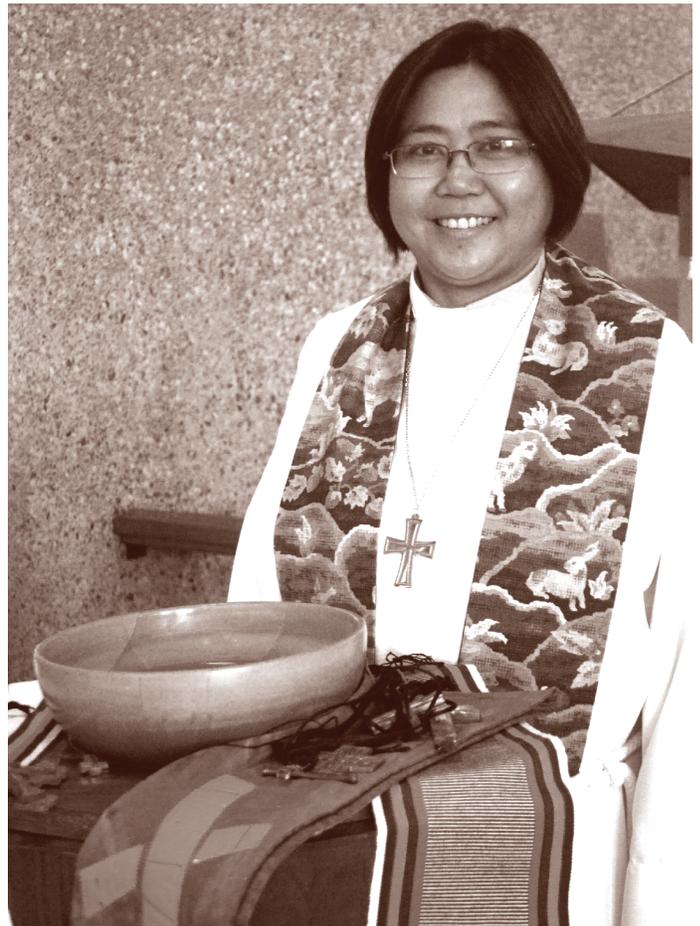
Good morning! I am the Rev. Teresita Valeriano, an immigrant from the Philippines, a Lutheran minister, and a lesbian living with my partner, Jennifer Snow, a citizen of this country. These are my identities; each is equally important to me.

June 22, 2009, was the most difficult day of our lives as a couple. Jennifer received the denial of my green card application, after five years of waiting, while I was in Canada on a work-related trip. By that time, I had been away from the Philippines for sixteen years.

Feeling betrayed by her own government and fearing the possibility of a permanent separation, Jennifer packed our apartment, stored all our possessions, and followed me to Vancouver, Canada, without any assurance about when I would be able to return to the United States. We also knew that she could only stay in Canada for a limited time.

Because my U.S. visa was required for my job as a minister, I also lost the ability to support us. The current immigration system and the denial of full rights to same-sex couples are two interlocking injustices that threatened my family. We stayed in Canada for four months, while my church worked hard and paid a fortune in legal fees to fight these injustices. As a result, I am one of the few lucky persons who has been able to return to the United States and eventually get my green card after another two-and-a-half years of reapplying.

Jennifer, her family, my family, and I did not only experience the threat of permanent separation and financial burdens, but we also experienced emotional and psychological turmoil in the denial of our rights as a loving and committed couple, who respect the law that protects and upholds the dignity of each human being. My faith accepts me for who I am and also affirms that my relationship with Jennifer is as sacred as that of anyone else who lives in a loving and committed relationship. This is not only our right, this is a gift that we cherish and protect. I appeal to you, leaders of the land, to change the law of this community so that it will not only support but also protect the rights of LGBTQ couples and of immigrants. No one should live in fear that his or her partner will be deported or have to leave this country.

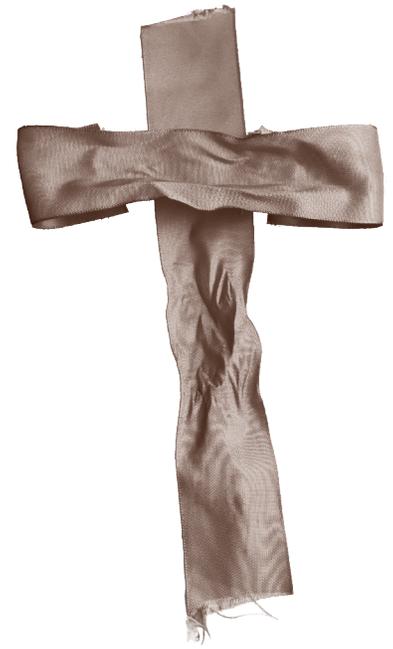


Before the testimony, I shared a ritual to recognize the bond between two people loving each other and committing themselves to a lifelong relationship. In the Filipino traditional ceremony, a knotted cord is placed over the couple's heads and draped on their shoulders to symbolize their bond, their oneness, on entering into a new life as a couple. This knotted cord also symbolizes that there should be nothing, nobody, that will keep them apart. The injustice that same-gender couples experience for not being able to marry should not deter us from protecting couples from being separated.

As of June 26 of this year, we rejoice at the recent Supreme Court decision that clears the way for thousands of couples like us to be safe, secure, and open in their relationships and to live with dignity in this country. We still pray for those who continue to live in the shadows awaiting truly comprehensive immigration reform. So please join me in this Filipino traditional blessing as we remember all bi-national, same-sex couples and all immigrant families fighting for their right to be together. We pray:

This cord symbolizes the love of God which brings your hearts and souls together. May your love grow stronger and bind you closer together through the years, and may no one, no law separate you from one another. We ask this in the name of the God of love. Amen. ❖

devotion
JOHN 15:9-12



As God has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept God's commandments and abide in God's love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

Colleen and I were married last year in Council Bluffs, Iowa, in a lovely ELCA church, which was quite welcoming to us. We were their first same gender wedding, and while we are glad to have broken them in, we would rather have been married in our own congregation, the church I serve and the church to which we have both been dedicated for some years now. Alas, we were not hopeful that the opportunity to be married legally in Missouri would be forthcoming in the near future.

So we were married in Iowa and we honeymooned in Omaha, Nebraska. We returned to Missouri where our marriage conferred on us exactly zero of the one thousand plus legal benefits which greet differently gendered partners who are married under the law. Fortunately, the benefits of being married under God's grace and the promises we made far outweigh any legal perks. Okay, we do look forward to "married, filing jointly." We can be a little cavalier, because we enjoy the support of our extended families and trust that neither of us would ever be barred from the other's hospital room.

Other couples are not so fortunate. For many gay and lesbian couples, the protections afforded by marriage would be essential. Too often I hear of a partner being removed from the bedside of the one to whom they have been committed for years, because only a biological family member is considered next-of-kin. Too often I read of someone denied pension and social security benefits after years of loving relationship, because there is no legal standing to receive them.

We couldn't be married in our church, so we brought the church with us. Members of our beloved community made the journey to Iowa, prayed with us, sang with us, and witnessed our commitment to one another. On the wedding day, we heard these words of Jesus, from John's gospel: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." We chose the lesson from John 15 because it spoke to us of our love for one another, but also because it spoke of the love we enjoy within the community at St. Mark Hope and Peace Lutheran Church.

We love our church—both the congregation and this denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Our church has been on a journey of discovery, walking together toward the promise of loving one another as God has loved us. I am proud to have been associated with each part of the acronym soup of welcome—a Concerned, now Reconciling Lutheran; a roster member of the Extraordinary Candidacy Project, now Proclaim; and a pastor in the ELCA, serving thirteen years, recognized for three years.

It has been a great journey, and it continues. As we talk together about loving one another as God has loved us, we will be called into the larger conversations on marriage, adoption, and immigration. We will go there faithfully, filled with God's reconciling love and Martin Luther's undying hope for the church. Let the people of the ELCA say "Amen."

— Rev. Donna Simon



Jennifer Sanders and Shauna Hannan

STILL SMILING

The Rev. Dr. Shauna Hannan

It was impossible to stop smiling on March 9. I knew it at the time, but the pictures prove it. There were seven of us gathered by the Gapstow Bridge in New York City's Central Park; the officiant, a Lutheran pastor, and four witnesses joined Jennifer and me for our wedding. We took the "public" in the ELCA's "publically accountable" seriously and chose a sanctuary with neither a roof nor walls so that others, two and four-legged alike, could participate. By the time we heard, "Jennifer and Shauna, by their promises before God and in the presence of this assembly, have joined themselves to one another as wife and wife," it seemed even the waters and the hills and the trees were clapping their hands and singing together with joy.

I had not anticipated the importance of knowing that our marriage was valid, legally. Yet the Post Office's delivery of our Certificate of Marriage from New York City's Office of the City Clerk was shockingly momentous. It was also delightfully incongruous (albeit complicated) that it was delivered to a 29203 address, a zip code in a state that does not recognize the marriage between two women.

The legal validation of our marriage is not the whole story; it is also important that our marriage is validated ecclesially. Because God's blessing and the church's affirmation are indispensable for this baptized, confirmed, and ordained Lutheran, it was important that the officiant on March 9 was a vested, ordained Lutheran pastor. That group of seven consisted of four clergy and three laity. The church was present.

While March 9 was a life-changing day, something more was needed. You see, our intention was not to elope, i.e. abscond. I had attempted to do that for too many years. I was good at it too. But, as it turned out, it did me no good. I covered up my pain about not having the right to marry with a cynicism about the institution of marriage (the statistics for heterosexual marriages helped justify my cynicism) and by flaunting my independence and self-sufficiency. Others supported these tactics. And then on a day in August 2009, my tactics and I were exposed. As I watched the numbers from the churchwide assembly's vote appear on my computer screen from my 29203 home, a cry came from the heretofore unknown depths. I was shocked by tears of thanksgiving for the validation I never knew I needed. I was also shocked by the fear of exposure. There's no more hiding now; the move mandated that I participate in relationships the same way everyone else does. It's public. Are we ready for this? Am I? My lifetime of learned and proficient behavior will not work in this emerging world. I will have to learn to walk through my days differently. I will have to learn a new language, "This is my wife." Psalm 119 keeps me centered and sane as I began to invite others into my private life like never before. Thanks to the church's affirmation, I am freer, less naïve, more honest.

So, in an effort to be more open, more public, more faithful, just days ago (at the time of this writing), "something more" happened. On June 30, Jennifer and I affirmed our marriage vows in front of 170 family members and friends who needed to witness this themselves. It was a public worship service (as all worship services are) in the sanctuary of our congregation in Columbia, South Carolina. While it had a roof and walls, anyone who walked through the doors was welcome. (Indeed, many who walked

“Because God’s blessing and the church’s affirmation are indispensable for this baptized, confirmed, and ordained Lutheran, it was important that the officiant on March 9 was a vested, ordained Lutheran pastor.”

through those doors had not walked through any sanctuary doors for years.) We invited the public to affirm and hold us accountable to the vows we made in March. All 170 people came forward to lay on hands as our friend, an ordained Lutheran pastor, the same officiant from March 9, prayed: "By the power of your Holy Spirit pour out the abundance of your blessing on Jennifer and Shauna. . . . Bless them so that their lives together may bear witness to your love" ("Affirmation of Marriage" in *ELW Occasional Services*).

Going into June 30, Jennifer and I knew we were already married. We didn't need another wedding. What we needed was to worship and to be affirmed. While March 9 was for the two of us, June 30 was for the 170. Our friends got to church, our families met, and all saw our affection for one another at the altar, in the meal, and, of course, later on the dance floor. Together these two events offered much-appreciated and life-changing legal and ecclesial validation and affirmation.

I entered that June 30 worship service with grateful yet pained and wide-opened eyes, knowing that our work toward full equality is not complete. For even in the very same week that our nation's Supreme Court deemed the so-called Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) unconstitutional, trusted supporters had some hesitation, given the fact marriage between two women is not legal in South Carolina. The fears, survival tactics, and pain will be assuaged only by the Spirit's presence in our continued honest and holy conversations regarding the freedom to marry.

I am grateful that you, church, prodded and tugged me, for I now find myself in a publically accountable, monogamous, same-sex, legal, and ecclesially validated marriage which, I pray, will be lifelong. Jennifer and I invite your support and prayers that it may be so. ❖

KNOW YOU ARE WELCOME

The Rev. Brad Froslee

On a Sunday evening a year ago in June we stepped off the plane in Minneapolis. Before landing, we were handed a form to fill out for customs and passport inspection—we were to fill out one per household. The questions very quickly became, “Do we, two men and a baby, count as a household...a family? What is our status? Who makes this decision?”

For the previous two weeks we had traveled with a quick stop in Canada, and stays in Iceland, Norway, and Denmark. These four countries smiled, waved us in, and welcomed us with open arms, and in Canada there was even a little joke with the passport agent about how we decided on our little guy’s last name. All four of these countries allow for marriage—and the reality is that their countries are doing just fine. People live and care for each other. And our being a family was never questioned—it simply was a part of the larger whole.

In fact, in Iceland, as we walked across the town square in Reykjavik, we heard an American asking the tour guide about their former Prime Minister. “Isn’t she a lesbian?” The tour guide quickly noted that she is, and that her being a lesbian is not an issue for them in Iceland. This gave us a sense of hope, and we felt we were truly accepted and welcomed in that place.

Today we are in Minnesota, which over the last year has gone through a state-wide vote that would have banned same-gender marriage (which was defeated), and more recently a legislative vote to allow same-gender marriage (which passed). We find ourselves now living in a state that says all citizens and families are accepted, welcomed, and can get married.

The freedom to marry in Minnesota is a civil option. It is an option that the congregation

I serve, Calvary Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, has said publicly it supports. We, as a congregation, will recognize, provide use of our facilities, and allow our clergy to perform marriages for same-gender couples—as we would any opposite-gender couple.

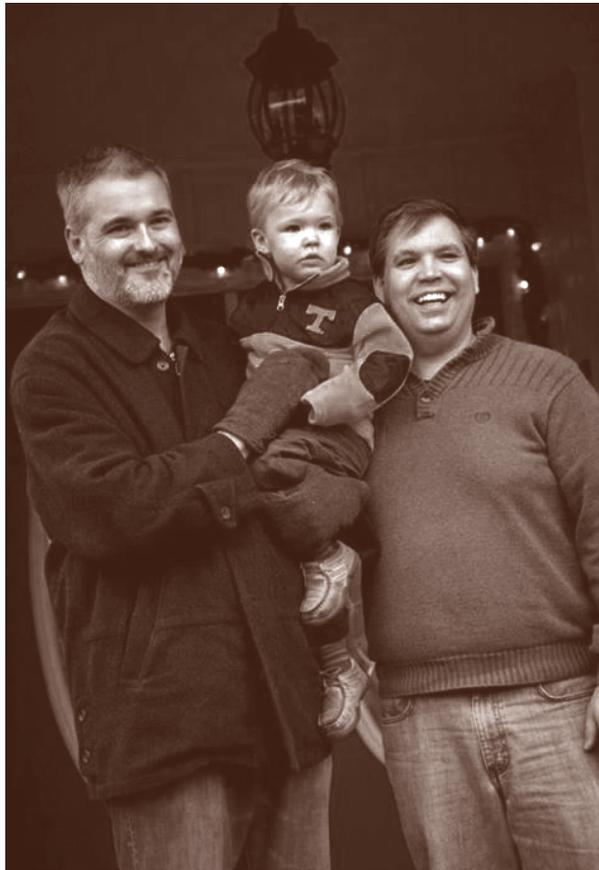
I know that not all Lutherans and all ELCA congregations have been on the journey that our family and congregation have traveled. It is my hope that we as the ELCA will strengthen opportunities for conversation, that together we will begin pondering what resources we can make available. And in our conversations, learning, and work, I hope we can find ways to broaden welcome and understanding.

What does it mean for us as a Church to have people arriving at worship and not having to wonder whether they or their family are welcomed, but rather feeling assured there is a space and place for all? What does it mean for us to create a space to effectively provide pastoral care, liturgical resources, and open dialogue?

Personally, this gives me a sense of hope, and feeling that we are truly welcomed in this place.

I long to come in for a landing knowing that the ELCA is saying there is a space and welcome, and to hear that this church cherishes families like ours enough to say, “We are doing our part to create conversation, supports, and resources. Know that you are welcome.”

God of our journeys, in our comings and goings we seek places that provide welcome, support and care. In these days may we discern how best to support and care for all. May your church boldly invite all to know welcome and a home where they will be nourished. Amen. ❖



Bill O'Connor, Brad Froslee and their son, Torin.

RESOURCES

Transgender

Frequently Asked Questions about Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People

Developed by ReconcilingWorks, this resource provides definitions, common confusions, gender transition, social aspect of transgender lives, and transgender people in the church. See ReconcilingWorks.org, and select the **Resources/RIC Resources** tab.

TransLutherans

TransLutherans is an affinity group of ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation. All transgender and gender non-conforming people and our allies are invited to join. If you are a Lutheran transgender or gender-nonconforming person or an ally, no matter where you are in your journey of faith, please go to ReconcilingWorks.org.

Injustice at Every Turn

A report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey. This study brings to light how transgender and non-conforming people face injustice at every turn: in childhood homes, in school systems, in workplaces, at the grocery store, the hotel front desk, in doctors' offices and emergency rooms, before judges, and at the hands of landlords, police offices, health-care workers, and other service providers. See tiny.cc/NTDS_Injustice

transACTION

transACTION is a curriculum designed to help churches and institutions address issues of understanding and welcome by providing step-by-step training about the needs, apprehensions, and fears of transgender people—as well as the wealth of gifts and graces they bring—while responding to the concerns of the church or religious institution. From the Institute for Welcoming Resources. See welcomingresources.org

Gender Identity and Our Faith Communities: A Congregational Guide for Transgender Advocacy

A resource based on the contributions of transgender people, their families, and clergy. Drawing on a wide array of personal experiences, religious and cultural analysis, and diverse faith journeys, it empowers people of faith with the knowledge and skills necessary to transform their communities and congregations into welcoming environments. From the Human Rights Campaign. See tiny.cc/HRC_TransFaith

Employment Non-Discrimination Act

10 things to Know About the Employment Non-Discrimination Act

From the Center for American Progress. See tiny.cc/ENDA_10

Why ENDA Matters to the Trans Community

Article by Brynn Tannehill, writing for the Huffington Post. See tiny.cc/ENDA_matters

Evidence of Employment Discrimination and its Effects on LGBT People

From the Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. See tiny.cc/ENDA_evidence

Churchwide Assembly Action CA97.06.29

The 1997 Churchwide Assembly expressed support for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), affirming the advocacy of synods and the Division for Church in Society in support of laws barring discrimination against individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation. However, the assembly action did not include support for workplace protections for transgender workers, and no federal ENDA law has been passed by Congress in any form.

Pastoral Care and Other Resources

The Institute for Welcoming Resources

The Institute for Welcoming Resources has a helpful list of pastoral care materials. See www.welcomingresources.org and click the **Resources** tab.

Encouraging Conversation: Resources for Talking about Same-Sex Blessings

Developed by the Episcopal Church USA, this resource is for congregations that wish to be in conversation about blessings for same-gender couples. See www.churchpublishing.org

Going to the Chapel: A Quick and Easy Guide for Attending the Ceremony of LGBT Friends or Family Members

“So the invitation has come. Maybe you saw it coming. Maybe it’s a surprise! But you’re invited. In this time of greater civil and religious public recognition of LGBT relationships, most of us will be invited to such an event sooner or later. Here’s a quick and easy guide to help you make the most of the experience and be a great guest.” By the Rev. Michael Fick, Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Chicago, IL. See tiny.cc/LGBTweddingGuest

Wedding Liturgies

There is no ELCA-approved wedding liturgy that is inclusive of same-gender couples. Please see the following resources for ideas for appropriate liturgies, including some from full-communion partners of the ELCA.

Renewing Worship 4: Life Passages

From 2002–2005, the ELCA provided a gender-neutral wedding liturgy as part of a series of volumes for provisional use called *Renewing Worship*. It is no longer available from Augsburg Fortress, but hard copies are still available for purchase from online book sellers. On Amazon.com, search for “Life Passages Rw V4.”

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC)

With permission from Augsburg Fortress, the ELCIC has adapted the Order for Marriage found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW). The adaptation is appropriate for use with same-gender couples and opposite-gender couples. However, this adaptation is authorized for use only in the ELCIC, not the ELCA. The changes involve replacing the words *wife/husband* with *spouse*, and there are a few other minor changes in wording. This provides the same basic liturgy for all couples, without distinction based on sexual orientation.

Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church has authorized liturgical resources appropriate for same-gender couples called *I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing*. This resource includes theological resources for study as well as liturgical resources. See www.churchpublishing.org

Services of Blessings of Relationships

Prepared by St. Paul–Reformation Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. Includes several services of blessing of a relationship, a Communion Service of Thanksgiving for supportive family and friends, as well as theological background. See tiny.cc/Blessing_Services

United Church of Christ

This order for marriage has been adapted from the United Church of Christ *Book of Worship* “Order for Marriage” to provide language that may be used for any marriage, regardless of gender. See tiny.cc/UCC_Order_Marriage

Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW) – Affirmation of Marriage

Those who have been legally married and who wish to have their marriage affirmed by their faith community may choose the “Affirmation of Marriage” liturgy in the in *ELW Occasional Services* volume. It utilizes language appropriate for same-gender couples.

Latino Resource

A La Familia: A Conversation about Our Families, the Bible, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

This resource presents a bilingual guide for addressing LGBT inclusion in Catholic and Protestant Latino families and congregations. Produced by the Human Rights Campaign; the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force; and UNID@S, the National Latina/o LGBT Human Rights Organization. See tiny.cc/HRC_familia

Immigration

Immigration Equality

Immigration Equality is a national organization working for equality under U.S. immigration law for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and HIV-positive individuals. Immigration Equality provides legal aid and advocacy for LGBT and HIV-positive immigrants and their families. Web resources include detailed analyses of the DOMA and Prop 8 rulings as they related to bi-national couples and families. See www.immigrationequality.org

The End of DOMA: What Your Family Needs to Know

General information. See tiny.cc/DOMA_end

ELCA Social Message on Immigration

Approved by the Board of the Division for Church in Society and adopted by the ELCA Church Council in 1998. See tiny.cc/ELCA_immigration

Toward a Compassionate, Just, and Wise Immigration Reform

Social Policy Resolution adopted by the ELCA Church Council in 2009. See tiny.cc/ELCA_Imm_Reform

Same-Sex Couples and Immigration in the U.S.A.

There are an estimated 28,500 bi-national, same-gender couples and nearly 11,500 same-gender couples in which neither partner is a U.S. citizen. Until June 26, 2013, when DOMA was

struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court, none of these 40,000 couples was allowed to sponsor their same-gender partners for permanent residence. These couples are raising almost 25,000 children. See the Williams Institute’s analysis based on the 2010 U.S. Census. See: tiny.cc/SS_Immigration

Reconciling in Christ Program Resources

For the following resources, see www.ReconcilingWorks.org, and select the Resources/RIC Resources tab.

Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Program: Frequently Asked Questions

Basic information about the RIC program of public welcome.

Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Program: Sample Affirmations of Welcome

A sampling of welcoming statements in use at one or more of our current RIC settings. For use as guides, templates, or inspiration in writing an affirmation that proclaims the unique commitment to welcome in your community.

Our Congregation Is Already Welcoming, Why Do We Need to Say So?

The importance of a public welcome.

Your Congregation Is RIC: Now What?

Ideas to move forward with inclusive ministry in your congregation: A practical guide, including action steps your congregation can take.

How Can Our Congregation Help Expand the Number of RIC Congregations in Our Area?

Ideas for sharing your story and encouraging other faith communities to join you in making a public welcome.

Shirts, Books, DVDS, Tattoos

Visit our resource center for RIC resources and swag to help your community. tiny.cc/RWKS_SWAG

About Us

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we support, embody, and inspire the full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the church and the world.

Since 1974, ReconcilingWorks (formerly Lutherans Concerned/North America) has ministered to thousands of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and heterosexual persons seeking to affirm both their faith and sexuality. An independent, pan-Lutheran, membership-supported organization, ReconcilingWorks is committed to working at the intersection of oppressions and to fostering personal empowerment for individuals as well as systemic change within the church.

Allies Against Bullying

Helping congregations and communities become safer places for everyone—especially our youth.

Resources available at
www.ReconcilingWorks.org

Reconciling Lutherans

Individuals calling the church to extend God's welcoming embrace to all. Reconciling Lutherans empowers individuals to publicly witness to their call for a church and world that welcome and include all. Each name added to this public roster will strengthen the call to the Church to become truly welcoming and inclusive. Signing up is easy and free.

View the list and sign up as a Reconciling Lutheran at
www.ReconcilingWorks.org/RL

Reconciling in Christ Communities

Congregations and communities publicly welcoming people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Founded in 1983, the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) program of ReconcilingWorks recognizes Lutheran communities that affirm God's welcome to all persons regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. It supports congregations in study and discernment leading to the adoption of a public statement of welcome and affirmation and identifies these congregations on its RIC roster.

The Affirmation of Welcome is central to the RIC program. It is simple yet powerful in its witness. Any Lutheran community that adopts a statement which includes the naming of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people as welcome to full participation is eligible to be designated as Reconciling in Christ after review by ReconcilingWorks.

Visit www.ReconcilingWorks.org/RIC for a listing of RIC communities and more information on the RIC program.



We believe reconciling works through...

- Fostering faithful conversations and building relationships
- Advocating for policies that support and protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and families
- Advancing non-discrimination in housing, employment, immigration, and public services
- Promoting equal protection under the law

We believe reconciling works... ...for the sake of the world.



What Was Goodsoil?

From 2005–2011, Goodsoil was a collaboration of organizations working at Churchwide Assemblies for the full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their families in the life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Through the years, member organizations included the Extraordinary Candidacy Project and Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries (which merged to form Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries), the Network for Inclusive Vision, Soulforce, Wingspan Ministry of St. Paul–Reformation Lutheran Church, and ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation (formerly Lutherans Concerned/North America).

ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation continues that work at the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

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Credits

All Things New

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