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Mission Statement

LC/NA works for the acceptance and full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, their families, friends and allies, in the Lutheran communion and its ecumenical and global partners.

Through our Reconciling in Christ Program, LC/NA builds community for worship, education and support; fosters welcome in all Lutheran settings; advocates for full participation in all rites, sacraments, and ministries of the Church; and invites all people into Gospel lives of authenticity, integrity and wholeness.

Statement of Sanctuary

The ministry of Lutherans Concerned, its meetings and its mailing lists are protected by our understanding of sanctuary. No participants need fear exposure or abuse in subscribing, joining or attending chapter functions.

All information that individuals may reveal of themselves is to be honored by others with total confidentiality. Mutual trust and respect, in the spirit of Jesus Christ, is offered to all who may elsewhere experience alienation, distrust or rejection. For the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we welcome you.

Diversity and Anti-Racism

An equal-opportunity employer, LC/NA welcomes candidates for paid or volunteer positions who share our commitments to full participation for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and anti-racist accountability to communities of color.

In this issue of *Concord* you will find coverage of Hearts on Fire, our biennial assembly and RIC conference, held at San Francisco State University, July 3-6. For those who attended, the coverage should stoke the fires lit there for the work leading to the full inclusion; for those unable to participate, the hope is the reportage will spark a desire and commitment to come to Let Justice Roll Down Like Waters, the 2010 LC/NA assembly and RIC conference to be held in the Washington, D.C. area.

Major Shifts Are Underway

By **Emily Eastwood**, LC/NA Executive Director

I never make it through the first stanza of David Lohman's hymn, *For All the Children*, without having to stop because my eyes begin to shine and my throat tightens with sudden emotion. "Though the day may not yet be here, We trust it

soon will be, When Your children will be free." As we sang this lovely tune at the closing worship of Hearts on Fire I took the hand of the fifty-something handsome man next to me. Like mine his tears had begun to fall. We sat in companionable silence, listening in wonder and

hope, faith renewed, vulnerable, free, authentic and strong. He shared a Kleenex with me and soon we both began to sing again.

Across the room my partner Jan had moved from the choir to companion a teen, part of our *continued on page 3*

For All the Children

David Lohman

God, we gather as Your people
To raise our song above,
And we dare to claim the promise of Your love,
Though the day may not yet be here,
We trust it soon will be,
When Your children will be free.

R/: O, may our hearts and minds be opened,
Fling the church doors open wide.
May there be room enough for ev'ryone inside.
For in God there is a welcome,
in God we all belong.
May that welcome be our song.

Oh, we sing for all the children
That one day they be free;
And we sing for generations yet to be.
That they never have a reason
To doubt that they are blest.
May they, in Your love, find rest. R/

Oh, we pray for all the young lives
Cut short by fear and shame
So afraid of who they are and whom they love.
May the message now be banished
That Your love is for the few,
May their faith in You renew. R/

God, we're working for the future
When children far and wide,
Can live their lives with dignity and pride.
As they grow in strength and stature,
May they join us hand in hand.
As against all hate we stand. R/

The Editor

DALE TRUSCOTT



In an interview with the popular secular magazine, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, The Right Rev. Gene Robinson, Bishop of the Diocese of New Hampshire of the

Episcopal Church USA said, "I sincerely don't want this to sound condescending, but I do feel sympathy for these conservatives. They are only believing what we've taught them to believe for centuries... Ninety-nine percent of government-sponsored oppression of homosexuals and suppression of gay civil rights is church-related. It's the church that has taught the larger culture to feel comfortable making homosexuals second-class citizens. This makes it distinct from racism and sexism. The church is the source when it comes to the secular culture's attitudes about homosexuality—and it's going to take church people to change it." (ED: bold added)

(<http://men.style.com/gq/features/>)

Bishop Robinson spoke to the gathered community at Hearts on Fire in San Francisco. He was lovingly received. We were blessed by his presence. And I believe his comment in the quotation above is very true and gives affirmation and support to the continuing vision and goals of Lutherans Concerned. "It's going to take church people to change it!"

Robinson's comments are an indictment not of Holy Scripture, not of Jesus Christ, but of the institution that believers understand to be the Body of Christ on earth. The great tradition of Christianity, which developed largely out of the Constantinian triumph of

the 4th century and the Council of Nicea, often claims that the Body of Christ is an inerrant home for the truth of God's revelation in the First and Second Testaments and for the very expression of the Spirit of Christ on earth. In other words, it is hard for a religious institution like the Church to question its own understanding of its own inerrancy. And yet, the very essence of reform and renewal of that same institution and its various expressions through Schism and Reformation has been the painful ability to examine itself and to accomplish change.

Now change is happening again. This time the change is of the mistaken notions about homosexuality and other dimensions of human sexual identity that were either extended from rather obscure references in the Bible or foisted upon it by "creative" translation. I'm not so sure I agree with Bp. Robinson when he says that racism and sexism do not also have their source in the church as well. One need only review the history of South Africa and of our own "peculiar institution" in the American south to find the ways churches found to justify viewing an entire segment of humanity as "less than human." Nevertheless, change is happening again, and the pain of that change on both sides of the issues is real and deep.

Lutherans Concerned is

succeeding in our quest for full inclusion in the ELCA and ELCIC and beyond. So are other LGBT-affirming organizations in other denominations. We cannot predict when official full inclusion will come, but it will come and it won't be long. It will come because it is time for it to come. And when it comes, we will not be treated to a grand, common, inclusive festival of joy throughout the Church. No, we will be treated to schism and dissent and reaction. Jim Crow followed the Civil War and another century was needed just to get to civil rights, and only now is an African American the nominee of a major political party for President of the United States. I was ordained in 1970 by the Lutheran Church in America in the same year as the first female pastor in our church. But years went by before women were able to get calls in Lutheran congregations as readily as men. In fact, both of these struggles continue. So it will be with full inclusion when it comes.

The prophet Amos was called by God around 750 BC to a difficult mission, to preach harsh words of judgment in what seemed like successful, peaceful times under King Jeroboam 2nd. He denounced Israel for reliance on military might to achieve so-called peace. He denounced the grave injustices in social welfare, immorality and shallow religious conviction. He denounced a religious institution that had become complicit with wrong-doing. In chapter 5, Amos proclaims the downfall of Israel, demanding that she seek God and all that God represents or else experience God's wrathful judgment. He rails against Israel's treatment of the poor who are "pushed aside in the gate." (5:12) Finally, Amos even despises Israel's sacrificial festivals claiming that God will no longer accept burnt offerings

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Major Shifts Are Underway

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youth and young adult pre-event, whose tears had overtaken, her heart breaking open with deep sobs. By the middle of the song, an ally pastor and I had joined the scene. My face questioned and accepted. The young woman buried her head in the crook of my neck and shoulder. I whispered, "God loves you as you are. You are not alone." She held on. "We pray for all the young lives... so afraid of who they are and whom they love."

My mind went to my own youth when I sat alone at night in the college chapel, my only light the eternal flame. I cried and prayed that God would take this cup from me. How different my struggles might have been if there were three grandmothers to know, comfort, accept, and encourage. "May they, in Your love, find rest."

At Hearts on Fire, I was overwhelmed by how much things have changed in the last six years for LGBT people. Shifts are happening. Perhaps the most profound shift for me came when I introduced myself to the opening day crowd at beautiful St. Mark's Lutheran as Executive Director of LC/NA, no longer a practicing homosexual but a married homosexual. Jan and I have been together for 21

would provoke us as "divine disturbers" bringing the words of Good News as Jesus did, with an edge. As a result many of us are really chewing on what was said. That is good, I think. What will it look like, sound like, feel like, when there is "room for every one of us inside?" Think about it. Chew on it. As Kelly Fryer reminded us, there are no lines, except of our own making.

At Hearts on Fire the level of participation in the sessions including the "I Love to Tell the Story" training demonstrated that this group had come to learn, to be challenged, and ultimately to be equipped with skills, passion for justice, and faith for action. Clearly, momentum is growing along with our movement. We are changing practices through our Reconciling in Christ program. We are building a strong family of grace-filled volunteers trained and committed to create change within the church from the inside out. When policy changes finally come, our work at the

When policy changes finally come, our work... will only increase.

years. We were legally married on July 2nd, 2008. Growing up gay in south Texas, I never believed I would be able to get legally married to my best girl. What a paradigm shift. I was so nervous, more so at the courthouse than when we tearfully said our vows in a private ceremony in the chancel of St. Mark's. Did it make a difference? Yep. I hold her hand more in public ready for the errant glance with a quick and smiling assurance, "It's okay, we're legally married." ... "And we dare to claim the promise of Your love."

For LC/NA more major shifts are underway, some of them challenging all of us to act consistently with our core values while allowing ourselves to think outside our traditional boxes. Certainly at Hearts on Fire we heard this in one context or another from all three of our keynote speakers. I had hoped our guests

congregational level will only increase. Those who believe what the church believes will receive permission to consider a path to deeper reconciliation with all God's people. Changes in practice are as critical as the removal of policy barriers in achieving our vision of full participation for all God's children.

We are working for the future, for the generations yet to be. The day may not yet be here, but it is most assuredly coming, when hearts and minds will be opened, the church doors open wide, when love casts out fear, and the children will be free. As Bishop Robinson reminded us. We know how this story ends. It is only a matter of time. ▼

From the Editor

continued from page 2

to appease for sin. And then he says, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream." (5:24) This is the very heart of Amos' theology.

There is always something afoot for which the people of God deserve to hear Amos' words... always! For that is the nature of human sinfulness. In our time, it is the sin of having made homosexuality

and other sexual orientational awarenesses the scapegoats for the failure of the Church to proclaim or to live great parts of its gospel treasure. But just as surely, in every time, God raises up prophets to speak and to demonstrate what God's justice truly is and what God's Church truly can be. Many of the people whose thoughts and reports you read here are among the prophets for this time and this place. In the agony of his life in service to his God, Bishop Gene Robinson is among those at the head of the procession.

RIC Settings

Added to the Roster since last issue

Ascension Lutheran Church, Nelson, British Columbia, Canada

Atonement Lutheran Church, Rochester, New York

British Columbia Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Christ the Servant Lutheran Church, Bellingham, Washington

First Lutheran Church, Saint Peter, Minnesota

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Romeoville, Illinois

Lutheran Campus Ministry at Georgia Tech, Atlanta, Georgia

Marin Lutheran Church, Corte Madera, California

Northern Virginia Lutheran Campus Ministries, Clifton, Virginia

Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, Washington

Peace Seekers – Lutheran Campus Ministry, University of British Columbia at Okanagan, British Columbia, Canada

For the complete list of RIC congregations, synods, and organizations, go to our website at www.lcna.org

Co-Chair

LEN WEISER



Greetings and Happy Summer! Summertime is warm here on the East Coast (unlike San Francisco during Hearts on Fire). For my family, summertime means beach and camping time. We spend as many days as possible at the beach at our family's house, as well as our annual family trip to Provincetown, Massachusetts, for Family Week where we camp. Camping in Cape Cod was the first camping experience I have ever had in which you paid to take a shower and you can't have campfires. But what about those s'mores?

Speaking of campfires and fire, my heart still is on fire as I'm sure many of yours are after our recent Biennial Assembly and Reconciling in Christ

*Folks who attended Hearts on Fire left **spiritually fulfilled** and motivated for action.*

Conference in July. From all of the responses I was given personally, in addition to the many emails that have been flying around in cyber space, folks who attended Hearts on Fire (HoF) left spiritually fulfilled and motivated for action.

During HoF, the Assembly elected a new Board of Directors for the 2008 – 2010 biennium. Your new Board of Directors met for the first time during HoF with our back packs packed and ready to head to the camp site to lay down our tent poles, tent, and supplies so that we can set up camp and begin our journey together for the next two years. We have gotten to this place in LC/NA's history because of

many people. And, I especially want to thank those outgoing board members who have given their time and talents to the board during the last biennium. We offer our thanks to: Jeannine Janson (co-chair), Hans-Peter Skalik (Canadian Representative), Lisbeth Kellogg (Bisexual Representative), Galen Smith (Transgender Representative), Kurt Neumann (Young Adult Representative), Jeremy Posadas (Secretary), Steven Walker (Treasurer) and Pr. Jayne Thompson (Vice Chair). Also serving with us was Pr. Jen Nagel (Chaplain).

Your new board is ready for this new biennium. We are charged and ready to go. During our opening night at HoF Pastor Bradley Schmeling reminded us that "Christ is risen; Jesus is out" and cannot be contained and the Rt. Rev. Gene Robinson said, "Hell must be razed!" We are ready to raze a little bit of hell! Our first stop on our journey together will be in New Orleans at the Many Voices, One Story conference. At this conference we will join our ecumenical partners for worship, fellowship, and planning. We will also set aside time to meet as a new board and with our regional coordinators for our annual leadership retreat. Following the retreat, committee members will meet for a weekend later in the year to continue planning for the next year. By the end of that weekend, I expect to see the tent of our next biennium up and we will be ready for our camping experience and the work needed to see that we continue on the path for full inclusion.

The Board and Regional Coordinators will be focusing on many things during the next two years. Some of them are planning for and assisting ECLA members with preparations for their Churchwide Assembly next August, studying the ELCA Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality and providing comments to the Task Force before the November 1 deadline (preferably by September 30), and by walking with our Canadian Lutherans and the ELCIC as they now live into a new day of having a bishop who is encouraged to use restraint in discipline. We will be addressing policy governance issues of the organization as a whole and will continue to strengthen programs and ministries that are supported/sponsored by LC/NA.

Our work is cut out for us. The path is ahead of us, we have our gear packed and we are ready to go. Please pray for your newly-elected board as we will pray for you! Let the adventure begin in the Church, in the world—so that all may know the warmth of God. ▼

MOVING?

Filling out a change of address form ensures the delivery of your *Concord*. If you are moving, take a minute to complete this form. It will save you time and LC/NA money. In the end, that's just plain good stewardship!

Name _____

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Mail completed form to Lutherans Concerned/North America, Inc., **Attn: Database Updates**, PO Box 4707, St. Paul, MN 55104-0707, or email to database@lcna.org.

Development Chair



TOM VANDENBOSCH

1. Sponsoring Bishop Gene Robinson's keynote address at our recent Hearts on Fire conference: \$2,500
2. The cost of one Hearts on Fire snack break: \$1,000
3. Expenses related to one Hearts on Fire workshop: \$300
4. Just *one* lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person whose sense of self-worth was restored, whose internal "name" changed from "reprobate" to "child of God" as a result of attending the conference: PRICELESS!

More than 300 of you joined us in July for Hearts on Fire, Lutheran Concerned/North America's biennial

Lutherans Concerned/North America can **produce** a **fabulous** conference and, with the **Holy Spirit**, **deliver** changed hearts and minds.

gathering. In a recent email message to Hearts on Fire attendees, Executive Director Emily Eastwood wrote:

"I don't know about you, but I was so energized by Hearts on Fire that I did not want it to end... The Holy Spirit was most certainly present empowering and inspiring us for the days ahead... Jesus is out...

That Magical Thing called Endowment

Clarence (Andy) Andersen died in June of 2001. This past year his legacy provided partial funding for LC/NA's presence at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, the hiring of its first full-time Development Director and the Youth and Young Adult Pre-Event at Hearts on Fire.

As most of you already know and the rest of you have likely guessed, Andy left a sizeable endowed gift to support the mission and ministries of Lutherans Concerned/North America. That's why—this year and every year—Andy continues to *make a real difference* in the lives of so many people. In a very real sense, Andy lives on through his significant contributions.

As this issue of *Concord* goes to press, two families are working with us to establish endowed gifts to provide long term support for LC/NA's life-saving work. One family has chosen to honor their college-age gay son by designating annual distributions from their endowed fund to benefit an RIC campus ministry in their community. The second family is discussing with LC/NA staff ways in which they can partner with us to memorialize their son, who recently took his own life in response to ongoing and severe bullying.

Perhaps you would like to honor or memorialize a loved one in similar fashion. For information concerning endowed funds, what they accomplish, and the simple process by which you can create such a fund, please, please call Development Director Tom VandenBosch at 651-665-0861, Ext. 117 or email him at development@lcna.org.

there are no lines... the Holy Spirit is loose... shifts happen... Hell must be razed."

Her sentiments echo what so many of you have said in conversations with me. I think we all came out of Hearts on Fire pretty fired up. But fired up to do what?

Black and Decker manufactures drills, but they sell holes. Ford manufactures cars, but they sell transportation. Rolex manufactures watches, but they sell prestige. In the same vein, I think those of you who attended Hearts on Fire will agree that Lutherans Concerned/North America can produce one fabulous conference (thanks, Ross, Brett and all the rest of you), but what we and the Holy Spirit deliver is changed hearts and minds.

If you don't believe me, ask L. She and her mother are creating a relationship that is focused on love and honesty. For her mother, Hearts on Fire modeled her first positive LGBT role models and helped set up new conversations. Or consider V: his attendance at Hearts on Fire was his first foray into being "out." He came to the conference apprehensive, even frightened. He came hoping not to be noticed. He left feeling truly "OK," truly loved, for the first time in his memory. He told us how the songs seemed to be sung directly to him.

Over the course of the next several months, you'll be hearing of several new opportunities to support the life-changing, even life-saving, mission and ministries of Lutherans Concerned/North America. Those of you who were unable to join us at Hearts on Fire will be introduced to our new **everGreen Giving Group**, your opportunity to support LC/NA with regular, recurring gifts monthly, quarterly, semiannually or annually. This fall, you'll all be hearing about our new **Friends of Andy** planned giving program. As we prepare for the ELCA's 2009 Churchwide Assembly, there will be many needs; there will be corresponding opportunities to give.

We truly do view these requests for funding as opportunities. LC/NA does not take "collections" from our members and other friends, allies and advocates. We *do* offer you opportunities to get personally involved in our mission and ministries by making offerings to our life-saving work. You'll have the satisfaction of knowing that each gift, large or small, will change hearts and minds. Who can tell? Maybe the heart and mind of someone you love.

Priceless! ▼

Take the High Road

An Interview with Judy Streets
by Carol Dunn

When Judy Streets says it is important to “take the high road,” she is not talking about her move from the San Francisco area to rural Red Lodge, Montana.

In the Bay Area, she helped her Christ Lutheran congregation in El Cerrito become RIC, became a board member of the LC/San Francisco Bay Area chapter, and edited their newsletter. She speaks with warmth of the



sometimes able to bring newer attitudes to congregations. Nearby Billings, a regional medical hub, attracts well-educated workers, and Red Lodge draws well-educated retirees. Often that education is accompanied by thinking that is more open as well. Judy’s new area is far less compact, so meetings are by email and phone.

One goal in Montana is to increase numbers in the LC/Montana chapter. She also hopes to work well with the synod in furthering LGBT ministries. Combining support from LCNA, such as resolutions and memorials, legislative process instruction, and press releases, together with support from her synod, Judy has high hopes

for enlarged LGBT ministry.

The “high road?” In addition to prayer and openness to the Spirit, Judy Streets also recommends the high road: affirmation of all people and their opinions, active listening and relationship building. Even in a new part of the country, quite different from your old haunts, those are still the tools to help you build up the body of Christ in your congregation and your synod. ▼

*The high road – **affirmation** of all people, active listening, **relationship** building*

opportunities to learn from the pros who advocated and who took resolutions to the Synod assembly.

When Judy moved to Red Lodge, expecting more resistance to LGBT issues in the church, she found that there too, some towns are conservative and others more progressive. She sees younger pastors

R I C C O R N E R

St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Guelph, Ontario, Canada

By Carol Dunn

While St. Paul’s Lutheran in Guelph, Ontario, may be in a cool part of our continent, the warmth in the hearts of the congregation is tangible. This one-hundred-year-old

Canadian congregation, with 370 baptized members, proudly proclaims its belief in an inclusive Gospel.

A member of the Eastern Synod of the ELCIC and located 62 miles west of Toronto, St. Paul’s is “committed to being a radically loving and welcoming congregation of faith, centred in the Good News of Jesus Christ.” Their RIC statement, adopted four and a half years ago, describes their promise to welcome and provide programs, ministries, and pastoral care to all who seek God. They have already determined as a congregation that they are in agreement with having same-sex blessings in the church.

Pastor Jeff Smith will be arriving to be with the congregation this September. St. Paul’s can be

*A radically **loving** and **welcoming** congregation of faith.*

reached at stpaulslutheran@stpaulsguelph.ca, or on line at www.stpauls-guelph.ca. Offer your blessings for their centennial celebration. ▼



Florida-Bahamas Synod – Some Light Beginning to Shine

Lutherans Concerned and Reconciling in Christ advocates had several reasons to come away from the 2008 Florida-Bahamas Synod Assembly, held May 2–4 in Daytona Beach, with a renewed sense of hope.

Two opportunities for outreach were programmed into the agenda – a workshop put together by a team representing Florida RIC congregations and allies, and another that comprised the synod’s only scheduled hearing on the ELCA Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality.

Additionally, both the bishop and the synod vice president included language in their annual reports suggesting openness to more inclusiveness.

Four of the six Florida RIC congregations – St. Stephen/Tallahassee, St. Paul’s/Clearwater, Lamb of God/Fort Myers and Abiding Savior/Fort Lauderdale – took part in the workshop titled “Opening the Door: The Journey toward Inclusion of All the Faithful by the Faithful.”

Months of planning went into the presentation, coordinated by Cheryl Stewart at St. Stephen. An initial meeting at RIC Leadership Training at St. Paul’s in January led to a series of conference calls to fine-tune the 90-minute workshop. As attendees entered the meeting room, they were offered yellow badges bearing a cross and the text “Welcome is an *action verb*!” More than 120 people took part, making the workshop among the best-attended at the assembly.

Members of the congregations took turns sharing experiences and reflections while their demographic information and church life slides were projected onto a screen. Then attendees formed small discussion groups with RIC resource persons taking part. The planners’ aim to have at least one member in each group express interest in receiving more information about becoming an RIC congregation was achieved. Some attendees expressed opposition to the RIC concept; others openly wished for movement in this direction; all made their points respectfully.

As to the hearing on the Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality, Bishop Edward Benoway had issued a message stating that attendees would be asked to “declare that they have read the actual draft [and] commit to respect the right of all to

speak without fear of intimidation.”

The session was well attended but not overflowing. Two persons testified tearfully: A woman related the cruelty she experienced from church folk when they learned that she is lesbian, and another said her congregation was literally held together by the administrator, a gay person, while it had no pastor, but that a member had written an eight-page, hateful letter condemning the young man.

Nearly all comments had to do with LGBT issues – addressed in only two of the statement’s 46 pages. Most speakers found fault with the statement, whatever their perspective, and many expressed hope for greater inclusiveness. Everyone who indicated the desire to comment had the opportunity to do so.

Bishop Benoway, who has taken no stand regarding LGBT issues, said in his annual report, “I fear we often deceive ourselves about how welcoming we are to those who visit our churches, and especially to those who are different than us... I challenge you and the people of this synod to become an ‘inviting and welcoming’ synod.”

Synod Vice President Bill Horne in his prepared report cited the Draft Social Statement wording that “this church does not have consensus regarding loving and committed same-gender relationships.” He wrote, “I strongly encourage all of you to continue to seek God’s will on this and other matters of human sexuality.”

—By Jan Etsinger

Myles Alexander Becomes First LC/NA Regional Field Organizer

“Draw new members, and strengthen present members.”

These are often aspirations within congregations, and are also the dual RIC goals for Pastor Myles Alexander.

Myles is the newest member of the LCNA staff, and the first Regional Field Organizer. His area, Region 3, consists of all nine synods in three states: North and South Dakota, and Minnesota.

Lutheran by upbringing, Myles graduated from the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in 1994, was ordained by the Minnesota Conference,

United Church of Christ, and served congregations in Minnesota and Wisconsin as well as a UCC church in Washington State. He lived in Washington for the past three years, both near Spokane on the east side of the Cascades and Camano Island on the west side. Most recently he enjoyed a stay at the Grunewald Guild, which he describes as “sort of a Holden offspring about art and faith.” With the new job, he plans residence near St. Cloud, Minnesota.

According to Emily Eastwood, LCNA Executive Director, “Myles is a pastor first and an organizer second. He is a grace-filled person, and is truly gifted and called to this position.”

His responsibility is to urge systemic change, moving toward a fully inclusive and welcoming church. Pastor Alexander is working to open conversations in non-RIC churches, helping them develop policies of full inclusion for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. He can introduce the RIC concept in council sessions, small groups such as committees, or in meetings of the whole congregation. Using LCNA media and resources, he can lead a congregation in self-analysis as it comes to understand church policy and its own readiness to move forward in pursuing justice.

If a congregation or group of congregations is already RIC, Myles will explore ways to adopt an even more complete welcoming stance. All will be undertaken in concert with the volunteer Regional Coordinator of Region 3, Joan Duke.

Myles says of himself, “I was raised to be an either/or person, but am living into the reality that the cosmos is both/and.” Though the comment was made in the context of having lived in North Dakota, Minnesota, and Washington and back to Minnesota, it seems also to be a reflection of his adult life and work. For example,

Myles says, “I was never *not* Lutheran and I won’t become *not* United Church of Christ. Both are a part of me.” He is both pastor and architect (plus stints as waiter, grocer, customer service rep, relay operator, and volunteer, once the co-chair of the LC Twin Cities chapter). Understanding that few

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Grace, Houston Calls ELM Pastor

By **René García**, Co-director of Multicultural Relations

After nearly a five-year pastoral vacancy, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Houston called Lura Groen to serve as its pastor on April 27, 2008. This will mark the first

Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM) ordination in Texas. Her ordination *extra-ordinem*, as a candidate certified by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM), took place on July 26, 2008.

A native of Cumberland, Maryland, Lura completed her undergraduate studies at St. John's College and then earned her M.Div. from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Integrity is a major value for Lura. Like many people seeking candidacy to be a pastor, she began through the "traditional" ELCA route, applying through the Metropolitan Washington, DC Synod. While going through this process, she was in a covenanted same-gender relationship, a detail that she included in the required initial essay. Upon receiving her application packet, the candidacy committee immediately denied



community, but to a commitment to social justice extending to issues of economic equality, anti-racism, and environmental stewardship. Since the issuance and acceptance of this call, Grace has received a mission grant from ELM and plans to go forward telling the Good News of God's unconditional love to all regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. ▼

Grace, Houston, is the only RIC congregation in the Texas-Louisiana Synod.

the request because of her relationship and returned her non-refundable deposit, which is required to begin the process. Not allowing this to impede her call to ordained ministry, Lura went forward with her seminary studies, applied, and was accepted to the then Extraordinary Candidacy Project, which has since transitioned to ELM.

Grace sits in the heart of the Montrose, the primary LGBT neighborhood in Houston. It has a history of welcoming LGBT people who began to embrace the congregation in the early 1980s. By this time, the congregation had been waning from its 600+ membership in the 1950–60s. Thanks to "white flight" and major gentrification issues the community began to become an unsafe place while property values plummeted. As is the case with many urban areas, the LGBT community began to move-in and over time the neighborhood began to prosper again.

In 1995 Grace officially became an RIC congregation. Since then the congregation has struggled to continue its ministry with less than 100 members, but continues to serve as a strong prophetic voice being the only RIC congregation in the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod.

Grace and Lura have identified common passions for ministry and outreach not only to the LGBT

RIC News

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measures for humans are simply binary, he asks us as God's children to accept one another no matter where we fall on whatever scale might be in play.

In an earlier interview, Alexander spoke of his understanding that full inclusion "has always been the Christ-centered response to God's gift of reconciliation to a wonderfully varied creation." He also suggested that by becoming RIC, a congregation signals a welcome to others who may be marginalized, as well as to the LGBT community. The skills and experiences acquired in the journey toward an RIC affirmation, he says, can form the groundwork for future difficult decisions in the congregation and the church as a whole.

And difficult decisions and challenges are certainly on the agenda for all Christian churches in today's world. ▼

—By Carol Dunn

Seeking to work in an LGBT welcoming environment?

See RIC section, www.lcna.org, for listings of organizations with current position openings.

Pastor Lionel Ketola participated in the ordination and installation service of Lura Groen at Grace Lutheran Church in Houston.

Q & A With Jay

Wilson begins ministry in the Bay Area
by Wendy Sherer, Region 6 Coordinator

This April the Welcome Ministry, an outreach to homeless and hungry in San Francisco, opened its doors to a new Assistant Director, Jay Wilson. Rostered with Extraordinary Lutheran

Ministries (ELM), Wilson has joined with Pastor Megan Rohrer, the director, to offer everything from meals to spiritual care and referrals for a variety of services for those who show up in need. Jay is the former Transgender Representative to the Board of LC/NA. Jay recently shared some of his impressions of the work so far.

How did you come to be at the Welcome Ministry?

The board decided to fund a position involving pastoral care, empowering life skills teaching, worship development, and advocacy with people living in poverty and homelessness, most of whom

have complex disability and addiction barriers. Cultural competency with diverse transgender and queer communities is also a necessity in this neighborhood. Pastor



*I have been... **allowed** into this community's stories of **faith**, suffering and **hope**.*

Megan Rohrer approached me directly since we had ministered together in ELM and she

knew I had the needed skills. I was excited and honored to join a ministry that was such a good fit with my passions for ministry and radical social justice work.

What are some of the joys you've experienced so far in this work?

There have been so many! During my 4 months here, I have had many pastoral care and social justice work moments that don't typically happen in a regular congregation. One guest asked me to help him learn Biblical Greek so that he could dig deeper into the Bible. Someone on a survey question when asked, "How do you define your housing status?" answered, "a resident of the kingdom of heaven." I have had the opportunity to listen to some amazing music from a guest who has difficulty expressing how he feels in words, gifting us with an amazing rhyming prayer during devotions before we served a meal. I have been leading some Skills Share self-help health classes—our first two had three guests each class, and

our last class on healthy eating had ten participants who shared tips like what day Whole Foods sets out its dumpsters and which free meal sites have the healthiest food.

I have been gifted to be allowed into this community's stories of faith, suffering, and hope, and trusted to share in ministering as well as helping them figure out their life goals, and using my technical skills to help them get started.

Have you found any challenges or disappointments working in this setting?

It can be discouraging to see how awful people are treated based on hobo-phobia, homophobia, sexism, classism, racism, and unfair expectations. One guest shared a story about how after her church closed, no other church she visited had been welcoming. I hear stories every day of people of all genders being raped and physically attacked in the shelters and on the streets. But it's in the midst of these stories of discrimination, poverty, and addiction that I am also seeing moments of grace—after one of our guests died, we learned that although he'd had a place to stay, a mailing address and a case manager, he'd listed the Welcome Ministry as his home. What good news it is that our ministry can be home to someone!

What can you share about the work you are also doing with First United Lutheran Church in San Francisco?

Right now I'm working with the children's ministry through the summer. It's a neat change of pace to be talking with bright and spirited young people about

parables and summer camp. It's also teaching me to be flexible, since there may be no kids or there may be eight, ages 5–12, several of whom have unique learning needs.

First United is also an exciting place to be worshipping these days, as they explore what it means to be progressive and Lutheran, redefining their community relationships and visioning for the future.

Has there been any progress in securing a call for you around this ministry?

We're currently discussing this possibility with a congregation, in which case I'd be spending more time there doing occasional preaching, teaching, disability consulting, and pastoral care.

Any final thoughts for the readers of Concord?

I am so excited to be doing Word and Sacrament ministry, as well as using my training in radical social work, community building, disability rights advocacy, and education. Additionally, Pastor Megan and I are appreciative for the offerings we received from Hearts on Fire on behalf of our ministries.

Find out how to support the Welcome Ministry by visiting www.welcomeministry.org/involved. ▼



First Extraordinary Ordination in Canada

Lionel always knew he wanted to be a pastor. On May 16, 2008, 23 years after he started answering the call from God, he was ordained at an 'extraordinem' ceremony. Two days later, he was

installed as the Associate Pastor and Ambassador of Reconciliation at Holy Cross Lutheran having been called by that Newmarket, Ontario, Canada congregation.

Lionel said, "I am excited about the scope of this ministry which includes word and sacrament ministry in congregations throughout the ELCIC, increasing the number of Reconciling in Christ (RIC) congregations, challenging existing RIC ministry settings to deepen their welcome and advocacy, and broadening our grassroots leadership base for RIC ministry and advocacy work in the ELCIC.

"This is about claiming and proclaiming the Gospel, throughout the Church. It is a privilege to be called by Holy Cross and serve in this ministry."

Lionel's Journey to Ordination

Lionel's life journey that passes through his May ordination and installation began in 1985, three years before the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, as he began his studies leading to a Master of Divinity from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Saskatoon. In 1987, Lionel informed his bishop that he was a gay man, an act that put at risk continuing his seminary program. Though he was eventually allowed to continue his studies, the ELCIC withdrew its endorsement of his candidacy in 1988.

Lionel's journey detoured from the path he felt called to by God for the next 14 years. During that time he worked with several non-profit organizations and trained as an expressive arts therapist. He met

the love of his life, Steven Loweth, and married him on New Year's Eve 2003. Steven, 43, is a music publisher in Toronto and active in the leadership the congregation of the Anglican Church of Canada where he is a member.

Reinvigorating answering his call to ministry, Lionel applied to the Extraordinary Candidacy Program, now subsumed into the Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM), and was endorsed as a candidate for ordination in 2004. ELM has a vigorous candidacy program that approves seminarians using all the criteria used by the Lutheran church bodies their applicants are from, with the single exception that it does not require that LGBT candidates refrain from entering into committed, same-gender relationships.

In 2005, Lionel approached Holy Cross Lutheran about an internship, the remaining step to approval by the ECP for ordination. Holy Cross in turn made application to Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries (LLGM) (also now subsumed into ELM) for a grant to support an internship, which was approved in early 2006. Holy Cross's prophetic stance regarding LGBT candidates for ordination was evident in their application to LLGM: "The Council of Holy Cross sees our congregation's efforts as a witness to the ELCIC as well as to the communities in which we serve."

The internship completed in June 2007, and Holy Cross and Lionel entered a period of consideration of future steps whereby Holy Cross could offer its experience to focus the ELCIC on re-thinking its policies of discrimination that forbade openly gay pastors and same-gender marriages.

On April 20, 2008, after prayer, consideration, discussion, and discernment, Holy Cross called Lionel to be Associate Pastor to Holy Cross and Ambassador of Reconciliation to the ELCIC.

The Bishop

Enter the Bishop of the Eastern Synod, Michael J. Pryse, an ecclesiastical leader who is known to hold very encouraging progressive positions. On April 30, 2008, he wrote to the congregation "with a heavy heart," saying that calling Lionel was "a serious breach of the constitutional obligation of all congregations and rostered persons" to abide by the constitution and bylaws of the ELCIC. He said that he recognized that such obligations could be frustrating and, in the short-term, seem to impede new understandings and practices. He held up the commitment to mutual accountability and internal discipline as foundational to the integrity of the shared public witness that Lutherans have. Reminding them of the meetings he had with the congregational council and the congregation itself in January and March of 2008, he said he could not support the action that Holy Cross had taken.

He went on to say that he was "committed to work toward ending practices that preclude the full participation of all God's people in the life of the church, regardless of sexual orientation." He said that

he thought their actions would undermine the work done thus far toward that end.

Finally, he reminded them of the administrative processes that would inevitably follow carrying out their decision to call and ordain Lionel - the initiation of which disciplinary processes he would do, "albeit with a deep and profound sadness."

The congregation thanked the Bishop for his letter and stated that they were going to proceed respectfully and prayerfully, aware of the potential consequences.

On May 9, the Bishop wrote letter to all rostered leaders in the synod outlining his reasoning and expressing the same thoughts regarding the deleterious consequences he thought would follow this calling, harming the work that had been done over the years, and reiterating the potential disciplinary consequences for Holy Cross.

On May 16, the day of the ordination, the Bishop again wrote to the pastor, Dawn Hutchings - this time expressing his "continued love and collegial friendship as you prepare to take a very significant step in guiding your shared ministry." He went on to say that, though they may not agree on the decisions they had to make, he honored the bonds of love and mutual respect that bound them to each other and wished their "bold and committed ministry to the community" well.

At the Eastern Synod assembly in July, the Bishop publicly censured and admonished the congregation for calling an openly married gay pastor, and censured

The Ordination and Installation

Held at Trinity United Church in downtown Newmarket and Holy Cross on May 16 and 18 respectively, the ordination and installation were glorious affairs - full of joy, peace, and Holy Spirit.

The ordination was held at Trinity because the more than 300 attendees would have far exceeded the seating capacity at Holy Cross. Pastor Dawn Hutchings, Holy Cross Lutheran, presided and preached. Glorious music was provided by Pr. James



Pastor Lionel Ketola with his spouse, Steven Loweth.

Brown, Pr. Tom Doherty, Michael Hackbusch, Marney Curran, and the choir of Holy Cross Lutheran.

Messages were brought by Gunter Meyer, Chairperson of Holy Cross Church Council; Rev. Ralph Wushke of Bathurst United Church; and Emily Eastwood, Executive Director, Lutherans Concerned/

was asked if he would give faithful witness of God's love in all that he did. To all he answered, "I will, and I ask God to help me."

The assembled clergy laid hands on Lionel as prayers were offered that he be a faithful pastor, patient teacher, and wise counselor, who served without reproach. He was presented an ELM stole that is passed to each newly ordained ELM candidate in turn, a copy of the Scriptures, and a chasuble. He was then announced to those attending, who readily, loudly, joyfully accepted him, prayed for him and acclaimed him as a minister in the Church of Christ.

Laughter, joyous applause, some tears went on for minutes.

At the conclusion of the ordination, we exited, singing joyously the Sydney Carter hymn, "Lord of the Dance," which ends with Christ saying "I am the life that'll never, never die; I'll live in you if you'll live in me: I am the Lord of the Dance..."

Ministry

On Sunday, May 18, Lionel was installed at Holy Cross as Associate Pastor and Ambassador of Reconciliation. As Associate Pastor of Holy Cross, Lionel will administer the Sacraments and preach the Word, participate in the ministries of Holy Cross within the community. He is enjoined by Holy Cross to creatively seek opportunities to proclaim the reconciling love of God in the context of the gatherings of the queer community, embodying God's inclusive

Those attending joyfully acclaimed him a minister in the Church of Christ.

and admonished the rostered leaders who had participated or attended the ordination of Lionel. The ELCIC's rules regarding gay clergy are that they may not be "self-declared and practicing homosexuals" and serve in the clergy - a sort of religious "don't ask, don't tell" policy. The legality of Lionel's marriage in Canada is notwithstanding in the eyes of the ELCIC.

At this assembly, a resolution was passed that encouraged the "Bishop and Synod Council to exercise restraint in disciplining... congregations, pastors and members who... call self-declared and practicing homosexuals." Similar restraint was encouraged in the case of pastors who bless or marry same-gendered couples in compliance with provincial law. Same-gender marriages are legal in Canada.

North America.

In her message, Emily said, "God has called and gifted Lionel for ministry. Of this we have no doubt. Holy Cross has been called and gifted for this. The Holy Spirit is loose. Read Acts: the Holy Spirit is always loose and at work in the church. Lionel is the right man in the right time."

Lionel was asked if he would assume the office of pastor in the belief that Holy Cross's call was God's call to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. He was asked if he would preach and teach in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the creeds (Apostles, Nicene and Athanasian) and the Lutheran Confessions. He was asked if he would his study of Holy Scriptures and prayer for, nourishment with Word and Sacrament of, and leadership by his example to God's people. And finally, he

and reconciling embrace for all who struggle with their place in the Lutheran churches.

As Ambassador of Reconciliation, Lionel is deployed as a field organizer for the Reconciling in Christ ministry to increase the number of new RIC congregations and organizations in the ELCIC, assist RIC settings to adopt deeper postures of welcome, working toward a church and society that welcome and include people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

"Let it be acclaimed that Lionel Ketola is ordained a minister in the Church of Christ. Lionel has Christ's authority to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, serving God's people. Amen. Thanks be to God!" ▼

Fertile Fields for Sowing – the Women of the ELCA Assembly

By **Rose Beeson**, LC/NA Board Secretary

Behold, a sower went forth to sow —MATTHEW 13:3

I entered the hall with trepidation. As an increasingly queer-identified person, still processing the mountaintop experience of Hearts on Fire, I found the idea of being in the heteronormative locale of Salt Lake City, Utah, surrounded by 2,000 Lutheran women most near my grandmother's age and many from rural or conservative areas, taxing at best. It was Thursday morning, the first day of the WELCA Gathering and Kathy Shattuck (Region 5 Coordinator), Jerry Vagts (Grassroots Organizing Coordinator) and I gathered at our spacious corner

Bold and powerful women said, “Thank you for speaking out. Don’t give up.”

booth to begin unpacking the tri-fold displays, boxes of pamphlets and brochures, and the Lutheran portion of “The Stoles Project.”

WELCA's theme for the 2008 Triennial Gathering was, “Come to the Waters,” and it seemed like the convention center was playing along nicely, with its green and blue striped carpet in the walkways, green rectangles of carpet under each exhibitor display space, and brand new blue carpet, still smelling of new carpet, running down each of the aisles. It was a

cavernous display hall, and the morning setup went by slowly. Suddenly, the previously dark banks of lights turned on, the air conditioner began blowing, and hundreds of women started trickling through the doors.

Jerry and Kathy chatted and laughed with the women, many of whom were making the first introductory round of booths, trying to figure out what was there and where everything was located. As the afternoon grew upon us, it became time for the hearing on the Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality. Jerry stayed at the booth while Kathy and I went off, determined both to listen and to make our voices heard.

There were about 30 people, mainly women, at the hearing, and we were told that there would be time for general comments right at the beginning and then at the end. During the opening comments, one man stood at the microphone and said he wanted more of a “creation” emphasis in the Draft Social Statement. “Male and female God created them and male and female it should remain,” was the gist of his comment. After that, it was fairly quiet as we were led through the first three sections of the draft social statement, I rose a few times and slipped by one of our staunch allies (and a newly elected member of the WELCA board) to affirm various positive lines and thank the task force for their time and dedication.

The Marriage section of the draft came quickly, and Kathy and I rushed to the microphone with proposed changes in hand. We were followed by two people arguing against marriage equality, and then the room came alive! Other women came up to speak. “My daughter is a lesbian; she and her partner were married. They had to go to a different denomination, because our church would not recognize them.” “How can the dissolution of a committed same-gender partnership be treated as seriously as a heterosexual marriage, when they cannot get married nor have their relationship blessed by the church?”

An African American woman reminded us of when the Bible was used to support slavery and said, just as she had never chosen to be black, homosexuals don’t choose to be gay. The supportive comments continued as we discussed lines 1137 through 1149, and some of the ladies asked for those two paragraphs to be deleted all together.

During this time, as it was nearing the end, I stood up and told my story, of the pain caused by attempts at conversion or “reparative” therapy and the unjustness of requiring lifelong singleness and celibacy of LGBTQ clergy, seminarians, and rostered leaders. I asked them, “How many of you, when you were 22, were prepared to swear to be single and celibate for your entire lifetime?”

As the hearing ended and I prepared to leave, some of these women – bold and powerful women, women who had lived their formative years prior to women’s ordination yet were speaking out here,

Rose Beeson, Secretary of LC/NA Board



ELCA



Stoles on display at the Lutherans Concerned/North America Mix and Mingle.

raising their voices for another marginalized and excluded group – came up and hugged me. “Thank you for speaking out,” “Thank you for being here,” “Good luck,” “Don’t give up,” “We are making progress ... slowly.” Over the next two days, Kathy, Jerry and I heard comments like this frequently.

Friday morning, after a leisurely start, the three of us once again headed across the street to the Salt Palace convention center. More women stopped by

the table, reading the stories attached to each stole, and holding them so tenderly in their hands.

Others stopped by for more information, seeking a safe space, or to tell us, ever so humbly how proud they were of their congregation. “We have the nicest two young partnered men in our congregation. One is the president of council and the other one is in the choir. Our congregation is in a very conservative area, but we all love them and are so glad they are there.” Or, “My son died of AIDS,” and “We are so proud of our new Bishop. He rode in the Pride Parade last month, and we have to leave early for his installation!” “Lutherans Concerned helped my son come out,” “Our Pastor baptized a child two men had adopted and brought to our congregation. Some people were upset, but I think he did the right thing.” We handed out flyers advertising our Friday evening hospitality time, and encouraged the ladies to come and bring their friends.

Jerry and I left the booth in the afternoon and went to set up the reception, leaving Kathy, who seemed to know a good number of women at WELCA to invite, educate and proclaim the Gospel message of full inclusion. Unbeknownst to us, the Spirit was already at work in the Hilton. Jerry had reserved a room and hospitality package for 50 at the

*The seeds were sown at **WELCA**, and they fell on good soil.*

the booth Friday morning, telling us that in her incredible Friday keynote speech, Sister Joan Chittister had encouraged them to welcome LGBT people.

The booth was busy Friday. We had women from Alaska, Nebraska, and Lower Susquehanna Synod, women from the many Minnesota Synods, elated women from the Sierra Pacifica Synod. Some women stopped by out of curiosity: they had never heard of Lutherans Concerned and wondered why we had stoles hanging on the dividing walls around our display space, and then gradually they walked around and stood by

Hilton. But, in the end, we used three times the space and twice as much food to accommodate those who attended. We displayed the stoles, draping them over some of the tables, and had the “Family Diversity Project’s: Love Makes a Family” exhibit displayed on one side of the room.

Having heard the disappointed murmurings of people for whom Jerry’s kaftans have become truly iconic of an LC/NA get together, Jerry relented, changed into one of his kaftans and prepared for a grand time. People from Mount Tabor and Prince of

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“In Honor of... ”

In Honor of...

Honored by...

Joe Brown	In memory of Joe Brown	George & Marianne Avery, Mark Engel, Dorothy Klefstad, Robert & Janice Schuster, Barbara Teskey, Wendy West
Franklin D. Fry	In memory of Franklin D. Fry	Franklin G. Fry
Brian & Randine Hughes	In honor of Brian & Randine Hughes’ 25th Wedding Anniversary	Thomas & Erin Becker
The Rev. Katheryn King and Dave Eitland		John Stoltenberg & Joey
Steve Miller & Wayne Morris	In honor of the Blessing Service for Steve Miller & Wayne Morris	Doris Hanson
Steve Miller & Wayne Morris	In honor of the Blessing Service for Steve Miller & Wayne Morris	Doyle & Luciene Morris
The Rev. Shawn Newton	Ordained to the UU ministry, June 10, 2007	Julie Reuning-Scherer
The Rev. David Parsons	In honor and appreciation	The Lindley-Geiger & Quinn-Gacioch families
Jeff Ramm & Neal Hauschild	In honor of the Blessing Service for Jeff Ramm & Neal Hauschild	43 family members and friends
Dale Truscott & Kin Xuxa	In recognition of the work of Dale Truscott and Kin Xuxa	The Jennifer M. Lee and Jeffrey S. Chapski Family Fund of the Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund
Deana Weindorf	In honor of Deana Weindorf’s 59 beautiful years!	Christi Weindorf



lucky congregation he has. He so clearly manifests the gifts that LGBT people bring to the pulpit.

On Friday evening we had a worship service entitled Reflections on Healing and Reconciliation. It was, without a doubt, a Service of the Word—perhaps too many words! There were three extensive “news stories,” each followed by a scripture passage too brief to do justice to the horror that had preceded it. Then a gospel passage and a beautifully-preached sermon, followed by an extended time of prayer, with the options of doing so at the cross, one-on-one with anointing, through written prayers tied to branches or with a memorial book. Altogether it created a service that lasted over an hour and a half and required a lot of sitting and listening.

Still, I was glad I took part. I received a lot of blessing from the music provided by Bread for the Journey, from the offering of foot- or hand-washing as a preparation for worship, and from the opportunity to explore my own woundedness and pain while kneeling by the cross, before receiving anointing and a loving and faith-filled prayer for my healing and wholeness from a brother in Christ.

Saturday brought us A Service of Blessing for All Families, which, as a last minute addition to the worship schedule, was blessed by a spirit of

Worship at Hearts on Fire

By **Paul Gibson**

For me, the highlight of any Christian gathering is the worship offered. It never fails to give me new ideas, new music, new expressions of faith, refreshment and renewal. Hearts on Fire

was no exception, setting a standard that synod assemblies and other church-related gatherings will be hard-pressed to match.

The opening worship at St. Mark's church on Thursday afternoon overflowed with joy. The congregation sang out so boldly that the organist could risk letting us have a hymn verse to ourselves from time to time. The choice of hymns was

It is so **good** to hear the **familiar rephrased** into the **transformative**

excellent, showcasing some gems to be found in the “cranberry hymnal” (ELW). And, while the liturgical music chosen was not always the most spirited of options, they were settings that everyone could pick up quickly, repetitious enough that we could learn them and join in. The Eucharistic liturgy brought together textual treasures from Scotland and New Zealand—it's so good to hear the familiar rephrased into the transformative.

This service was the first time that I had the pleasure of Rev. Bradley Schmeling's company. My friends tell me that he always preaches sermons as insightful and moving as the one he gave us, exploring the dark side of the Emmaus story. What a



spontaneity and informality, and by a generous outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as well. Songs, as beautiful as they were powerful, were chosen from a wide range of sources and blended well with the words of blessing and sending created by the worship leaders. I was struck by the observance that we are one family because “we take on God's unknowable last name together.”

On Sunday, the assembly was concluded and drawn together by a powerful service of commissioning and sending, the highlights of which were the installation and blessing of the LC/NA leadership, Barbara Lundblad's reflections on the Emmaus story (“They sat at the table with pieces of broken bread... and each other.”), and the hymns and choir anthems chosen by David Lohman. Without a doubt, we left San Francisco with hearts on fire, empowered to spread that fire throughout the church and the world. ▼



We gathered for Hearts on Fire ...



Made our way guided by chalked sidewalks (yes, the University suggested way to get people around)



Met at St. Mark's for our opening session – greeted by Bishop Mark Holmerud, Sierra-Pacific Synod



Heard from Bishop Gene Robinson, Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire, that our "gay agenda" is the gospel of Christ



Got about for some sessions in school busses, with seat belts... Note: jackets, chilly



Worshipped, Pastor Lionel Ketola, Holy Cross, Newmarket, Ontario, Canada, presiding

HEARTS ON FIRE PHOTOS



The Word brought to us by Pastor Bradley Schmeling, St. John's, Atlanta



Shared a bit of fun as Emily Eastwood and Ross Murray try to figure out who's taller



Were challenged by Kelly Fryer to remember that Christ erased all the lines man drew to separate people from each other and from God



Talked about the draft Social Statement – Revs. Paul Tidemann and Chris Berry



Were given admin instructions by Ross Murray (lots of times) to keep things running smoothly



Met in regional caucuses



Washed feet as preparation for...



A service of Healing and Reconciliation, Rev. Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock (left of dias) bringing the Word



Music by Bread for the Journey



Inspired in Bible study by Rev. Gladys Moore, newly affirmed LCINA Co-Chair



Exhorted by Bishop John Selders to open our welcome to all: "It's not us if it is just us."



Learned to tell our stories in a purposeful way



Met in business sessions...



Where we heard the course charted for the future



Later in music invigorated by the Transcendence Gospel Choir



Held a reception celebrating couples



Closed with worship, Rev. Dr. Barbara Lundblad bringing the Word



Oh, and we video'd whole bunches of Hearts on Fire, more on that later

NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS Elected at Hearts on Fire LC/NA Assembly

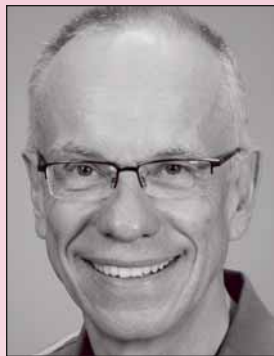
Biographical information about these leaders is posted to the LC/NA website, www.lcna.org.



Co-Chair
Rev. Gladys Moore



Co-Chair
Len Weiser



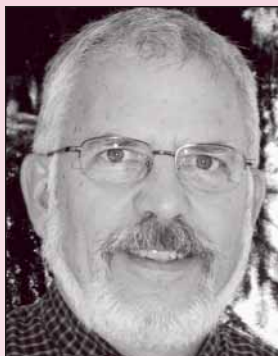
Vice-Chair of Development
Rev. Richard Andersen



Secretary
Rose Beeson



Treasurer
Rev. Kenneth Feinour



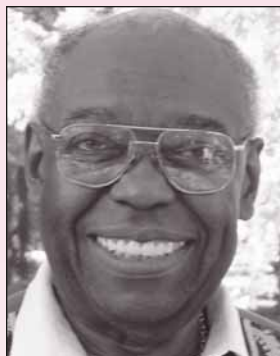
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Philip Moeller



Co-Director of Multicultural Relations
René García



Co-Director of Multicultural Relations
Jim Tyler



Director of Youth, Young Adult and Family Ministry
Ross Murray



Bisexual Representative
Connie Monson



Canadian Representative
Karen Mathiasen



Transgender Representative
Nicole García



Youth Representative
Geoff Abel



Chaplain to the Board
Rev. Rachel Thorson Mithelman

Keynote **Speakers**

Move, Invigorate, and Inspire

"Raze Hell, **Lines are Erased**, Shifts Happen... "

**The Rt. Rev. V. Gene Robinson,
Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of
New Hampshire**

Gene Robinson spoke eloquently and passionately about the reason we were gathered and why some in the church are so afraid: because everything that was or appeared to be nailed down was coming loose. And rightly so! Twenty years ago, most in churches would have said that they didn't know anyone who was LGBT and would have been right, for the most part. But now, so many have stood to tell the world



who they were that no longer can just anything be said or written about us, because a face they know comes up and they know it is not true of Sally or Jason. He said we who work for full inclusion are people of uncommon courage engaged in something that comes with risks – a concept Christ understood full well. He said that standing vested for his consecration as bishop,

wearing a bullet-proof vest, accompanied by a vested "deacon" who was actually an armored and armed, brave security man, there because of the FBI-determined credibility of the death threats, he realized that death is not the worst thing for a Christian – not living your life is!

And, he said the church has never been a safe haven from conflict. Christ said that heaven was here and now. We should not fear conflict, but remember

that the resistance is so great when you challenge so many privileged people by inviting people of color and women in, let alone LGBT people.

On how to keep going, doing the work when some days are dark, he said we need to keep razing Hell – that's *r-a-z-i-n-g*. We need to preach the Gospel of Jesus in a manner that razes the personal and sociological hells people are in. And remember that we know, we know, how this is all going to turn out – with full inclusion. It isn't going to be easy and we aren't always going to get our way, but God says at our baptism the same thing God said to Christ at baptism: "You are my beloved – in you I am well pleased." Robinson said to live life in this ministry with such joy that no one will doubt the love of Christ shines in us. Our "gay agenda," he said, is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. And, in prayer, try being silent. Just let God love you.

Kelly Fryer, author, theologian

She spoke of lines, lines that separate us from each other, lines that are mostly put there by other people. She said that every time some line is made to disappear, another will pop up someplace else. Why? Because, she said, people can be dumb and think they can separate other people from God. She said that Christ died to remove the lines, the one Cain drew between hunters and farmers when he killed Abel, the one between Ishmael and his kin, the one between the sons of Hagar and the sons of Sarah that runs down the Middle East to this day, the line between slave and free, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile – "Who has tricked you, you foolish people, Christ died to remove these lines," paraphrasing Galatians 3:1.

She said that lines have always been with us and the people of God draw them. She challenged us to examine ourselves for lines that separate us from, say, people who are weirder, from people who may have voted against our political beliefs and the candidates we favor or for the candidate we now loathe. She said Christ died to rid us of those lines. They are already gone. Christ said the kingdom of heaven is here, now. Christ's death frees us from the things that would kill us if they could: fear, hatred, self-loathing, pride.

Our job is to live like the Christ-freed people we are, live so that others ask when we walk by "Who is that? I want whatever they have." She told us to stop waiting for permission to live fully as Christian, stop waiting for the church to bless us – Christ already has. Moreover, we have been made priests through Jesus Christ and given a call. That's how God works: we are blessed in order to be a blessing.

Luther said we are slaves of none and slaves of all. We are set free so that we can love and serve our neighbors. We need to carry the message that God loves them to the world in a way that is full of fire and passion. This ministry is not a right that someone can give or withhold. It is our responsibility.

Sometimes **God** calms the storm and sometimes God lets the storm rage and calms God's child.

that sometimes God calms the storm and sometimes God lets the storm rage and calms God's child.

He said the reason that we are opposed so vigorously is that this is really about the end of patriarchy. And there is a direct connection between misogyny and homophobia. "White, straight, educated, western men have made most of the decisions for most of the world for a very long time – and that gig is up," he said. He said it is no wonder



She said it was time for us to find our voice, to reclaim the “E” word, and be the evangelical voice, to share the good news we have been given, the uniquely good news of God’s radical love and grace.

On the struggle raging in the church, she said it was won 2000 years ago, by Christ. Doesn’t mean there isn’t still lots of work to do; there always will be.

She then challenged us to think audaciously: not about just increasing the number of RIC congregations but of asking every RIC congregation to grow by 100% over the next 5 years. Or, how about asking every RIC congregation with fewer than 100 members to grow by 100%, and those with more than 100 members to split to plant a new church, founded on the principle that all the lines man has drawn are gone?

She left us three questions to ponder: What fire is burning in your heart? What part of the world does Christ want to light up through you? What is Christ calling you to do for the sake of something truly audacious?

John Selders, Bishop

John Selders brought us to the memory-presence of those who came before us, the native Americans whose land we now occupy and those who preceded us in the awakening of our souls. He said it was apparent that God is up to something now. He thinks we are on the edge of the 4th Great Awakening in America. Shifts happen. The first, through Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield and Nathan Webb, stirred the hearts of the people of colonial America. The second, through George Sheeny and others, led to changes in American life like prison reform, the temperance movement, and women’s suffrage. The third, in Los Angeles, the Azusa Street Revival, led by William Joseph Seymour, prompted out of the Pentecostal movement the working together of black-white-brown people for social reform based on the gospel.

Shifts happen. As with all awakenings, we can change with it or be relegated to the margins.

Research among Christians and non-Christians in their 20s–30s reveals that they are far more critical of Christianity than that group was as little as 10 years ago. Only 16% now hold a positive impression of Christianity, only 3% if you ask them about

Evangelicals. Among the 12 attributes they ascribed to Christians were judgmental, hypocritical, too involved in politics, and old-fashioned. And 80% of these people had spent at least 6 months prior attending church – 50% had considered becoming Christian but rejected it.

The researchers remarked at how thoughtful, nuanced and experiential the opinions expressed were. When the label “judgmental” was used, it was the result of truly un-Christian observed behavior. Ninety-one percent of non-Christians and 80% of their Christian peers believed that the church was anti-homosexual, showing excessive contempt and an unloving attitude toward gays and lesbians, and making homosexuality a bigger sin than anything else. In that regard, Selders said, it was hard to find a practical application for “hate the sin; love the sinner,” when everyone who was not an ideologue knows that homosexuality is a pre-determined biological trait.

Without being prompted, those polled in the research said that Christianity has changed so drastically that it does not look like Jesus. That young people thought Christianity has departed from its roots, presenting a dissonance between the Christianity that had been taught to them and the Christianity they saw lived out, came as a surprise to the researchers. This came from young Evangelical Christians as well.

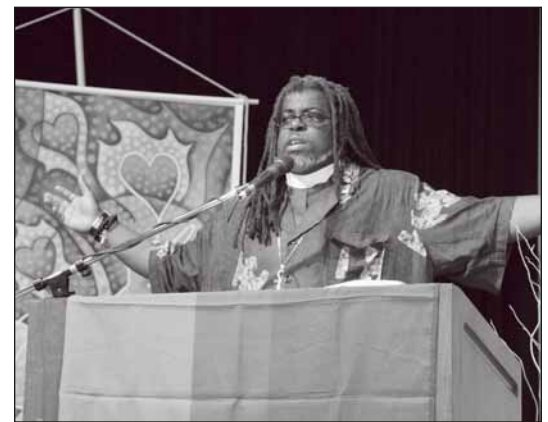
Selders said we have to make our circles wider and more relevant – “it is not us when it is just us.” He enjoined us to stop meeting in our own ghettoized groups and clubs. He spoke of a three-day long meeting recently, of “tongue-talking black folks with reserved Congregationalists and New Age Metropolitan Community Church people,” as maybe being the model to break out the yesterday-mold.

“What a meeting that was!”

He said it was important to be intentional about getting on the trajectory to change. We all have to stop being stiff-necked.

He said that those on the road to Emmaus had truly felt the impact of what happened in days just prior, but even more so felt the impact of what happened on that road. Shifts happen.

Selders is concerned that our welcome to young people be intentional and lived out. He said that most of us learned the things we really do well from someone else. So, teach, learn, make a place and be pleased to have done so. He reminded us that “hurt people hurt people,” and enjoined those in the work who needed to do so to go and get the help they needed. ▼



The Janson Family Endowment

In Regional Caucus at Lutheran Concerned/North America's 2000 biennial assembly in Columbus, Ohio - which she did not attend - Jeannine Janson was chosen by the Northwest Region to be their new Regional Director. A phone call was made to her home, she

picked up and the rest, as they say, is history.

Jeannine served as the Northwest Regional Director from July of 2000 until July of 2002, when she was recruited to be Co-Chair of the LC/NA Board of Directors.

For the past six years, as Co-Chair of the Board, Jeannine has been a **full time** volunteer. It would be impossible to list all the work she has done to promote the mission and ministries of Lutherans Concerned/North America. Among her many

*Jeannine has been a **full time** volunteer for Lutherans Concerned/North America*

accomplishments, she coordinated the highly successful *ONE VOICE* campaign.

All of which we honored at a special time of Celebration and Thanksgiving during our Hearts on Fire biennial assembly at San Francisco State University in early July. As our guest of honor, Jeannine was recognized for her many contributions to Lutherans Concerned. Jeannine knew that she would be our guest of honor that evening, and that

Jeannine Janson receives the renamed Janson Distinguished Service Award from Executive Director Emily Eastwood and Co-Chair Len Weiser.



what has simply been known as our Distinguished Service Award was being renamed the Janson Distinguished Service Award.

What Jeannine did *not* know was that LC/NA's Board of Directors had decided to honor Jeannine and her family by creating a new, named endowment in her honor. The Janson Family Endowment was announced that evening. Jeannine could not have been more surprised – or more thrilled.

Endowed gifts are crucial to the long-term success of Lutherans Concerned/North America. Because endowed gifts are invested and only the income from those investments is used to support the mission and ministries of LC/NA, they create dependable income streams available to us over the long haul.

To create The Janson Family Endowment, initial gifts totaling \$25,000 are required. Approximately half of that amount has been contributed to date. Once the endowment is fully funded, it will earn sufficient income in just one year—assuming a modest five percent return on investment—to fund two seminarian scholarships to Churchwide Assembly 2009, or two youth scholarships to Let Justice Roll... our 2010 biennial assembly in Washington, D.C. And, year by year, as more gifts are added to the endowment, much will be accomplished through The Janson Family Endowment. ▼

To request additional information – or to make your contribution to The Janson Family Endowment – please contact Development Director Tom VandenBosch at 651-665-0861, extension 117 or email him at development@lcna.org.

Two Siefkes Awards Presented at Hearts on Fire

During the Saturday Night Celebration at Hearts on Fire, the Jim Siefkes Justice-Maker Award was presented to the Rev. Jayne Thompson and Dr. Bennett Falk.

Jayne Thompson, who was nominated by three different individuals, has been working mightily for justice for LGBT Lutherans for many years. As an ELCA Campus Pastor, Jayne has supported students



through the coming out process and assisted them in conversations with parents and other family members.

But Jayne is best known for her advocacy for LGBT Lutherans in one of the most difficult, trying and far-reaching arenas – that of synod and churchwide assemblies.

In Denver in 1999, Jayne orchestrated the movement to change the foundational documents of the ELCA that preclude ordination and rostered service of openly LGBT persons.

In Orlando in 2005 and Chicago in 2007, Jayne took the lead in working with voting members, helping them to articulate how justice could best be

expressed in actions of the assembly and equipping them to take this message to others and to the assembly floor. As one of Jayne's nominators said, "This is hard work: it is evangelism filtered through parliamentary procedure."

Between churchwide assemblies, Jayne works with synod representatives and other **goodsoil** folks to bring actions for

justice to the floor of synod assemblies throughout the ELCA.

Again, to quote one of Jayne's nominators, "When justice finally comes in the ELCA, it will come through an act of legislation: the whole church will assent to a policy that does not belie the Gospel. The road to that day is long and tortuous, filled with victories, defeats and compromises. We are blessed to have Jayne Thompson as one of our guides on that road."

On being given the Siefkes Award, Jayne said, "I am stunned, honored, grateful and amazed; it is a huge blessing!" In her acceptance remarks, Jayne recognized her husband, Jack Hayes, for his support of her advocacy work these many years.

Bennett Falk, who is married to 2004 Siefkes recipient, Dr. Margaret Moreland, has long been an advocate for the full inclusion and participation of LGBT Lutherans, but his efforts became far-reaching when he created the **goodsoil** website, goodsoil.org.

It was over lunch in early 2004 that Bennett's pastor, the Rev. Jeff Johnson (of University Lutheran Chapel in Berkeley) asked if Bennett thought a "MoveOn.org" style movement could be built to support the full inclusion of LGBT folks in the Lutheran Church.

It made perfect sense for Jeff to pose this question to Bennett because Bennett is an information technology professional. In the early 1990's, Bennett wrote *The Internet Roadmap* – one of the first books about how to navigate the worldwide web. Coupled with his expertise in the use of the internet, Bennett also brings to the table a theological

background with a Ph.D in Philosophy of Religion from McGill University in Montreal.

In response to Jeff's question, Bennett said it would be interesting to try. And so he did.

The website, goodsoil.org, became a central organizing tool for LGBT Lutheran justice work, communicating to the masses what is happening, where and how people can become involved and make a difference. It is via goodsoil.org that advocates can prepare for synod assemblies and be informed of what is happening or has just happened. The impact of goodsoil.org has, indeed, been far-reaching. And it is because of Bennett Falk that we have goodsoil.org.

In his acceptance remarks Bennett said, "I feel as though I'm crashing a party where I don't quite belong. Stan Olson, Jo Chadwick, Paul and Shirley Egertson, Paul Tidemann, Jim Delange, Margaret Moreland, Jayne Thompson: these are heroes and saints to me; and, by comparison, the work that I do feels very ordinary. I design databases and build web sites. It's enjoyable work, it's fun to do, but it's ordinary. There is nothing heroic or saintly about it." [But, he went on], "The truly amazing thing is that God takes perfectly ordinary stuff and works miracles with it. Yes, we launched a web site. A little

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The **Jim Siefkes Justice-Maker Award**, named for its first recipient, the Rev. Jim Siefkes, was established by LC/NA in 1992 to recognize straight allies whose contributions to advancing justice for LGBT Lutherans have been significant and far-reaching.

Previous recipients of the Siefkes Award are: Bishop Emeritus Stanly Olson; Joanne Chadwick; Dr. Paul Jerslid; The Rev. James DeLange; The Rev. Paul Tidemann; The Rev. Reinie Heydemann; Bishop Emeritus Paul Egertson and Shirley Egertson; Dr. Margaret Moreland; and Bishop Emeritus Lowell Erdahl.

IPC Workshop

at Hearts on Fire

On July 4, 2008, at Hearts on Fire the International Program Committee (IPC) of LC/NA sponsored a workshop to review progress in its evolving mission of accompaniment

of groups and individuals supporting full participation of LGBT persons in the life of the church. The workshop featured special presentations by the Right Rev. Yap Kim Hao and Enric Vilà i Lanao.

Bishop Yap is the former Bishop of the Methodist Church of Malaysia and Singapore, the first Asian to have held that position. After leaving office, Bishop Yap was instrumental in the founding of the Free Church of Singapore, openingly welcoming and supportive of the LGBT community. Last year, Philip Moeller, Director of International Programs of LC/NA, visited the Free Church and spoke at a worship service. More than 100 youth were in attendance.

Bishop Yap had recently attended the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in the United States (UMCUSA) and had released a joint statement with the Rev. Gilbert Caldwell of the UMCUSA to the press calling for the Conference to “rescind its negative legislation vis-à-vis LGBT persons and instead commit itself to affirm homosexuality and include LGBT persons in the parish in the world in which we live.” The Bishop currently serves on the Council of Inter-religious

Organizations in Singapore where he provides a strong voice for LGBT inclusion in all denominations. He is a most welcome ally.

The second presenter, Enric Vilà i Lanao, is currently the Co-President of the European Forum for Christian Groups. He spoke knowledgeably of the various European and International Groups working with LGBT issues since he has been active in or even been a founding member of several of them. Enric is also studying theology on the side of working with NGO development in Europe. Mention was made of working out a defining of companionship between the Forum and LC/NA, and a joint communiqué is under preparation. Marti Scheel is the lead person on the IPC assisting the Director with the development of our European Program.

Liaison with other regions was also discussed. Increased links to Africa have a high priority as well as expanding ties to Asia. Even before the establishment of the IPC, LC/NA had relations with groups in Brazil. Unfortunately, changes in personnel and international institutional issues in Brazil have shaken the sustainability of our contacts and program vision. Leo Treadway is the lead IPC person on Brazil, and he outlined some of the issues for the participants so that they might better understand both the issues of sustainability and the importance of local ownership in any program we might propose with our partners.

The Director of the IPC reported that he receives continued contacts from individuals seeking various kinds of help, only some of which can be supported by LC/NA. The focus for IPC will continue to be on building stronger partnerships and finding new partners in advocacy of LGBT issues and full

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Resolutions Adopted at the Biennial Assembly of Lutherans Concerned/ North America in San Francisco, California, July, 2008.

Resolution 2008-01: Intentional Commitment to Becoming an Anti-Racist Organization.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that in hope for a church, society, and world radically reconciled across all divisions, Lutherans Concerned/North America expects individual members, RIC settings and core teams, chapters, leadership, and staff to continue to educate ourselves and our fellow LC/NA members about the pervasive structures and effects of racism in North American societies and in Lutheran and other faith communities throughout the world, as well as to continue to institutionalize our journey into being an anti-racist organization; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that over the 2008–2010 biennium, LC/NA will pursue the following next steps as concrete manifestations of the above commitment:

- In addition to continuing to hold regular anti-racism trainings at the Board, staff, committee, and Regional Coordinator levels, the Multicultural Relations Committee (MRC) and Grassroots

Organizing Coordinator will work with at least two (2) chapters or RIC core teams to hold a local anti-racism training, that would include steps for building relationships with local communities of color and/or racial-justice organizations.

- LC/NA leadership will work to build coalition with at least three organizations doing racial justice work either inside or outside of the ELCA.
- MRC members will research examples of affirmative action in practice and determine which best practices are in keeping with LC/NA's mission and resources. These findings will be reported to the Board for approval and incorporation into LC/NA's personnel policies for staff hiring and leadership recruitment.
- Future job postings will encourage those with bilingual fluency – especially in Spanish – to apply.

Resolution 2008-02: Resolution Affirming California Supreme Court Decision and Opposing Constitutional Amendment.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Lutherans

Concerned/North America, at its 2008 biennial assembly, affirms the California Supreme Court's decision of May 15, 2008, regarding equal marriage rights; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Lutherans Concerned/ North America opposes Proposition 8 on the California statewide November 2008 ballot, asking voters to amend the California constitution to define marriage as limited to one man and one woman; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Lutherans Concerned/North America encourages its members to join efforts, such as, California Faith for Equality, and others, to defeat Proposition 8; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Lutherans Concerned/North America directs its staff and Board members to communicate this resolution to the press, public figures, and any other parties of interest.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that Lutherans Concerned/North America authorizes its Board of Directors and staff to oppose any similar initiatives on other state or local ballots.

The World *is About* to Turn

Wiesner accepts second call *by Wendy Sherer*, Region 6 Coordinator



When Bethany Lutheran Church in Minneapolis made headlines by ordaining and calling ELM-rostered (Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries) candidate Jay

Wiesner, they were frank with him. They wanted him to understand the very real possibility that they would shortly be closing their doors due to financial and membership shortfalls. Six years later, Bethany is

“Some years ago I attended worship here, and had a fleeting dream of being their pastor one day. And now it’s really happening.

“During the time I was interviewing, someone asked me if I believed the Holy Spirit was calling me here. I said, ‘Yes, I believe so, but now it’s up to the congregation to decide if that’s true.’”

That decision seems not to have been difficult for the folks at University Lutheran, who voted unanimously in April to call Pr. Wiesner. After the vote, they celebrated by singing “Canticle of the Turning.” The Spirit had spoken.

And the welcome continues for Jay, who began his second call on June 15. One of the retired clergy who attends UniLu said to him when he arrived, “I’m so glad I get to call you my pastor.”

One of the things Jay enjoys the most about ministry in this place is a weekly celebration called “Feast Incarnate,” an invitation to Bible Study, dinner, and worship extended to homeless and/or HIV-positive individuals in the community. Wiesner is also looking forward to beginning ministry with university students this fall. New challenges and a change of scenery for a lifelong “Minnesota boy.”

As for Bethany, they would consider candidates from either the ELM or ELCA roster for their next pastor, open to whomever God may be calling there.

Jay Wiesner is only the third ELM candidate to be placed in a second call. He believes this bodes well for the future. “Around the time when I was starting at Bethany, one got the feeling that if you were lucky enough to get a call, that was probably it for you. No thoughts beyond that. Now, though, it seems there’s more hope and possibilities for mobility if one feels moved to do that. It’s encouraging.”

Wiesner will be officially installed at University Lutheran Church of the Incarnation on Saturday, September 27, at 4:00 pm, in a celebration that is open for all to attend. ▼

Feast Incarnate is **Bible Study** extended to homeless and/or HIV positive individuals.

in the remarkable position of seeking Pastor Wiesner’s successor, having enjoyed new life and growth during his ministry there. And Jay has found new life in his second call to University Lutheran Church of the Incarnation (UniLu) in Philadelphia.

Was it hard to leave Bethany? “Of course,” answers Wiesner, “especially considering the risk they took in ordaining and calling me, against the policy of the ELCA. We’d grown to love each other, and had invested much mutual energy into our relationship and ministry together.”

But as many church leaders know, there comes a time in each setting where discernment and the Spirit lead one to consider moving on. Jay believes pastors have a “shelf life,” so to speak, after which it makes sense to let someone else step in and infuse the situation with new blood. And Jay has become that “new blood” once again, this time for UniLu.

Pastor Wiesner is shown with Bruce McCullough and Council President Sharon McCullough.

New Staff at LC/NA

We are excited to welcome a new staff member to the St. Paul office, Lissa Messner! She is serving as Data Entry/Clerical Assistant working with Tim Fisher and Brett Bowman to make sure LC/NA’s records, files, and database are all kept accurate and current. We’re excited to have her and can already see that her sense of humor and excitement about this work will fit in well around the office. Those of you who attended Hearts on Fire know her as the very helpful and ever-present person at the registration and merchandising desks, gracefully dealing with room-key mix-ups and the occasional buyer’s remorse over Bobblehead Luther purchases. When she is not working at the office, she is pursuing interests in art and art history, as well as her adorable one-year old, Ella. Lissa can be reached at LissaM@lcna.org.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada Synod Assembly Reports

By **Karen Mathiasen**, Canadian Representative to the LC/NA Board

Sometimes change seems to happen at a glacial pace, at other times it looks as though we are losing ground—going backwards, then there are moments when we can actually see

positive change happening. In Canada, we have been able to see substantive movement forward in the synod assemblies throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC).

In April, the British Columbia Synod Assembly began with some promising movement forward. Emily Eastwood and Lionel Ketola attended this assembly representing Lutherans Concerned/North America (LC/NA) by invitation of local allies. A motion was passed at the assembly giving Emily and Lionel voice, an unprecedented occurrence, giving them the opportunity to speak to the motions put before the assembly. Two motions significant to LC/NA were passed. The first was "... to affirm that all people of all sexual orientations and gender identities share the worth that comes from being persons created by God and are welcomed into the full life of the synod, in accordance with its constitution and by-laws, and its policies." The

Substantive **movement forward** throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

second motion was to "... encourage congregations to go through the process of study that will enable them to consider becoming Reconciling in Christ congregations." The significance of the RIC program being mentioned in the second motion should be duly noted.

In May, at the Alberta Synod Assembly the outcomes weren't as obvious to the outside observer. A motion recommending "... that homosexual behaviour is abhorrent to God in both Old and New Testaments and therefore the Synod will cease its discussion on the matter and prohibit the marriage of same-sex couples" was defeated. The election of Tim Posylnunzy as Chairperson of the Alberta Synod Council for a four-year term was another positive outcome. Rev. Posylnunzy is the pastor of Holy Spirit Lutheran church in Edmonton, an RIC congregation.

At the beginning of June, Pastor Lionel Ketola attended the Saskatchewan Synod convention

representing Holy Cross Lutheran Church in his new ministry role as Ambassador of Reconciliation. A number of supportive individuals worked alongside Lionel to host the first Lutherans Concerned Hospitality Event at a Saskatchewan Synod convention. While there weren't any significant motions passed related to welcoming LGBTQI individuals, Lionel's presence and the positive response he received helped to build support and momentum with allies in the synod to work towards a church that is fully welcoming and affirming.

The last (and largest) assembly was that of the Eastern Synod, which covers southern Ontario, Quebec and the maritime provinces. At issue was the "extraordinary" ordination of Lionel Ketola—the first such in the ELCIC—in May 2008, against the express wishes of Bishop Michael Pryse (*See story on page XX*). Holy Cross Lutheran Church of Newmarket, Ontario, made the bold, visionary move not only to provide a place for Lionel to do his internship (with supervision from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia), but also to call him as an associate pastor upon his endorsement for ministry through Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM). The call includes acting as an Ambassador of Reconciliation to encourage and support other congregations in their journey to become welcoming and RIC. Many ELCIC pastors participated in the rite of ordination, leaving both Holy Cross and those Eastern Synod pastors who took part open to discipline.

Bishop Pryse opened the business sessions with the Bishop's Report, using that opportunity as the venue for discipline, by publicly censuring and admonishing any rostered pastor who had vested and/or participated in the laying on of hands at the ordination. He similarly publicly censured and admonished Holy Cross. However, he also announced that he was obliged to appoint an investigative committee to examine the matter of the discipline of Holy Cross and to report with recommendations to the Synod Council meeting in November 2008. He added that, "While the constitution does not specify a range of discipline for congregations in such circumstances, it does say that the Synod Council *may*, upon recommendation of the committee, suspend or exclude the congregation from this church." He emphasized and repeated the word "may." He also added, "I am committed to working toward ending practices that preclude the full participation of all God's people in the life of the church, regardless of sexual orientation." As Bishop Mike had not released his report in advance, you could have heard a pin drop in the room while more than 300 people listened.

The next report, from the treasurer, highlighted that last year Holy Cross helped bridge a gap between the budget and actual benevolence offerings with their gift to the Synod of \$27,000, above and beyond their budgeted commitment to the synod. A slide of

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ELCA Synod Assembly Update

One of the settings in which we do our work is at synod assemblies. Congregations from throughout the synod send voting members to worship, pray, and study together—and,

yes, to debate resolutions on the assembly floor. Although the **goodsoil** Legislative Team expected the 2008 synod assembly season to be relatively quiet, we nevertheless faced an unforeseen challenge this year. Synodical leaders from across the ELCA asked their congregations not to submit legislation having anything to do with issues related to the Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality. The churchwide ELCA office went so far as to provide synod bishops with a template press release, ready-made to paste

The **ELCA** provided a **template quote** for synod bishops to **discourage** action on the Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality

into church newsletters and bulletin announcements, in which Bishop “*add name here*” could be “quoted” as discouraging action in 2008. Frankly, some of us were a little puzzled by this move, given that the Conference of Bishops stated last year that the church “trusts the Holy Spirit to guide us and have confidence in the constitutional process that orders our conversation as we engage together in moral deliberation at Synod Assemblies.” Puzzled or not, we had to deal with it.

The synods’ stated rationale was that since the draft statement had been released on March 13 — only a single month ahead of the start of assembly season — there was too little time for well considered legislative action to happen at assemblies in 2008. On its face, this sounds reasonable enough. But what the churchwide and synod offices neglected to point out was that, again in March 2009, the ELCA Church Council will make its final decisions about what social-statement and related policy proposals it will present to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. This March 2009 date comes less than a month before the beginning of the 2009 synod assembly season, creating the same problem as in 2008.

So, the **goodsoil** Legislative Team decided the most graceful response was to follow the wishes of synod leadership on a case-by-case basis. In those synods where we faced resistance, we exercised restraint and did not press for our legislation. Thus our objectives for 2008 were relatively modest: to pass all three of our resolutions in at least a few synods and to defeat all opposing resolutions that might be brought forward.

Goodsoil’s Policy Change resolution (almost

identical to last year’s Memorial 1) passed with flying colors in the St. Paul Area Synod and was referred to the synod council under favorable conditions in the Northwest Washington Synod. In the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, this resolution was unfortunately postponed indefinitely before any discussion could occur. The Blessings resolution, calling for resources and guidelines to be developed for the blessing of same-gender relationships, passed in three synods (St. Paul Area, Northwest Washington, and Northeastern Pennsylvania). The Anti-Violence resolution, calling for concrete steps to be taken in fighting violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, passed in four synods (St. Paul Area, Northwest Washington, Metro New York, Metro D.C.) but was defeated in one (Northeastern Ohio). Six opposing resolutions and memorials were defeated in Northwest Washington, West Virginia/Western Maryland, Pacifica, North Carolina, Northern Illinois, and Southwestern Pennsylvania.

The **goodsoil** Legislative Team thanks all who helped make 2008 a successful synod assembly season: Regional Coordinators, Synod Liaisons, RIC congregations, and allies of all stripes. We have already begun planning for a far busier synod assembly season in 2009. In the ramp-up to Churchwide Assembly 2009 in Minneapolis, we will ask for your help and your prayers as we work toward a church that does not discriminate. ▼

ELCIC Synod Assemblies

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Holy Cross with Pastor Ketola in clerical robes accompanied his words!

The two motions that most interested those of us from Lutherans Concerned and our allies were about restraint in disciplining of those taking part in the call of “self-declared and practicing homosexuals” and in the performing of same-sex blessings and/or marriages (which are legal in Canada). The Reference and Counsel Committee re-worded these two motions and presented them in tandem. The Bishop ruled that the two would be debated and voted on together. Debate focused mostly on the question of discipline. As a lay delegate for my congregation, I was left stunned when I realized that both motions had passed! While there were no substantive changes made regarding these issues (that happens at the national level), there was a feeling among many of us that change will occur to make our church more welcoming and inclusive of all LGBTQI individuals.

Now we have to prepare for our ELCIC national assembly in 2009, and there is much work and planning ahead of us. More than ever, though, I feel the support of straight allies growing, and more openness to change. Alleluia! ▼

Draft Social Statement

Hearings Update

By **Tim Fisher** LC/NA Office Administrator/
Legislative Assistant

As of this writing, 57 hearings on the Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality have been held across the ELCA. The purpose of these hearings is to give ELCA members the opportunity to respond to the draft before the next Sexuality Task Force when redaction “officially” begins. We’ve encouraged our people to bring to the

microphone whatever thoughts they may have. Also, more specifically, we’ve suggested that supporters might wish to point out where they agree with the draft and where they see room for improvement. Many have noted how the statement rightly affirms the Christian values of serving the neighbor, trust and commitment, family, right relationship, and public accountability. Many have also pointed out the many inconsistencies in the draft, particularly its exclusive definition of “marriage” and its thin support for same-gender couples and their families.

Reports from the hearings are mixed, which is not surprising. Speakers from many perspectives—supporters, opponents, and everyone in between—have offered both praise and criticism. There seems to have been more of the latter than the former.

One lesson we learned after the first few hearings is that we did not adequately anticipate the need for speakers to refer to specific line numbers in the text. In fact, we had assumed that getting too deep into

The Draft Social Statement On Human Sexuality: Two Responses.

Responses to the Draft Social Statement are due to the Task Force by November 1. Hearings in synods are taking place through September. In communications and at Hearts on Fire, our biennial assembly and RIC conference, Lutherans Concerned enjoined on all its members to thoroughly read the draft and submit comments to the Task Force, in order to reinforce those segments and thoughts in the document that support full inclusion and participation and to change or eliminate those that do not.

It will come as no surprise that on a matter of such importance there are divergent views concerning the draft and what to do about it. Here we present two such views: from Siefkes Award winners, Rev. Jim DeLange, former pastor of St. Francis Lutheran Church in San Francisco and current Chair of the San Francisco Interfaith Council, and Rev. Paul Tidemann, former pastor of St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Lutherans Concerned is committed to engagement in the process outlined for the draft statement, believes that the statement can be strengthened so it reflects a Christ-centered view of the subject, and calls on all of you to continue to study the document, participate in local and congregational discussion, attend synod hearings to voice your thoughts, and submit your thoughts to the Task Force by September 30 using

the official response form. That means now.

A Response by the Rev. James DeLange, Chair, San Francisco Interfaith Council

I think we can file the new draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality in the ever-expanding archive of “Unfortunate Lutheran Statements about Sex.”

The long and repetitious introduction reads like a prolegomena to a book of systematic theology. Its conclusions drive relentlessly toward cultural combat. Underneath its message is a war on the Sixties and all that it represents: sex, drugs and rock and roll.

The tone of the draft statement in describing our sexualized culture is one of sadness. After reading its analysis of our present culture, I wanted to break out into the old hymn “The World is Very Evil, The Times are Waxing Late:” (Service Book and Hymnal, #586.)

If we could just go back to an earlier age when boys and girls went to the movies and the most sexual thing a boy could do was to steal a kiss at the end of the night. Condoms were safely hidden in the back room of the pharmacist’s lair – available only to married men he knew (never to women) and handed to the customer in a plain paper bag. That supposed non-sexual world never really existed, of course. Girls dropped out of school to go away and have their babies, or were forced into early marriage, in both cases forever shamed in the eyes of

the community.

This draft statement demonstrates this church’s relentless antipathy for saying anything positive about sexual expression outside of marriage. It counsels every human being to put a lid on all sexual expression until that magic moment they say “I do.” Then it makes sexual intercourse the crown jewel of marriage. It doesn’t take much of a survey to discover that successful long-term marriages are built on many things, sex having little to do with it. Masturbation, the most common form of sexual expression for both married and single people, isn’t even mentioned. Probably for fear that the last time that masturbation was mentioned in a positive way in the draft of an ELCA sexual statement, it produced a firestorm that lit up the ELCA switchboard in Chicago for a week.

This draft statement honors an impulsive Las Vegas marriage over that of a devout Lutheran couple who date for a year, decide to move in together, then decide to marry or not. While they are weighing this most important decision in their lives, praying and seeking outside counsel, they are forced to live with this latest finger-shaking draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality. The draft statement’s idolatrous view of marriage is given a status that would set Martin Luther spinning in his grave. (cf. “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church” in

the nitty-gritty of the text would bog down the hearing discussions. But once we heard from the early hearings that speakers were being asked to refer to specific line numbers and to suggest what language should be deleted or inserted, we conveyed

urge all supporters of full inclusion to attend the hearings still to come. Go to the ELCA website, www.elce.org. In the Search ELCA.ORG box, type “draft social statement” and hit the enter key. Click on the “Draft Social Statement – Evangelical

*Some of **our supporters** have wondered whether **their witness** at the hearings will make any **difference**. The answer is **yes**.*

that need to our people. Even with a heads-up, some speakers are not comfortable addressing the text in such a detailed fashion—although we know that some are and have been doing so.

Some of our supporters have wondered whether their witness at the hearings will make any difference. The answer is yes. Your voice matters a great deal. The more that the Task Force hears from church members calling for a church that doesn’t exclude, the more likely they will be to reflect that call in the text of the statement. LC/NA continues to strongly

Lutheran Church in America” entry, which will take you to the Draft Social Statement webpage. In the colorful box on the right, click on Synod Hearing in “Find a Synod Hearing near you.” If you do attend, please be sure to contact your Regional Coordinator beforehand. ▼

particular the article on marriage as a sacrament and how Luther deals with impotence. Then the draft statement goes on to say that the reason for all divorce is the betrayal of “trust,” which one must assume means sexual infidelity on the part of a spouse. Marriages end for many reasons, and some people, either by choice or by circumstance, never marry. This naïve, single emphasis on trust as the glue that holds marriage together runs contrary to our Lutheran belief that all of us are at one and the same time, saints and sinners. If, indeed, there is any one word to look for in holding a marriage together, it is “forgiveness.”

This draft document’s “eat your peas” attitude toward sex flies in the face of what unmarried people are actually doing. A single person reading this will only roll his or her eyes and get on with life without the church. Which is exactly what they should do when the church has so distanced itself from the lives of real people. They see the hypocrisy of a church that identifies “morality” with sexual abstinence outside of marriage when it should be doing just the opposite: identifying morality with justice for all, including sexual justice for all. This draft statement, like those before it, demonstrates a great consistency of misjudgment about what is going on in the lives of real people

who love God and their church and endeavor to conduct their lives by the grace that is given us in Jesus Christ.

I suspect the statement’s failure to speak courageously for fear of a reaction from certain quarters of the ELCA’s ever-vigilant sex police reflects a combination of wishfulness and irresponsibility that characterizes the Lutheran impulse to be nice even in the direst of circumstances. Worst of all, the need to hold on to an imaginary church unity has trumped the courageous theology and action of the Book of Acts when the division over circumcision threatened the very existence of a fledgling church.

Finally, when it comes to issues important to our lesbian and gay brothers and sisters, this statement can only bring itself to urge understanding and more dialogue. This is just more of the same we have been hearing for more than thirty years. People, who have been crushed by the cruelty and hypocrisy of our time, should not be cast aside in order to preserve peace in the church. We are reminded of Winston Churchill’s indictment of those who would not take a courageous stand on behalf of the vulnerable nations of Europe who had been intimidated by Hitler: “They go on in strange paradox, deciding only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity – all

powerful to be impotent.”

To paraphrase Dorothy Parker, the premier literary critic of my parent’s generation:

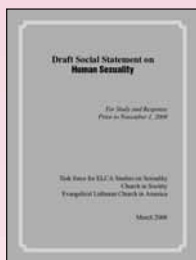
“This is not a social statement that should be tossed aside lightly; it should be thrown out with great force.”

A Response by the Rev. Paul A. Tidemann, St. Paul, Minnesota
(Retired ELCA Pastor and member of the goodsoil Legislative Team.)

It has been a long timecoming, with many crossroads and roadblocks along the way. I suppose you could say that sexual matters have always been in the background or foreground of church matters. In Lutheran circles in this country we go back at least to the LCA Statement on “Sex, Marriage and Family” that raised the issue about homosexuality. After several attempts at Social Statements and studies we come now to this Draft that many are hoping will be adopted in a finally revised form by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August 2009.

In one sense persons could say, “Who cares what the church says.” This may be especially true of some younger people. I stand in the place of one who believes that the church’s witness on matters going on in society can make a difference. We need organized groups that will provide leadership in a society that is often chaotic and confused about

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Global Mission Event Welcomes Lutherans Concerned

By **Jerry Vagts**, Grassroots Coordinator

They talked about the need to listen and follow the words of Jesus to love one another.

“Welcome and Hospitality” was the title of the workshop we hosted in two different time slots. The sharing of stories, the video *RIC: It’s about Being Church*, and discussion kept the room full and lively. The reception for our message was strong and eager. There were many questions about the RIC process and how to start it in small, rural congregations. I heard it expressed more than once that “Now is the time!”

During the second workshop, a board member from Lutheran Core introduced herself. She said she was doing so not to antagonize but to be open about her position on this issue as our two organizations did not exactly see eye to eye on it. She also stated she was moved to come to this session after listening to the keynote speaker talking about openness and deep listening. So, she was there to listen.

The Holy Spirit also brought us this beautiful lesbian couple from the local RIC congregation, Our Savior’s, with their two small boys. Stefanie, as she spoke of what it meant to them to be members of an RIC church community, said it all. Among her tears... and ours... we all felt what it was to be welcomed where we have not always been welcomed. The sharing was as beautiful as the two small boys, ►

Those who attend the Global Mission Event are often labeled as a radical bunch; they are out there pushing the envelope, while working in parts of the world where the issue of offering a welcome to LGBT is a difficult, if not seemingly impossible topic to discuss. But at their recent gathering in La Crosse, Wisconsin, we were warmly received and made to feel very welcomed and

We all felt what it was to be **welcomed** where we have not **always** been welcomed.

very much a part of their mission. Messages from the keynote speakers spoke of welcome and inclusion. They talked about oppression and reconciliation.

Two Responses (continued)

relationships, directions and issues in a radically changing world. I do not believe we can get along in this world without institutions, including church institutions. So, we therefore need to help those institutions change where necessary and to provide leadership and direction in this world. The church plays a critical role in that we look to God for insight and vision regarding what is best for God’s creation and God’s people today.

The Social Statement that we have in this Draft form can provide a context for the mission and ministry of the church in terms of how we will be in relationship to one another as human beings when it comes to our sexuality. The Task Force that has worked on this Draft has not been of one mind on some of the issues. This is especially true with regard to ministry with and on behalf of gay and lesbian persons. We could wish that the Statement could include bisexual and transgendered persons, but that needs to be a subject for another day – soon, we hope.

There is no question that what we hope will happen is that the context

established in this Statement will lead to a full policy change that would allow the rostering of same-gendered persons in committed relationships. One of the critical reasons that the proposal for full policy change did not happen at the 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly (CWA) is that a majority of voting members thought the church should wait until the Social Statement came before the Assembly in 2009 to provide a context for policy decisions.

This Draft has its problems. Key among them is that it is inconsistent in statements made and positions taken. For example, it states, “Following previous decisions of this church, we call on congregations to welcome, care for and support same-gender-oriented people and their families, and to advocate for their legal protection.” But in other places, it seems to take the position that marriage between one man and one woman is the only way, e.g. “This church recognizes the historic origin of the term “marriage” as a life-long and com-mitted relationship



between a woman and man, and does not wish to alter this understanding.”

The Draft has some good statements on theology and Lutheran ethics. It is important that when we send criticisms of the Draft that we also indicate where the Task Force

has done good work. For example, the statement says “God created human beings to be in relationship with each other. The gift of sexuality is vital to this intention. God continually blesses us, as holistic human creatures, with diverse powers including powers for action, reasoning, imagination, and creativity. Sexuality, as a dimension of human life, includes such powers or capacities. Sexuality especially involves the power or capacity to form deep and lasting bonds, the power to give and receive pleasure, and the power to conceive and bear children.” This kind of statement opens the way to understanding that families of same-gender couples can raise children responsibly and lovingly.

The Draft also lifts up some critical issues that need attention in our society

baptized by their church family and active members of their RIC church home. The Lutheran Core board member thanked me as she was leaving, said she had listened deeply and that we were all staying in the church, so we needed to talk more and continue to listen deeply. Our handclasp was firm and genuine.

Many contacts were made, including wonderful support from seminary students from Ghana and Nigeria. These will be closely followed up! The final note is about the music. The music group was young, diverse, and talented beyond measure. Violin, trumpet, flute, piano, guitar, drums, voices... many had trained under Mary Preuss and Tom Witt of Bread of the Journey and you could tell it. They were wonderful... and hopefully someday will perform for Lutherans Concerned! ▼

IPC Workshop

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participation in the Christian communion of faith. This will include increasing not only our profile but getting to know other groups already at work with LGBT issues internationally. The IPC boxes in each issue of the Concord will attempt to provide members with greater familiarity with such groups.

The IPC also provided the Executive Director, Emily Eastwood with some regalia in order to compete with the official regalia of the church officials with whom she often meets. This "assist" came in the form of red Cossack uniform coat from the Republic of Georgia, which the Director presented to Emily. This lapse into levity brought pause to the agenda and showed that humor is part of advocacy whether national or international in focus.

Anyone interested in more information or in joining the IPC should contact the Director, Philip Moeller, international@lcna.org. ▼

Next RIC Core Team Leadership Trainings

September 19–21, 2008
Southern California Reconciling in Christ Training
 Southwest California Synod Office, ELCA
 Glendale, Calif.

November 14–16, 2008
Washington, D.C., Welcoming Church Program Training
 Lutheran Church of the Reformation
 Washington, D.C.

To register contact:
 Jerry Vagts, grassroots@lcna.org,
 651-665-0861

with regard to abuse in relationships, abuse of children, and exploitive use of sexual images in the media and other places in society. It correctly lifts up God's gift of sexuality and the importance of trust and faithfulness in relationships.

The bottom line in all of this is that we want to strongly urge the Task Force, the ELCA unit on Church in Society and the ELCA Church Council to present a Statement, which provides a context for healthy relationships among same-gender-oriented people and heterosexual people. Furthermore, we need to strongly urge the leaders of the church to present a Statement that provides a context for full change in the rostering policy of the church so that gay and lesbian persons in committed relationships may be rostered as ordained pastors (or restored as pastors to the roster), or rostered as associates in ministry, diaconal ministers and deaconesses.

We think that some of the following statements in the Draft provide that kind of context:

- "God created human beings to be in relationship with each other. The gift of sexuality is vital to this intention." (Line 462f)
- "This church should remember that the critical issue with respect to the family is not whether it has a conventional form; in the midst of different challenges, other familial arrangements also may fulfill these vital roles of providing safety, shielding intimacy, and building trust." (Line 683f)
- "This church must work toward more understanding of the varieties of sexual identities, seeking for that which is positive and life-giving while protecting from all that is harmful and destructive." (Line 710f)
- "We call on congregations to welcome, care for and support same-gender-oriented people and their families, and to advocate for their legal protection." (Line 1133f)

If this mandate is to be carried out the ELCA is going to need pastors and lay rostered leaders who themselves model the kinds of same-gender relationships

which are so badly needed in church and in society.

For the church to continue to exclude gay and lesbian persons in committed relationships from its roster is unjust, is contrary to the Gospel, and is also contrary to the basic ethics of the Lutheran church which is attuned to justification and incarnation extending well beyond the application of static principles, even biblical ones, to varying situations. (Line 310f)

It is really important that persons read the full Draft Statement and use the form that is provided following page 50 to indicate their responses. Your response also needs to include language that urges the church to adopt a rostering recommendation (which is separate from the Social Statement) that fully changes the current ELCA policy and allows for rostering of gay and lesbian persons in committed relationships. Your responses need to be done not later than September 30. The official deadline for response is November 1, further editing by the Task Force may already be underway.

Women of the ELCA Assembly

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Peace Lutheran Churches, the two Reconciling in Christ congregations in Utah, arrived early to shepherd people to the hospitality reception they were co-sponsoring with us. The Holy Spirit was right about attendance being more than 50: more than 200 WELCA attendees stopped by for fun, fellowship, and, of course, our cash bar. At the end of the evening, volunteers stayed well past 11p.m. and helped disassemble and package the stoles and Love Makes a Family exhibit.

Saturday morning WELCA's keynote speaker was the Rev. Heidi Neumark, pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church of Manhattan, an RIC congregation with a homeless shelter for LGBTQ youth. In her presentation, before the entire gathering of 2,000

Women of the ELCA, she told the stories of some of the youth living there, weaving them in to her presentation on bold Biblical women.

The booth was filled on Saturday as well, more women stopping by to gather information, to make sure they really understood and to share their stories. "What does it mean to be a lesbian? When did you know you are gay? Are you sure you aren't confusing it with friendship?" (and when explained) "Oh! That is how I feel about men." "We live in a really conservative area, but Pastor said he would perform a blessing for my daughter and her partner. They can't have it in the church, because too many people might be upset, but he said he would be thrilled to do it elsewhere." "The Episcopalian women, when fighting for women's ordination, used the slogan, 'If you won't ordain us, don't baptize us.' I think it is really the same in this case."

These women, courageous and bold enough to admit innocence and lack of knowledge regarding LGBTQ people, invited us into conversation with them, asked the difficult questions, the embarrassing questions, but the questions that have to be asked for people to really understand. "Why would you want our congregation to publicly single you out for welcome? If you didn't tell me that you are gay, I wouldn't have known and, of course, you would have been welcome." These women trusted that our booth was a safe space and dared to ask for clarification; they are truly bold women.

Sunday morning, I took the bus to Mount Tabor Lutheran Church, one of two RIC congregations in Utah, and the only one within bussing distance. Pastor Annemarie Burke preached on Matthew, Chapter 13, the parable of the sower. In her sermon she illustrated how the sower did not carefully plant the seed in neatly hoed fields, but scattered the seeds about with the abandon of abundance.

"Our life as Christians," she said, "is to resemble the sower, boldly proclaiming the love and grace of God to all we meet."

The seeds were sown at WELCA, and they fell on good soil. ▼

Siefkes awards

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while later, things began to happen, extraordinary things – not exactly out of nothing, but definitely out of the ordinary. People began signing up, and a community, this community became visible in a new way. People's minds were changed, perhaps their hearts were strangely warmed, and gradually justice became a more realistic possibility, a possibility that can and will become a reality."

LC/NA is deeply grateful for Jayne's and Bennett's efforts for the full inclusion and participation of LGBTQ people in the Lutheran Church. Thanks be to God for them! ▼

Notes from the International Program Committee (IPC)

Hearts on Fire: The IPC sponsored a workshop at Hearts on Fire, which featured special presentations by the Right Rev. Yap kim Hao, the former Bishop of the Methodist Church of Malaysia and Singapore, and Enric Vilà, co-President of the European Forum for LGBT Christian Groups. For more on this workshop see the supplemental article in this issue.

Other Sheep: This clever name is used by an ecumenical group that does advocacy for LGBT persons within the church at large. We hope to learn more about them, but they are currently supporting workshops in East Africa. It is encouraging to learn of more and more support and education programs, but, then, the need for increased support activity overseas continues. For example, three gay men were sentenced to hard labor in Cameroon for being gay with no evidence presented in court of their having committed any gay sexual acts.

Is the US Government Overlooking Abuses Abroad?: That was the common complaint of panelists at a June 23, 2008, meeting in Washington, DC, of heads of international focused gay and lesbian groups. The event was sponsored in part by the recently formed LGBT Caucus in the House of Representatives. No lawmakers involved with the caucus participated in the panel, and our sources do not know if any were present in the audience. The common complaint was that the USA is doing very little to respond to abuses and hostility against the LGBT community abroad.

International Organizations: There is in fact a plethora of international organizations that support of LGBT community internationally. For example, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. Another is the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA). Enric Vilà, who was with us at Hearts on Fire, was a founding member of ILGA-Europe. In subsequent issues we will introduce you briefly to some of these, but you can, of course, Google on your own! [There is even an organization for gay and lesbian judges!]

Moving on in Norway: It is a bit difficult to track the respective national developments supporting the right to marry in Europe. In Scandinavia, for example, the right to register civil unions regardless of gender extends back to the late 1980s/1990s: Denmark-1989, Norway-1993, Sweden-1994, and Iceland-1996. Norway moved ahead on June 11, 2008, when its parliament voted to allow same-sex couples to marry with the elimination of gender specific language in the civil marriage legislation. This will take effect January 1, 2009. Last year the State Lutheran Church of Norway voted to allow those living in homosexual partnerships to serve as clergy but left it up to each bishop to decide on employing such clergy. Other choice options in national legislation as well as ecclesiastical rulings make tracking where we stand difficult, but the movement towards equality is at least evident albeit painfully slow.

—Philip Moeller, Director, IPC