

## ELCA Discernment Process

Questions from April 11, 2011 Church Meeting

“Rejoining the ELCA – What would we have to gain, what would we have to lose/give up, what do we have to give the ELCA?”

Facilitator: Rev. Dr. Rachel Rivers

### What is the same-sex wedding policy?

There would be no disciplinary action from the Sierra Pacific Synod for performing same-sex ceremonies.

In a 2008 letter to Sierra Pacific Synod clergy, out-going bishop David Mullin and newly-elected bishop Mark Holmerud wrote:

*Past practice in our synod has been to request pastors who have been asked to preside at covenant blessings to consult with the bishop. Such a conversation would likely include counsel that, while neither of us may have intentions to bring charges for discipline against a pastor who chooses to solemnize a same-gender marriage, we cannot guarantee that other pastors or congregations will not choose to do so, as is allowed in the sections of the ELCA Constitution and By-Laws quoted at the end of this letter.*

I thought you might be interested to see the policy that St. Mark's has on their website:

#### *The Blessing of Relationships at St. Mark's*

*We believe that relationships of loving, intentional commitment of one person to another are blessed by God. This blessing is inherent in the relationship itself as a part of creation. It is given whether or not the state recognizes the relationship with its laws, or the church formally sanctions it with its rites. Such relationships are the basis of the family, the fundamental unit of society into which each of us is born.*

*It is clear from scripture that God intends that we should live together in responsible, loving, mutually interdependent families. We believe that God's blessing is given not only to heterosexual unions, but also to unions of two men or two women who pledge their love and commit their lives to each other.*

*Even though California law concerning marriage does not apply to same-sex unions, and most Lutheran churches do not recognize these commitments, we honor them just as we honor the marriage of a man and a woman. We consider the commitment of same-sex couples to be as serious and permanent a commitment as marriage. It is our conviction that the laws of the state and the customs of the churches will someday be changed.*

*A marriage, same-sex union, or domestic partnership may be formalized in a civil or private ceremony without the rites of the church, but we believe that is appropriate for Christians to make these vows before a pastor, in the presence of family, friends, and the community of faith. Solemnizing our promises in this context expresses our conviction that we recognize God's love for us and our need for God's grace. In our rites of blessing, we ask for God's continuing presence with us and with our relationships, that with God's help we may love one another more fully, and may be empowered by the Gospel to overcome whatever difficulties life may place before us. We also ask the prayers, support, and encouragement of the congregation, the faith community of which we are a part.*

*[From http://www.stmarks-sf.org/index.php?/the-blessing-of-relationships-at-st-marks](http://www.stmarks-sf.org/index.php?/the-blessing-of-relationships-at-st-marks)*

**What is the inclusivity policy? (in the ELCA would we be able to call Jay Wilson?)**

Yes, the policy change includes GLB and T.

The ELCA Church Council meeting in Chicago moved the decision of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly into policy by replacing the language in church documents that excluded ministers in committed same-gender relationships with a policy that allows congregations and organizations to call a fully-qualified minister in a committed, same-gender relationship. And, the Council also approved the way to reinstate ministers who have been removed from the roster because of the previous policy and to receive ELM pastors onto the roster of the ELCA. The Council also made the benefits of the ELCA pension plan available to rostered ministers and employees in committed, same-gender relationships.

**Would our status as a "church without walls" be affected?**

Being part of the ELCA would have no effect on this.

**Would we have freedom designing worship services?**

The ELCA does not dictate worship formats. We would continue to have autonomy in creating our services.

**What is the required financial commitment?**

There are no 'dues' or required payments. The level of support is entirely at the congregation's discretion. The only suggested guideline from the synod is the tithe (10%). As individual members are encouraged to move into percentage giving, moving toward 10% as the biblical norm, so too, are congregations.

**Would we receive a formal apology?**

I have heard both Bishop Holmerud and Bishop's Associate Nancy Nelson publicly express their sorrow and regret for the expulsions. They have both been very supportive of both me and First United from the time of Bp. Mark's election in 2008.

I refer you to the text on page 3 taken from St. Francis' *Festival of Reconciliation and Restoration Rite of Reception* on February 27<sup>th</sup>. Also, I recommend listening to Bishop Holmerud's sermon from that day. You can find it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HVO723GNAM>

**Would any future conflicts between FULC and the ELCA be addressed in a conversation instead of an expulsion?**

This is an issue of vulnerability and risk. I think that we probably all agree that the current bishop and staff have earned a measure of our trust. But beyond that, there are no guarantees. We can hope that experience has been a good teacher. We can do our part in continuing to advocate for more just practices. But we can't predict or foresee what circumstances may arise in the future; we can only be committed to dealing with whatever comes with faith and confidence in the One who has brought us through these past 20+ years. I am not advocating either rejoining or not rejoining. But I do believe that whatever decision we make should be based on a faithful weighing of both sides, and not on fear of the unknown.

## RECONCILIATION

*The President of the congregation in 1990, Nancy Barker, leads us in the following rite.*

President: Let us remember and rejoice.

Leader 1: We remember our commitment to do what was right in the Gospel by calling and ordaining Phyllis Zillhart and Ruth Frost as ministers of the Gospel.  
We rejoice in their faithful service as Pastors of this congregation.

Leader 2: We remember the stress of being on trial and our disillusionment at the outcome.  
We rejoice in the Churchwide Assembly vote in 2009 to welcome partnered lesbian and gay clergy to the ELCA.

Leader 1: We remember our pain at being torn away from the wider Church.  
We rejoice that the ELCA has made it possible for us to return.

Leader 2: We remember our work of remaining faithful to the Gospel and the Lutheran values of vocation and grace.  
We rejoice in all who came to our aid and who continue to give encouragement and support.

Leader 1: We remember today with sadness the pastors and congregations who have left the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to protest the decision of the Churchwide Assembly to change the policy regarding LGBT clergy.  
We rejoice in the pastors and congregations who have remained committed to a church that includes all of God's people.

Cantor 1: In your great mercy forgive all in the past and present that wounds and divides your church. God have mercy.

**Cong.:** **God have mercy.**

Cantor 2: Enliven us so that we may extinguish any grievances and guilt that separate us. Christ have mercy.

**C:** **Christ have mercy.**

Cantor 3: Help us to amend what we are, and direct what we shall be; that together we may do your will. God have mercy.

**C:** **God have mercy.**

Bishop: In Christ, God has mercy on each of us and on all people. We are forgiven, washed clean of the past and receive new life and a new beginning. Let us be at peace.