



**A Pastoral Letter from the Bishop of the
Western North Dakota Synod**

August 22, 2009

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

I pray God's peace upon you this day and I will continue to pray God's peace upon the people and congregations of the Western North Dakota Synod. Monumental changes have been approved by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly this past week in Minneapolis. Churches that choose will, in the future, be able to call as their pastor a person who is in a publicly accountable lifelong monogamous same gender relationship. Congregations who choose to may hold services to pray over those in same gender relationships who want public recognition of their desire to enter into a lifelong monogamous relationship.

Some who enter worship today will celebrate these changes, others will grieve them and still others will be caught in a place of wondering; "What does this all mean?" As the Pastor to this synod I pledge myself to walk with all of you. I pledge myself to pray with and for all of you. I pledge to answer, to the best of my ability, the questions that you have.

In the face of these monumental changes it is important to remember that the foundation of our church, Jesus Christ, has not changed. Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior. We are saved for Jesus sake, by his death and resurrection. At the foot of the cross we gather for a word of grace and forgiveness. Set free from our sin we are sent into a world in need of hearing the Good News of Jesus; longing to see people living out the Gospel.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

In light of the passage of the Social Statement "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," some will say the ELCA has ignored scripture. I believe that is an oversimplification of a very complex statement. This is a quote from the text of the document:

This church recognizes that, with conviction and integrity:

On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that same-gender sexual behavior is sinful, contrary to biblical teaching and their understanding of natural law (line 809-820).

Never is this position dismissed. At the same time the document recognizes that other faithful Christians have come to a biblically based position, based on Jesus' call to love God and love neighbor, to fully embrace those who are in publicly accountable lifelong monogamous same gender relationships (lines 843-858). Never is this position dismissed. I see this social statement, not as dismissing one scriptural train of thought in favor of another; instead, it is a recognition that there are differing ways to interpret scripture.

For people who are deeply concerned about these changes I want to remind you that your congregation still has full authority over whom it will call to serve. That has not changed. No one from outside the congregation has ever been able to force a candidate upon a congregation, nor will they now.

I ask all members of this church to closely study the documents yourself. Closely read them, openly talk about them and be willing to ask clarifying questions. As I write this pastoral letter to you the words of Psalm 23 are held in my heart. Let us walk together faithfully, caring for one another in Christ's name.

Rev Mark Narum

Serving as Bishop of the Western ND Synod ELCA